

“Labor of Love”

Tomorrow is Labor Day. When you hear that word “labor,” what comes to mind? Pain (childbirth), work, stress, exhausting, challenging, unfulfilling, nostalgic, fulfilling, satisfying, invigorating, sustaining, enjoyable. That word “labor” can elicit both negative and positive feelings. It’s been like that ever since the beginning of time. Genesis 2 reports to us some details of day 6 of creation. **“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it...Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field”** (Genesis 2:15,19-20). In the perfect world God wanted the humans he created to have a fulfilling and enjoyable existence and part of the way he accomplished that was by giving them labor to do. If someone would have interviewed Adam on day 6 of creation and asked him to describe how he felt about his labors I imagine he would have said something like this: “fulfilling, satisfying, invigorating, sustaining, enjoyable.” And then Adam and Eve fell into sin. Listen to how labor changed. **“With pain you will give birth to children...Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food”** (Genesis 3:16a, 17b-19a). If someone would have interviewed Adam and Eve a year after they fell into sin and asked them to describe how they felt about their labors I imagine they would have said something like this: “Pain (childbirth), work, stress, exhausting, challenging, unfulfilling, nostalgic, fulfilling, satisfying, invigorating, sustaining, enjoyable.” Thankfully God has not removed all joy and satisfaction when it comes to our labors in this sin tainted world. But it can be a labor of love, at times, to labor on this earth. One specific aspect of a Christian’s life where this is definitely true is when it comes to living my Christian faith in a world that is anti-Christian in so many ways and dealing with the affliction of my sinful nature that loves to sin. The struggle is real, but the struggle is worth fighting because **“Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him, who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).** Motivated by the love Christ gave to us through his life, death, and resurrection, and the earthly and eternal blessings that we enjoy because of his love, let us now commit ourselves to the labor of love that James presents to us - James 3:13-18.

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peace-makers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

James 3:13-18 is only six verses, but it is packed with contrasts between God angering labor and God pleasing labor. James 3:13-18 is filled with wisdom that God would love Christians to avoid and also labor toward. Let's consider these contrasts.

- Labor of love #1 – Laboring to live a **“good life”** (vs. 13) **“full of ...good fruit”** (vs. 17) instead of **“every evil practice”** (vs. 16). As Christians we bear Christ's name and represent him with our words and actions. As Christians we can make Christ look like he is worth following or make following him look worthless. Society would be better off if Christians, like us, would labor toward living a beautiful, honorable, good life instead of a worthless, unethical, evil life.
- Labor of love #2 – Laboring to live in **“humility”** (vs. 13) instead of **“boast”** (vs. 14) about sin. One of the discouraging things about living in the year 2021 is how readily people share, even boast about, and expect everyone to be okay with their sin. As Christians God desires that we would labor toward humility in our lives. Humble repentance on account of our sins and seeking the comfort of forgiveness from God and others.
- Labor of love #3 – Laboring to be **“peace loving,”** (vs. 17) **“peace-makers”** (vs. 18), and **“full of mercy”** (vs. 17) instead of **“harboring bitter envy”** (vs. 14). It is so easy to offend others with and be offended by words and actions. And it is so tempting to be bitter and to hold grudges. In fact, the world around us gives us so many examples of such sinful behavior and even encourages such revenge motivated sinful behavior. Even though it is a challenge, God calls Christians, like us, to daily labor toward diffusing tense situations instead of escalating them and to be quick with forgiveness instead of anger.
- Labor of love #4 – Laboring to be **“pure”** (vs. 17) instead of filled with **“selfish ambition”** (vs. 14). It takes no labor at all to be selfish. We are conceived and born programmed to care about **“ME”** above everyone else. God has called Christians to consider: what is the motive behind my decisions and the activities I am involved in? Money, power, prestige, honor, reputation, resume builder, impress others? In and of themselves those things aren't wrong, but if that is my main motivation then God is not pleased. God desires that we monitor our motives and that we labor toward allowing love for God and others guide our decisions and activities.
- Labor of love #5 – Laboring to be **“considerate”** (vs. 17) and **“sincere”** (vs. 17) instead of **“earthly”** (vs. 15). God desires that Christians care about the feelings and happiness of

others. Laboring toward that balance of being understanding and accepting of others while at the same time not compromising the truth of Scripture as we sincerely speak the truth in love of God's Word to others.

- Labor of love #6 – Laboring to be **“submissive”** (vs. 17) instead of **“disorderly”** (vs. 16). Being willing to follow the lead of other people for the sake of unity even if I don't agree with my government, the leaders at my church, my boss, my spouse, my parents, my teacher on the best way to handle a certain situation. As long as they aren't leading me in ways that our sinful, it's okay to follow their lead without grumbling, complaining, and bad-mouthing them. While it hurts, it's okay if others don't like my idea and decide to go in a different direction. I can accept the decision and I don't have to get angry and threaten to “take my ball and go home.”
- Labor of love #7 – Laboring to be **“impartial”** (vs. 17) instead of **“unspiritual”** (vs. 15). If we're honest we will admit that some people are easier to like and love than others. The person who is upbeat and positive is easy to like. The person who has been very kind, generous, and helpful to you in some way is very easy to love. On the flip side, the person who is negative and unpleasant is easy to dislike. The person who makes my life difficult and stressful is very easy to dislike. A Christian strives to be impartial, by not picking favorites, by being equally kind, helpful, and generous to all.

Who is up for such labors of love? None of us. That's why it is so comforting to know that our Savior, Jesus Christ, was up for such labors. He perfectly handled all the contrasts we just talked about. And his death and resurrection means that we are forgiven of all of our labor of love failures and eternal life in Heaven awaits us. So, I'll ask again. Who is up for such labors of love? We are! You are! I am! For those connected to and motivated by Christ, nothing is impossible. Go labor in love and let's see the **“harvest of righteousness,”** (vs. 18) the positive Christian impact we can have on the people God has placed in our lives. Amen.