

Introduction:

Have you ever built a sand castle at the beach? No matter how good an artist or craftsman you are, there is a real problem with sand castles on the shore. Though you may construct something beautiful, even memorable, the tide is coming in. Though you felt a sense of accomplishment, enjoyed its beauty, and took pride in your work, in the big scheme of things, building sand castles for the sake of sand castles is washed of meaning as soon as the tide comes in. If we are not careful, our entire lives will be nothing more than building sand castles on the shoreline. This month, we focus on lessons that will help us overcome this kind of futility.



“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (**Genesis 1:22**, ESV). God was in the beginning of everything. Therefore, we are striving to put God in the beginning of everything we are and everything we do. This month we turn to our work, our careers, our jobs. We need to put in the beginning of our job, God.

What is your job? Butcher, baker, or candlestick maker? Teacher, salesperson, waiter, assembly line worker, janitor, mechanic, lawyer, doctor, President, carpenter, preacher, engineer, accountant, banker? Whatever your career put God in the beginning of your job by remembering what Jesus taught in **John 6:27**: “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you” (ESV). Let’s unpack that verse and put God in the beginning of our job. Be ready, because in the end, I’m going to ask you to be unsatisfied with your career. I’m going to ask you to pursue something greater than any career can possibly give you.

Discussion:

I. What this verse is not saying.

- A. **II Thessalonians 3:10-12** says, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” (ESV). Jesus said we shouldn’t work for food to eat; Paul says we shouldn’t eat if we don’t work for our food. What is going on?
- B. Very simply, Jesus is using a figure of speech known as *Ellipsis*. *Ellipsis* means understood words have been left out in order to keep us from being distracted by the omitted words and force us to think more about the included ones. Jesus, therefore, is not offering a blanket statement that we aren’t to work jobs to provide food. Rather, understanding the elliptical nature of this sentence, we can see that Jesus is saying, “Do not work *only* for the food that perishes, but *primarily* for the food that endures to eternal life.” Therefore, as **II Thessalonians 3:10-12** instructs, don’t be idle or a busybody. Pursue a job, do your work quietly, earn your living. You should even strive for excellence on your job (**Proverbs 22:29**) and work with all your might (**Ecclesiastes 9:10**). But don’t let your job take over your life.

II. Four Keys to Keep Your Career from Dominating Your Life.

- A. Key #1: Keep your career in eternal perspective.
 1. If we do not take care, we can think our career is more important than it really is. Jesus’s instruction that we should not work for the food that perishes draws us up short. Whether you build houses, doctor bodies, or even run countries, **II Peter 3:10** says the earth and all its works are going to be burned up.
 2. Even preachers can miss the boat on this. Far too often, preaching as a career ends up being about preaching sermons, writing articles, blogs, and books, gaining influence, and attracting more people to fill bigger and bigger buildings. All of which will burn up along with everything else out there.
 3. From an eternal perspective our careers are all building sand castles on the shore. This earth and all its works are going to burn up. We can’t carry any of it with us into eternity. Keep that in mind on your job.
- B. Key #2: Don’t be satisfied with a perishable income.
 1. We must not become enamored with the perishable trappings of this world. Study hard in school, get a good job or start your own business, make lots of money, have nice things. But when all of it burns up, we may find we have climbed the ladder of success, but leaned it against the wrong wall.
 2. Jesus tells us not to be so intent on the perishable income that we lose sight of what is imperishable and eternal. He tells us to work for the “food that endures to eternal life” (**John 6:27**). This is hard because

the perishable income is so tangible. The imperishable sometimes seems like pie in the sky in the great by and by. Earthly treasures perish (**Matthew 6:19-21**). Heavenly treasures endure (**1 Peter 1:3-4**).

