

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 12 September 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Bringing up Servants for the Lord

Years ago, in the state of Colorado, there was a young boy growing up in a family of 6 children. His parents' relationship had deteriorated; and it ended in divorce when he was 7. Along the way, he took 1 ½ years of piano lessons from his dad; and after his parents' divorce, he taught himself to play the piano without any further lessons. His mom had a hard time providing for her kids; but she trusted God and prayed daily for her children. Money was never plentiful, and her son took on various jobs to help out (such as newspaper routes). As he entered 5th class, the church that his family was attending opened a Christian School. Although his family didn't have the money to send him to this private school, the church leadership provided for him to be the school janitor, to work his way through the first year there. This was a big change for him. Not only had he been taught nothing about the Lord in the public school, but the quality of education was poor. This was evident by his inability to read or write at even a 2nd class level as he entered 5th class. One teacher cared so much for him, that she spent extra time to give him the remedial education he needed. As he entered his teenage years, his desire for a Christian education led him to work both before *and* after school so that he could pay to be enrolled in that Christian high school. In addition to all these things, he was on his school's football team. Yet, busy though he was, he was faithful to church. He had received Christ as Saviour when he was 12 years old, after a Christmas musical programme; and being in church was very important to him.

In time, the Lord brought a godly young lady into his life; and after their marriage, he and his wife taught their children the character trait of hard work. One area in which he wanted to teach his children was the area of music. When his children expressed interest in playing instruments, he encouraged them to do so, so that they might use their skills to serve the Lord. Having been in the military, he knew how to manage a schedule; and he made sure that his children's day was well laid out. His daughter and son were up early every morning. After they were up, his family did prayer and Bible reading together before he left for work. His children were home-schooled; and their schedule was laid out each day, with specific times for instrument practice, schoolwork, music lessons, chores, and play time. As they entered high school, it was not unusual for them to finish their schoolwork late in the evening. When they wanted something special, they knew they would have to work for it. On one occasion, they saw someone playing a Hammered Dulcimer, and thought they would like to have one. To earn the money for it, they started a bread business, and earned all the money (roughly \$1600) to have one made. They worked other jobs to earn money, as well--such as working on the grandparents' farm, and picking strawberries. With the money they earned, they also bought violins for themselves. In time, they learned to play the organ, piano, violin, and dulcimer; and they had a keen sense of how music can be used to serve God. To this day, they are using their musical abilities to glorify God.

By now, some of you may realise that the man of whom I speak is my father-in-law, and that his daughter is my wife, Katie. I thank God for the strong work ethic that Katie's parents instilled in her. If it weren't for my wife's strong character, she probably would not have weathered 15 years of missionary work, with all its trials, heartaches, and plain old hard work!

This morning, I would like to preach on this matter of instilling the character quality of hard work in our children. The title of this message is *Bringing up Servants for the Lord*.

I. God created man to work.

In **Genesis 2**, we find the first mention of the word “work” in the entire Bible. **Genesis 2:2** says, “*And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made.*” I find it significant that in this first mention of “work,” it is *God* who was working. God set the example for mankind by working to create the universe in six days. However, shortly after this verse, we find the first mention of “work” in reference to *man*. Let’s take a look at it.

Genesis 2:7-15 / 3:23

There is something in this passage that one can’t help but notice: as soon as God created Adam, *He put him to work!* In **verse 15**, we are told that God put Adam in the garden to “*dress*” it. The Hebrew word for “*dress*” is the verb *avad*. This same verb *avad* is translated as “*till*” in **Genesis 3:23**, where we are told that God sent Adam out of the garden to “*till the ground from which he was taken.*” *Avad* is translated in other places as “*labour*”—such as in **Exodus 20:9**, where God said, “*Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work.*” *Avad* is also translated as “*serve.*” In **Psalms 100:2** David wrote, “*Serve the LORD with gladness.*” *Avad* is also the root word for the Hebrew noun *eved*, which means “servant.”

