

# “Faithful Labor”

Psalm 8, Lamentations 3:23, Philippians 3:14, 2 Corinthians 12:15, 2 Timothy 4:7

Pastor James York

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Labor Day is a tribute to the achievements and contributions of workers to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country. This weekend we celebrate the love and goodness that comes from labor both paid and unpaid. Passionate unpaid labor is critical such as parents, emergency personnel, coaches, community happenings, organizations, clubs, missions, churches, and on and on. Creative, loving, joyful labor is an attribute of God. In six days the LORD made Heaven and Earth. God continues to labor today as God sustains all of creation, redeems, and continues to create. It is fitting that we take a day to rest and savor our accomplishments for “on the seventh day God rested and was refreshed.”

**The psalmist sings. Psalm 8 NLT “Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens. You have taught children and infants to tell of your strength, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you. When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you set in place—what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority—the flocks and the herds and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents. O Lord, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth!”**

God calls us to love and care for each other, every person, every animal, every plant, the environment, and all of the earth like God lovingly nurtures us. Our labor should expand goodness, love, creativity, and joy echoing the majesty of God throughout the cosmos.

Thank you for your generous labor to this church, our family of faith, the body of Christ, the partner of God. Thank you for your lavish labor that makes ministry thrive here. Together we are a light to the world. Together we are feeding the hungry, educating the marginalized, housing the homeless, assisting those struck with disaster, creating peace, clothing the naked, enabling Clearwater Forest, preventing bullying, helping grow crops, purifying water, providing basic needs, creating an equal place for everyone at the table, caring for the sick, providing ministries of worship, education, fellowship, and mission and much more. In our midst we have several people who have been long time members of North, who decade after decade have faithfully labored doing God’s work. In our midst we have people who donate hours of service every week. In our midst we have people who by worldly standards only give a little, perhaps a single prayer, yet every act of labor for God is multiplied creating an eternal celebration of love. It’s like the boy who gave his lunch which God multiplied to feed thousands of people. I thank you for your faithful, abundant, loving labor. God notices each and every gift of labor. Imagine how wonderful it will be in Heaven to have Jesus thank you for all the loving labor you have done. God will reveal how your labor affected the world exponentially making a difference beyond your wildest imagination. God will show you all the lives you touched. You will celebrate with them and all of Heaven the love you shared. The apostle Paul says when we let God work through us we shine like stars.

I hope you will make time to relax, to reflect upon your labor, to celebrate the good you have done, the love you have shared, and thank God for the gift of labor. Give thanks for the labor of those

who have cared for, helped, and inspired you. Perhaps your labors reflect some of the characteristics of these faithful laborers.

The optimistic labor of David. Even as a boy David had an optimistic faith that moved him to attempt feats for God that most people wouldn't even consider. David believed so deeply in the power of God that a giant could not intimidate him, a murderous king could not paralyze him, and genocidal enemies could not defeat him. With optimism David labored on whatever task God gave him, fully expecting grace and power to be revealed along the way. Give thanks for optimistic labor that believes we will in time experience God's redemption even in the bleakest of circumstances. Things are getting better. Human lives are being transformed by God. Suffering is being relieved by God's mercy. Oppression is being lifted. Sin is being defeated. The church is pushing back the gates of hell. God is alive, powerful, gracious, and merciful. Give thanks for optimistic labor that is inspiring hope.

Jonathan did the labor of steadfast friendship. Jonathan's father was King Saul. Jonathan was heir apparent to the throne. Jonathan and David were great friends. Jonathan didn't sacrifice his friendship to protect his future nor fight for his own inheritance as David became King. Jonathan risked his life to spend time with David. Jonathan made the labor of friendship a priority. Give thanks for the labor of friendship that brings out the best in each other.

