



## “Dirty Jobs”

*Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 6:1–4; Galatians 6:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12; 2 Thessalonians 3:10*

***God has called each of us to work for his purposes, not merely our own, even if that means getting our hands dirty***

We live in a dynamic world; nothing stays the same. Churches like other organizations either grow and decline; no church stays locked in stasis. So...growth it is. God has given us a mission and the

means to accomplish it, both our own resources and abilities, but also the Holy Spirit, who guides and directs and strengthens us in all this.

Work was given by God to humans at the very beginning, before things went tragically awry. Adam and Eve lived in a beautiful garden and were expected to get their hands dirty in the work of tending the garden and, generally, mastering the wildness of God’s good creation. The garden’s soil is soft and fertile. I imagine it to have been like one big bug-free, disease-free Miracle-Gro commercial; even I might have had a green thumb there. But when they rebelled against God, work became hard and even life-destroying. My own concrete-like weed-laden soil is a distortion of God’s creation, a distortion intertwined with the distortion of my own relationship with God. Nonetheless, God has called us to his work and given us his Holy Spirit to encourage, empower, and sustain us. That is what we are about, putting shovel into soil and beginning the hard work of readying ourselves to invite and welcome more and more people to the body of Christ.

### ***Working the mission***

Read the above verses from Matthew, which is often called the Great Commission. Three verbs: make, baptize, and teach. Now, there might not be much labor involved in baptizing, but “make” and “teach”? Both imply a lot of real work, hard work, tiring work that involves us all.

And we are all commissioned to not only help people new to the faith begin a life of discipleship, we must help one another to grow, to become ever-truer disciples of our Lord. This is not only the work of clergy and staff; it is the work of us all and it often requires us to take on a dirty and messy job.

### ***Real work***

I’ve included several New Testament passages that speak to work, including the story from Acts of the needed delegation of work in the community of believers. You can bet there were a lot of “dirty jobs” to be done.

As you look over the passages above, you will notice that some seem to speak to our work in building for God’s kingdom and others of our “real world” work, making a living . . . that sort of thing. We tend to separate the two—and I’m not sure we should. Paul was a tentmaker by trade and took some pride in the fact that he supported himself as he evangelized for Jesus. It is a fair bet that much of Paul’s mission was accomplished in the day-to-day work of making leather and canvas goods for customers.

Too many people are burdened by a life filled with work that is frustrating, mundane, even dehumanizing. Too often, this is made worse, not better, by our co-workers. Perhaps they work out of fear of what will happen to them if they don’t keep showing up at their job or their inability to find a better job. They know that there must be something else. Something new. Something that will bring passion and satisfaction. But fear holds them back.

I don’t believe that God has planned out each step of our lives, such that all we have to do is trust God and wait for the next place that God will take us. But I do believe that God works with all our ambitions, decisions, troubles, and mistakes to move us forward toward God’s purposes for us.

If you are in a mundane job, you might ask yourself how it could be preparing you for the work you believe you should be doing. What can you learn now? How might God use this job to make you ready for the work you want to do? You might even ask yourself how you can find God's presence and encouragement in the work you do now.

Finally, I've always been struck by the fact that Paul closes his great chapter on the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, with a "therefore." He writes, that because we shall all be raised just as Jesus was raised, our work is not in vain. Paul means that because we know the entire human enterprise is headed for a glorious, God-created restoration, all that we do now has meaning and purpose. We are not just passing time, waiting for the end. Instead, in all our work, dirty as it may be at times, we are building for God's kingdom, we are helping to ready the world for God's great burst of new creation, a new creation already begun in Jesus Christ.

## THE GREAT COMMISSION

The Book of Acts tells the story, in part, of how this commission was carried out in the first 30 years after Jesus. Jesus was crucified and resurrected in 30AD or so. About three years later, Saul, a zealous Pharisee who was present at the martyring of Stephen, was on his way to Damascus to round up more Christians. While on the road to Damascus, Saul was visited by Jesus, transformed, and would thereafter be known as Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles.

For the next thirty years, Paul traveled throughout the eastern Mediterranean founding new churches, making disciples, teaching, and baptizing. The Book of Acts tells us how the invitation to follow Christ was taken by Paul and others to much of the Roman Empire, even to Rome itself.

The people of God are charged with inviting everyone, in all places, at all times, to accept Jesus' invitation and enter the covenant community of God's people. As Jesus so neatly put it in his Sermon on the Mount, "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16). We are to be that light, drawing the world to Jesus Christ.