Now, why is this word *avad* so important? Because it shows that in God’s eyes, “work” and “service” are inseparable. As we’ve seen, the word *avad* doesn’t mean merely “to labour”: it means “to serve.” The whole purpose of man’s labour is to *serve God!* Work is not a curse: it is a privilege. Why? Because in working, we can serve our Creator. For the believer, work won’t end at death, either. For all eternity, God will have *work* for His people to do.

Revelation 22:1-3

In Heaven there will no longer be thorns, or thistles, or deteriorating health, or anything else that makes work toilsome. All these things are part of the curse which our sin brought about: but in Heaven, there will be no sin or curse. Nevertheless, there will be *work* in heaven! This means that for the Christian, there is no real “retirement age.” You may retire from a career; but God has work for Christians to do until their dying breath. After death, there will be work to do in heaven. In the 1,000-year Kingdom, there will be work to do. In the new heaven and new earth, there will be work to do! Every Christian needs to latch onto this truth, and embrace *hard work*. Every Christian parent should be teaching this truth to his children, as well. Every child should be taught that “I was made to serve the Lord.”

II. Idleness is the father of most ill character traits.

In our culture, idleness is not really seen as a reprehensible quality. In the movies, lazy characters are often portrayed as mildly annoying, yet harmless, and even likable. In our society, laziness is not discouraged by our socialistic welfare state: instead, it is rewarded. However, God has not changed His mind on the matter. Laziness is ungodly and wicked.

Parent, if you want your children to have God's blessings in their lives, and not cursings, then you'd better do whatever it takes to teach your children the character trait of hard work.

By the way, there is a certain blessing that God did not give to Adam until he had first proven himself to be a worker. What was that blessing? Let's take a look.

Genesis 2:18-22

Did you notice that gap between **verse 18** and **verse 21**? In **verse 18** God said, "*I will make an help meet*" for Adam. Yet, it wasn't until **verse 21** that God actually *did* make a help meet for Adam. Something important had to happen before any wedding could materialise. What was it? Adam had to do some *work*. Before God would bless Adam with a wife, Adam first had to give names to all the animals. (That's a monumental task!) Only after Adam had given names to all the cattle, birds, and beasts of the field did God finally create a wife for him. So, what does this tell us? This tells us that a man who is lazy should not be married. First of all, a lazy man will not be in any position to provide materially for his family, because he isn't willing to do whatever it takes to support them. Secondly, he won't be in any position to build a strong marriage, or to rear children. Why? Because building a strong marriage and rearing children require *hard work*! A man who flees from work will *not* put forth the effort to understand his wife's emotional needs, or to lead her spiritually, or to work through problems. He will not be prepared to take the time to discipline his children in love, or to teach them the things of God. Why? Because doing these things requires diligence.

Now, let's go back to the Garden. In the beginning, God commissioned man to work for the purpose of bringing glory to Him. However, the entrance of sin into the world changed everything. Because man was now a sinner, bent on pride and rebellion against God, his work now had to take on an additional purpose. Let's see what that purpose was.

Genesis 3:14-21

After man sinned, mankind was plunged into a deathly crisis. Man's sin now separated him from God. Yet, God had a solution. The solution was that He would provide a Saviour for man. This Saviour (the "*seed*" of the woman) would one day come into the world; and while He was here, His "*heel*" would be bruised (or "crushed") by Satan. Yet, by having his *heel* crushed, this Saviour would, in turn, crush Satan's "*head*." In other words, he would utterly defeat him. *This* was God's remedy for sin. From the very beginning, God announced it. The remedy was that He would send His Son to take the penalty of our sin on Himself, so that we might be saved. We cannot work to earn our salvation: our salvation has been earned for us through the saving work of Christ on the cross. God illustrated the salvation that was coming by killing an innocent animal, and by making from that animal coats of skins to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness. This is a picture of being covered with Christ's righteousness.

Now, God's plan of redemption was not accomplished until 4,000 years after the Fall. Man had to wait a long time for the Saviour to come. However, in the meantime, God had a remedy for the *character crisis* that man's sin has caused: and that remedy was *hard work*. Before the Fall, man's work was not hard: but now, God made man's work *hard and toilsome*. Childbirth would now be painful and toilsome for the woman. For the man, earning bread would now be toilsome because of the thorns and thistles that God created after the Fall. *Why*

did God make work toilsome? In order to *teach men character*. Now, I cannot emphasise enough that being a hard worker *cannot* earn you salvation! Only Christ's work on your behalf can save you. However, hard work can *restrain* evil, and teach man character.

