

Words for an Emerging Church

Wednesday, October 13, 2021

Praying for Those Hands

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. —1 Thessalonians 5:12

Whatever you do, work at it with all our heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. —Colossians 3:23

Our Lancaster Association pastors met for breakfast at an area restaurant, and during the prayer of blessing for the meal I was struck by some familiar, yet now newly meaningful words, which were spoken. As is rightly and commonly stated in such a prayer the request was added that God will *bless the hands which prepare this meal*. We have heard these words all our lives and I trust that our hearts do go out to those who worked hard to make the many mealtime blessings which we have received, but in 2021 this familiar phrase took on a much deeper meaning.

Upon hearing these words my heart suddenly went out to the harried and understaffed souls who were trying to hold things down in the kitchen! I was not aware of the specific status of staffing at this particular restaurant, but I can guarantee that they were in need of workers. *Every* eating establishment is, along with a host of other employers. As God's plan would have it, I was in conversation with a pastor whose son heads up the whole dining program at a state university. She reported that he is presently short on staff to the tune of 150 people! The problem of employment and staffing in our country is very real.

We very much need to pray for the hands which prepare this food, and **how shall we pray?** A big desire of mine in recent months has been **for understanding** of the nature of this terrible crisis. Why the shortage of workers? How much of this is due to government benefits discouraging work, or is that not really a central issue? Are there still COVID fears which hold people back from seeking work? Where have all the workers gone? Not only is present day journalism polarized, but I am finding that news agencies are reticent to do the hard work of investigation which is badly needed at this time.

We must pray for a strong and **renewed work ethic** in our nation. It is not my intention to make sweeping accusations of laziness, but all my life I have been concerned that our nation, and particularly God's people, demonstrate their faith by working hard and honestly. There has always been the temptation to disdain work, especially the dirtier and less glamorous jobs, and I fear that this attitude may be worsening as the generations go by.

There is also the matter of **just wages**. The debate over minimum wages or what constitutes a fair payment for labor is always a lively one with opinions varying

widely. Let the debate go on, and let us all pray that workers would be paid as they deserve. This present work crunch has boosted wages, and this is probably overdue.

But before our prayers become too lofty and theoretical, let us heartily pray for **the wearied, overworked souls** who are presently holding things down at eating establishments, retirement communities, stores, and businesses across our country! There are many exhausted workers who deserve a pat on the back and word of thanks. And let us be honest with ourselves. It is too easy to pay no attention to the many service sector workers all around us, and to pay no heed to the value and dignity of their labor! Next time you are in your neighborhood Dollar Store or CVS, consider the clerks who are running back and forth from stocking shelves to operating the cash registers. They are working hard, they need to know a lot, they are obviously understaffed, and they are putting in maximum effort to earn their often time minimum wage. A little respect please!

I often come back to the story told by noted psychiatrist Robert Coles about his college days at Harvard in the 1950s. He would tell of hours spent in their dorm rooms sharing noble thoughts about how they would someday straighten out the world and restore dignity to the human race. And while they would philosophize and think grand thoughts about humanity, they would also trash their rooms and make no efforts toward neatness. They didn't need to waste their precious time being neat, because "the bitties" would clean it all up for them. (That was what they called the low wage middle aged maids who regularly cleaned their rooms.) Dr. Coles looks back with a mixture of amusement and embarrassment over his inexcusable treatment of these noble workers. He reminds all of us that it is too easy to hold noble notions about saving humanity while showing no due respect to those who serve all around us.

I was much blessed by the breakfast prayer. Let us continue to pray, whether it be at mealtime or whenever, for those many weary hands and souls which are much in need of God's strengthening.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Almighty God, you have so linked our lives one with another that all we do affects, for good or ill, all others lives: so guide us in the work we do, that we may do it not for self alone, but for the common good; and as we seek a proper return for our own labor, make us mindful of the rightful aspirations of other workers, and arouse our concern for those who are out of work; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. —Source Unknown