3. The story of the rich man and Lazarus in **Luke 16:19-31** explains this well. The rich man was satisfied by the mediocrity of his perishable income, until he perished. Suddenly, he would rather have been the poor beggar Lazarus. The point is not, of course, that faithful Christians are all poor beggars. The point is as exciting as a few years of relative riches is, they are nothing compared to an eternity with God. As Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Don't sacrifice eternal riches because you are fixated on the fun of the temporal and perishable income from your career.
- C. Key #3: Let your career be your servant; Let God be your god.
1. We all know that industry and discipline are virtues. It only takes a few chapters into **Proverbs** to know we should be workers and we should work hard. However, the blessing of work can become a curse. Rather than being a servant and a channel of God's blessings in our lives, it can become our god that we serve. Let's unpack this point with a little more depth.
 2. Three ways to keep these relationships in balance.
 - a) While the master/slave relationship of the New Testament days is not an exact parallel to modern working relationships, Paul's instructions to servants in **Ephesians 6:5-8** is helpful here. *Work as though Jesus were your boss*. Do your work in such a way that Jesus is glorified. It also means, of course, if your boss asks you to do something contrary to Jesus, you still let Jesus be your boss.
 - b) *Enjoy the blessings that come from your work as a gift from God* (**Ecclesiastes 5:18-20**). As long as we keep in mind the eternal perspective of our work mentioned earlier, there is no need to be ashamed of the blessings God has given you through your work. Enjoy them. Of course, to enjoy them, you must first be content with them. God is not obligated to give each of us the same pay for our work. With that in mind, we must neither be envious of the blessings others receive or arrogant regarding the blessings we receive. But do not simply enjoy them. Enjoy them as God's gift. We must not arrogantly think the blessings we have through our work are the product of our own hand, our own intelligence, our own discipline, our own strategy, our own planning. They are gifts from God; enjoy them as such.
 - c) *Share your blessings* (**Ephesians 4:28**). While we are to enjoy the blessings God gives us through our work, we are not to hoard them. We see the two opposites in **Ephesians 4:28**. There is the thief who steals and the laborer who shares. We must not be as those who are willing to stop halfway between these two. Paul doesn't say let the thief quit stealing and become industrious in order to take care of himself. He says we are to move to the opposite extreme. Instead of stealing, we share.
- D. Key #4: Put your trust in the saving work of Jesus Christ.
1. In **John 6:27-29**, the people asked Jesus how to work for the bread of eternal life. His response: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (ESV). The people had misunderstood the miracle of the loaves and fish. They saw an endless supply of perishing bread. They were supposed to see the Living Bread. Their hope and trust was bound up in where they were going to get their next meal. If we are not careful, that is what a career becomes for us. Our career and our work become our hope and our trust. We have to study hard in school so we can get a good job so we can save up for retirement so we can take care of ourselves into old age and not burden our children with burial expenses when we die. That's a fine plan. But there are worse things than being hungry when we are old.
 2. If our greatest hope is to live comfortably on earth until we die a ripe old age, we will almost inevitably view our career as our savior. Our career, however, is not our savior because we don't need to be saved from hunger and homelessness. We need to be saved from sin. Again, Lazarus and the rich man drives it home (**Luke 16:19-31**). I'm not saying I want you to be a hungry and homeless beggar or that God wants you to be one. I'm just saying there are worse things than being a hungry and homeless beggar. And while it is great for people to work to save themselves and others from hunger and homelessness, that is not what we ultimately need salvation from. We need salvation from the wrath of God over our sins.
 3. There is only one place to get that: in Jesus (**Acts 4:12**). **Romans 6:23** is clear; the wages we have earned is death, but God wants to give us a free gift through Jesus Christ. He wants to give us life. He has done that through the death of His Son, Jesus. Therefore, Jesus tells us in **John 6:27-29** to quit putting our faith, trust, and hope in our work and instead put our faith, trust, and hope in the saving work of Jesus.

Conclusion:

Are you satisfied because you have a great job, with great benefits, and a great retirement? Don't be. Don't be satisfied until you have an eternal and imperishable inheritance reserved in heaven by the blood of Jesus Christ.