What kind of evils does hard work restrain? Well, for one thing, it restrains the evil of **talking too much**, and of **being a busybody**.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 / 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

Proverbs 10:19 says that *"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin."* In other words, the more a person flaps his jaws, the more likely he is to sin. Why? Because he will begin to pry into other people's business, and to talk about things that he ought not. This was precisely the problem that some of the people in the church of Thessalonica had. Some of them had become busybodies. What was Paul's remedy to this problem? The remedy was that they were *to get to work!* In his first letter, Paul warned these unruly people to *"study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands."* When this warning wasn't heeded, Paul had a more forceful solution in his second letter. He said that if any would not work, neither should he eat. In other words, when it came time for the church fellowship meal (which they had every Sunday), those who refused to work were not to be allowed to mooch off other people's meals! They also were not to be invited to dinner in others' homes. Parents, I believe we can find a principle in this. If your child won't do his chore, or won't complete it, he should be denied his next meal. If he still won't work, he should be denied his next meal, as well! (My kids can testify that this has happened many times in our house!)

What other evils does hard work restrain? It restrains the evil of **theft**. It is necessary for this sin to be restrained, because theft comes naturally to sinners. Remember, what did Adam and Eve reach forth their hands to do as soon as they decided to disobey God? They *took* the forbidden fruit. The tendency of sinners is to take that which does not belong to them. If a child be not taught to work, he will naturally become a thief. The remedy to the temptation of theft is to learn to *work hard*. **Ephesians 4:28** says, *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good."* From earliest childhood, children must be taught to embrace hard work in their hearts, so that they will not be tempted to seize that which is not theirs, and for which they did not labour. By the way, gambling is a sin for the same reason that stealing is a sin. Gambling is trying to get other people's wealth without working for it. **Proverbs 13:11** says, *"Wealth gotten by vanity (emptiness) shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase."* Our children should understand that the "get rich quick" mentality is wicked.

What other evil does hard work restrain? It restrains **covetousness and lust**. It also restrains the sin of **discontentment**.

Proverbs 12:11 / 21:25-26

Show me a child whose parents have not taught him to work, and I will show you a child who covets material stuff, and who doesn't appreciate what he does have. He won't even be satisfied with the food that his parents lovingly prepare for him. Why? Because he hasn't been taught the value of work. He has no thought that "My family and I have worked hard today, and pulled our loads: and now we can all sit down and enjoy the meal that we've

worked for.” He thinks that his parents *owe* him that food; thus, it isn’t sweet to him. Show me a teenaged boy whose parents don’t keep him busy working, and I’ll show you a boy whose mind is chained with lustful thoughts. Why? Because his mind has not been kept busy with productive work. Furthermore, a child who hasn’t been taught to work will follow “*vain persons*,” who are “*void of understanding*.” Show me an idle kid, and I’ll show you a kid who will end up hanging out with bad friends, and who will be destroyed.

A Christian young person who has learned to resist laziness will be in a much better position to win battles against temptation. Why? Because fighting temptation requires work! In **1 Corinthians 9**, Paul compared the Christian life to a race, in which a Christian “strives for the mastery.” That implies hard work, doesn’t it? Running a marathon isn’t for the lazy: and neither is running the Christian life. Paul said, “*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection*.” Keeping your old flesh “in subjection” isn’t something that lazy people do. If a child have trouble picking up his room, doing chores, doing homework, and getting up early for school, is it likely that he will be diligent in getting up early to read His Bible and pray, or to make it in time to church, when Daddy and Mommy are no longer around to see that he does it? If he cannot deny his flesh when he wants to sleep in and be lazy, is it likely that he will be vigilant and on guard against sin and temptation? The 19th-century Baptist pastor Charles Spurgeon said: “Some temptations come to the industrious, but all temptations attack the idle.” (*The Dictionary of Brilliant Writers*, 1895, Josiah Hotchkiss Gilbert, p. 345.)

