



NG Study Guide: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18 :: "Working While You Wait" [2.9.25]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis: In 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, seven of the eight chapters refers to the Lord's return. Knowing that Jesus could return at any moment, how should His followers navigate the challenges of providing income, planning retirement, and being about His business until He comes. Let's discover how together...

Subject: Working Until Jesus' Return

Object: Work While You Wait

⁶But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; ⁸nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, ⁹not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

Context: Some of the believers at Thessalonica had stopped working for a living because they expected Jesus' immediate return. This created tension with other believers in the church who were indirectly supporting those who weren't carrying their proportional share of responsibility.

A. How should Jesus' followers approach work?

1. God created work to bless man (Genesis 2:15)

In the Garden of Eden, before the fall, God gives Adam a job to do. God describes work as good. After man's rebellion work becomes toil or labor. Work ethic is a belief in the moral benefit and importance of work and its inherent ability to strengthen character. Work is a means to contribute to a community. God gives opportunity to work to bless us, others, and advance His kingdom. Each of us are entrusted with resources of time, talents and treasure to use for God's glory. It is said that man has three basic needs in life: love, purpose and significance. Humans often attempt to find purpose and significance in work itself. Apart from life with Christ, work and achievement will not satisfy (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11).

Until the day when the New Heavens and New Earth are set in place, the Christian attitude toward work should mirror that of Jesus: "My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work (John 4:34). Work is of no value except when God is in it.

2. Don't be entangled with lazy people (6,14)

⁶But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

Command (6) is a military term, and the reference to *the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (6)* reveals that it is Christ's authority that Paul appeals to. They are to *withdraw from* or remove themselves to stop the corruption. Later in this section, *do not keep company with (14)*. Those who are able to work, and refuse to work are *disorderly (3x: 6,7,11)* in rebellion against God. Work attitudes can be contagious for better or for worse. They were *not walking (living) according to the tradition* or the teaching and example of Paul and his companions.

Similarly, Jesus associates a refusal to work and advance His kingdom as laziness and wickedness (Matthew 25:26).

3. Be an example of unselfish work to advance the gospel (7-9)

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, 9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

They knew what to do, but weren't doing it (7). In contrast to those who did not work, Paul and his companions *worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you* (8). *Labor and toil* speak of hard work. Greeks and Romans despised manual labor, and hired slaves to do menial work that they felt was beneath their dignity. In contrast, the Jewish rabbis taught that any Jew who did not teach his son a trade teaches him to steal. And rabbis, teachers of the word of God, learned a trade to support themselves. Paul worked as a leather craftsmen or tentmaker to support himself and avoid being a burden to others. Paul was prepared for Jesus' return at any moment, but worked to advance the gospel while he waited. Similarly, Jesus worked as a carpenter, and taught and exemplified servant leadership (Mark 10:44, Matthew 20). In contrast to the wicked and lazy, Jesus commend the faithful as good (Matthew 25:23).

Paul understood that he had the right or *authority* (9) to receive financial support for his ministry (1Thess. 2:9, 1Corinthians 9:6-14, 1Timothy 5:18) but declined in order to be an *example* for the believers to *follow* (9). They were to follow Paul's example of hard work and sacrifice to advance the gospel so that they would be a good example to others.

B. How to navigate the work challenges (10-15)

10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. 14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

1. Don't enable (10)

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. If people are able to work they should seek to. The church should not support those who are able to work but refuse to so that resources will be available for true needs (Acts 6, 1Timothy 5:3-6). All should seek to contribute to the community.

2. Exhort to contribute (11-12) *For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread*

There were some who did not work, did not contribute, and were busybodies or gossips (11). Instead we should be busy in God's business not everyone else's business. Those that don't contribute are *exhorted in Christ to work in quietness* or peaceably (12). *Eat their own bread* (12) is the idea of contributing rather than merely consuming the labor of others. In essence, an exhortation for all to do their part.

"Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28).

If busy in God's business there is no time to be busy in everyone else's business.

3. Don't get tired of doing good (13)

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

Those who were working and contributing are encouraged not to grow weary, and keep doing good. It is hard to run the race with endurance especially when you are carrying other people's load. Note, there is a difference between being tired doing good, and being tired of doing good.

"Don't grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1Corinthians 15:58).

4. Confront those who won't contribute (14-15)

And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Withdrawing from those who are rebelling is intended to help them realize their wrongdoing so they repent, and seek to do what is right. Yet, don't treat *him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother* (15). Confront the wrong with gentleness, love, respect, humility and firmness.

"If anyone is overtaken in trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one with a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1).

C. Pray for peace and grace (16-18)

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. ¹⁷ The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. ¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

1. Peace during conflict from without (16)

Paul prays, *the Lord of peace* who is Jesus (Is. 9:6), *Himself give you peace always*. In the midst of persecution they could experience Christ's peace knowing the Lord was with them, *The Lord be with you all* (Matthew 28:20). They could cast all their cares upon Jesus knowing that He cares for them (1 Peter 5:7).

2. Peace during conflict from within (16-17)

Jesus' presence is the source of peace *always in every way* (16). The conflict within the church caused by the tension between those who refused to work and those who were carrying a disproportionate load was to be committed to Christ. He would provide peace knowing that Jesus would be working in the hearts of those who refused to work; and He would transform them to conform to the image of Jesus who came to serve rather than to be served.

Paul affixed his own signature to a letter dictated to a scribe to affirm his authorship (17) and provide a personal touch to remind them of his love and care for them

3. Grace for all (18) *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

In the midst of conflict related to performance (e.g. working or not working) it is great to be reminded of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. None of us are made right with God by our moral performance, but by His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). As they prayed and recalled the grace of God which they received they were likely to show that grace towards others (Ephesians 4:32).

Conclusion: So, until Christ comes, we live in anticipation of His imminent return, but work to provide for ourselves, family and the community of faith.

Study Guide Qs:

Q1. *In what ways can work be a blessing?*

Q2. *How might unselfish work advance the gospel?*

Q3. *How might this lesson apply to service at the church?*

Q4. *How might this lesson apply to other contexts (e.g. home, workplace, school)?*

"Disciples Who Dig Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

1. Here is a brief essay on what the Bible says about work: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-work.html>.

2. Reread Thessalonians (I + II). What lessons stood out to you. How would you like to apply them to your life?

Love your neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

- 1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?**
- 2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?**

Disciples who make disciples:

- 1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?**
- 2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:**

Talk with someone at your work (or school) about what you learned, and how you would like to apply the lessons at your work (or school).

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Notes:

1. Preparation and participation: Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.

2. Consider what about the passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?

If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

3. The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities. As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.

4. The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better. As a leader, discuss this section frequently.

5. The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples. Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.

Next week- New Book Study: Genesis - "Beginnings"

Genesis 1:1-2 :: "The Beginning"