The labor of Joseph's integrity. Joseph rose to a position of great power and influence. He had control over all the food during the seven year drought in Egypt, yet power did not corrupt him. Joseph avoided financial impropriety, political scandal, and sexual seduction. Joseph could have festered up anger against his brothers and avenge them; but instead, he forgave them and provided for them. Give thanks for labor of integrity.

The labor of Esther's tenacity. Esther was in a horrible situation: she could risk her life by pleading for her people before a dangerous king; or she could use her beauty, protect her position, and have a luxurious life by turning her back on her people. She asked the entire Jewish community to pray for her for three days and then with tenacity she said, "I will go to the king even though it is against the law and if I perish, I perish." Esther put it all on the line. I will do the right thing, no matter the consequences, even if it means my death. Esther was willing to lose everything to do God's work. Give thanks for labor of tenacity.

Solomon labored with wisdom. God spoke to Solomon through a dream and asked him what he wanted. Solomon asked for an understanding mind of wisdom, so he could govern the people well and know the difference between right and wrong. Solomon strived to labor with wisdom, seeking God's will on every matter. Give thanks for wise labor.

Jeremiah labored with enduring hope. Jeremiah labored faithfully, persistently throughout his entire life even though the people were unresponsive to his teachings and everything kept going wrong. From a human perspective Jeremiah's ministry never went well. The world labeled him unsuccessful. Jeremiah didn't get cynical or bitter. He expressed his true feelings to God. He admitted he felt abandoned and unsure of the future. He let go and let God's restoration fill him with hope and confidence knowing someday all of God's promises will be fulfilled. Jeremiah wrote, **Lamentations 3:23 "For God's compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is God's faithfulness."** Give thanks for hopeful enduring labor.

Nehemiah celebrated the progress of labor. Scripture describes in great detail the celebration Nehemiah arranged after rebuilding Jerusalem's walls. It was a huge and wonderful party. Together they savored their achievements. They honored each other's contributions. They praised God for sustaining them. This weekend let go of all the labor that needs to be done, so you can celebrate all that your labor has accomplished. North Presbyterian has an abundance we should celebrate. After worship, celebrate with at least one person talking about the blessings of our labor.

Peter labored with initiative. Peter creatively started new things, new ministries with new people and unexpected people. Peter took bold risks for God. Peter was the only disciple to get out of the boat and walk on water. Peter was the first to identify Jesus as the Messiah. Peter changed his stance on the necessity of Christians following Jewish food purity laws. God is always at work in our lives and in the world. Give thanks for the times when you, and those around you, labored with initiative, boldly promoting new things God called you to do and new ways God called you to be.

The apostle Paul labored with intensity. Paul wrote, **Philippians 3:14** “**One thing I do...I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.**” **2 Corinthians 12:15** “**I will gladly spend and be completely spent for the sake of the church.**” At the end of Paul’s life he said, **2 Timothy 4:7** “**I have fought the good fight, I finished the race, I have kept the faith.**” Give thanks for those times of intense labor.

Moses had courageous labor. Pharaoh and the wealthy Egyptians controlled the Israelites, because they loved the luxurious lifestyle, the huge profits, provided to them by the cheap labor of the Israelites. Moses had the courage to tell Pharaoh and the wealthy Egyptians that oppression, vast inequality of wealth was wrong, it was against God’s will. Moses had the courage to lead the Israelites on a 40 year journey to freedom in the promise land. Moses had courage to keep going, keep leading, when people complained, rebelled, and were certain that a better life for all was unrealistic. Give thanks for courageous labor – Times when you stood up for someone – Times when you spoke up for the poor and outcast – Times when you set a person free – Times when you helped another – Times when you spoke out, advocated, and voted for a world where everyone is treated as equals so all have food, housing, health care, education, freedom, meaningful fairly compensated employment and clean water.

Jesus’ labor reveals all of these traits and every good and creative aspect of wholesome labor. Jesus labor was gracious. Jesus forgives, heals and renews. Give thanks for your labor of forgiveness.

What is special about the way you do your labor? Amen