What else does hard work guard against? It guards against our tendency to **waste time**.

Ephesians 5:15-16

We have only a short time on this earth; and God expects us to “*redeem the time*” that we have. God is the Creator of time; and He expects us to use it wisely for His service. Just look at Christ’s life in the Gospels. Do you ever see Christ wasting a single moment of time? You do not! Yes, Jesus did take times to rest. However, even when He rested, His rest was brief; and it was not for the purpose of extravagant self-indulgence. Jesus rested for the purpose of communing with His Father, and getting rejuvenated for the work that was before Him.

Many Christians’ heads should hang in shame at the thought of how much precious time they waste. Many Christian *parents*’ heads should hang in shame at the thought of how they are teaching their *children* to use their time. Current statistics now show that the average amount of screen time that children have per day (between Facebook, Instagram, and other social media, email, texts, telly, smartphone, x-box, etc.) is 9 hours per day! (And that isn’t counting “screen time” for homework assignments.) Studies show that some 13-year-olds check social media 100 times per day! Folks, this is ungodly! Even if a child be not looking at anything fleshly or worldly in all those hours (which is extremely unlikely), this is a shameful waste of the precious time that God has given us on this earth. Do I believe that a child *shouldn’t* have a mobile phone, an x-box, or a telly? Yes! As parents, we should be doing all in our power to make sure that our children’s minds are being filled with God’s Word—first of all, so that they will see their need of salvation; and secondly, so that they will keep their hearts pure after they are saved. The clock is ticking. Our kids are growing up. Their hearts and minds are forming, and their character (whether for good or bad) is being solidified. Make the time count! Teach them to use their time to work hard for the Lord.

III. One of the best ways to teach children character is to teach them to work hard.

If I had to pin-point what the foundation of all good character is, I would say that it is **humility**. You cannot even be saved without humbling yourself before God; and *after* you are saved, you cannot be spiritually strong without humbling yourself to the dust every day. A humble person is willing to be *reproved* by God through his parents, or through his pastor or teacher. A humble person is teachable. He will be ready to change, and to have his character moulded in whatever way it needs to be moulded.

However, if humility be the foundation of all good character, then hard work (when done in humility, and for the right reason) is like a main, central pillar in the building, holding the structure up. You can give your child all the book-learning in the world; but if you don't teach them to work, you are setting them up for a life of grief.

It may be easier and faster to do a job yourself; but the important thing is not getting the job done fast, but rather taking the time to teach your child how to work! We *must* take the time to teach them how to sweep that floor thoroughly; how to fold those clothes right; how to pick up that room; how to make that bed; how to wash those dishes; how to iron those clothes; how to mow that grass; how to handle that shovel or that rake; or how to cook that dinner. We should also teach our children to do *more* than what they are asked (in other words, to take initiative)! A Christian child who seeks *additional* work is a child who is in a good position to be a faithful servant of Christ. **Proverbs 22:29** says, "*Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.*"

Genesis 39:1-6, 21-23 / 41:14, 37-41

Joseph was a man who literally stood before kings. Why? For one thing, because he was a man with an upright, pure heart. However, you cannot separate his uprightness and purity from his *work ethic*. *Because* Joseph desired to be upright before God, he therefore viewed it as a sin to do anything less than his utmost best for his master. Whether he was a slave in Potiphar's house, or a prisoner in a prison, or the prime minister of Egypt, he did everything to the utmost of his might; and God blessed him for it, and used him in an extraordinary way. **Ecclesiastes 9:10** says, "*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.*"

There should be no job that is "beneath" your child. Scrubbing toilets should not be beneath him. Sweeping the floor should not be beneath him. Teach your child never to be ashamed of honest work, no matter how menial it is! Throughout Scripture, God called people to their "big, important" life's task while they were working. Joseph was working as the steward of a prison when he was called to be the governor of Egypt. Moses was tending sheep when God called him to deliver Israel. David was tending sheep when he was called to be king of Israel. Elisha was ploughing his father's field when he was called to be a prophet. He also served Elijah in menial tasks for ten years before he was called to replace Elijah as the head prophet of Israel. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fishing when they were called by Jesus to be His disciples; and Matthew was busy collecting taxes when he was called.

A Christian parent should seek to find his children's natural gifts (and their spiritual gift, if they be saved), and to encourage them to use those gifts for the Lord. By the way, we should

never show partiality toward one child because of his abilities. God created each child with the gifts *He* wants them to have. Focusing on one child because we like his (or her) abilities will cause strife and jealousy. Take Isaac and Rebekah's family, for example. Isaac loved Esau because he was a hunter, while Rebekah loved Jacob because he was into shepherding and cooking. Sadly, Isaac favoured Esau for his abilities, but failed to teach him to know and love the Lord. Consequently, Esau turned out to be a profane man, who never knew God. Now, Jacob did love the Lord; and his mother loved him for that fact. However, Rebekah and Isaac should have loved *both* their sons equally. Their failure to do so led to a great division in their family, and much heartache. We should value the abilities that God has given to each of our children, and teach them to use whatever abilities they have to serve the Lord.

IV. **Children need to be taught to labour for the right reason.**

There is a lesson that I learned long ago: People do what they *want* to do, and people *don't* do what they *don't* want to do. Should a person not want to go to church, then he won't go to church. Should a person not want to read His Bible, he'll find excuses not to read his Bible (such as "It's too hard to understand"). Should he not want to take time to pray, then he won't make the time. Why? Because he doesn't treasure talking with the Lord. Jesus said, "***Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.***" Well, guess what? It's the same way with work. Should a person not want to work, then he won't work; and more often than not, he doesn't want to work because his parents haven't *taught* him to treasure hard work.

However, children must treasure hard work for the right reason. The purpose of work is to glorify God. If you work hard for *any other reason* than to please God, then your work will be in vain! However, if you work for the Lord, your work is *not* in vain.

Ecclesiastes 2:9-11

1 Corinthians 15:58

Do you know what a "workaholic's" problem is? His problem is not that he works hard: his problem is that he has *wrong motives* for working hard. He works not to please the Lord, but to stroke his sense of pride in his achievements, or to lay up worldly treasure. (Thus, he works excessively, to the hurt of others around him.) If you work hard to get worldly stuff, or to feed your pride, then all your labour is "vain" (worthless). However, if you labour for the Lord (whether by flipping burgers, or by sharing the Gospel with someone), your labour is *not* empty: it is pleasing and profitable to God. We parents should challenge our children with the thought, "If *Christ Himself* were here watching you work, would He be pleased with your work? Would He be pleased that you are doing your best, *and* that you are doing it for Him?"

As we teach our children to work, we should also be teaching them that they can't work for the Lord in their own strength. If you labour in your *own* wisdom and strength, you will fail. However, if you labour for the Lord in *His* might, your work doesn't seem so toilsome. It's a *restful* sort of labour. First of all, you are not trying to do the impossible. (You are not trying to earn your way to heaven.) You are resting in the saving work that Christ did for *you*. Secondly, your labour is restful because the Lord is empowering you to do the work. Also, you are serving Him out of love. When you serve Him out of love, it takes the burden out of your labour, and puts a spring in your step. Jesus said, "***My yoke is easy, and my burden is***

light.” Christian, are you serving the Lord fervently, out of a heart of love? Christian parent, are you labouring to bring up children who will serve the Lord out of a heart of love?

Conclusion: As I close this morning, I would ask this question: Have you been born again? Perhaps your heart is a million miles away from the Lord, because you have never repented of your sin, and trusted in Christ. You are still separated from God, and on your way to hell. You may have “prayed a sinner’s prayer”: however, you were not truly saved, because you never considered yourself to be so terrible a sinner as to deserve *hell*. You never had any intention of turning over the throne of your heart to Jesus, either. There has never been any change in your life, because you still live life for “me”—just as you have always done. You cannot even begin to have truly godly character until you are born again into God’s family. If you have never been saved, I urge you to repent and believe on Christ today!