

## BOOK EXTRACT: THE GIFT OF WORK

*(from 'Keep a Quiet Heart' by Elisabeth Elliot)*

The principal cause of boredom is the hatred of work. People are trained from childhood to hate it. Parents often feel guilty about making children do anything but the merest gestures toward work. Perhaps the children are required to make their beds and, in a feeble and half-hearted fashion, tidy up their rooms once a month or so. But take full responsibility to clear the table, load the dishwasher, scrub the pots, wipe the counters? It would be too much to ask of many ten-year-olds because parents have seriously asked nothing of them when they were two or three. Children quickly pick up the parents' negative attitudes toward work and think of it as something most sedulously to be avoided.

Our Lord and Saviour worked. There is little doubt that He served in the carpenter shop under the instruction of His earthly father Joseph, putting in long hours, learning skill, care, responsibility, and above all, the glory of work as a gift to glorify His heavenly Father. He did always those things that please the Father. Later he chose almost all His disciples from those who laboured with their hands. Even the apostle Paul, a man of brilliant intellect, made tents.

Booker T. Washington, an African-American who grew up in the South when members of his race were expected to do the hardest and dirtiest jobs, learned his greatest lesson from the example of a Christian woman. A New Englander, the founder of the Hampton Institute, she herself washed the windows the day before school started, so it would be nice for those children who had been born slaves.

Is work a necessary evil, even a curse? A Christian who spent many years in Soviet work camps, learning to know work at its most brutal, its most degrading and dehumanising, testified that he took pride in it, did the best he could, worked to the limit of his strength each day. Why? Because he saw it as a gift from God, coming to him from the hand of God, the very will of God for him. He remembered that Jesus did not make benches and roof beams and plough handles by means of miracles, but by means of saw, axe and adze.

Wouldn't it make an astounding difference, not only in the quality of the work we do (in office, schoolroom, factory, kitchen, or backyard), but also in our satisfaction, even our joy, if we recognised God's gracious gift in every single task, from making a bed or bathing a baby to drawing a blueprint or selling a computer? If our children saw us doing 'heartily as unto the Lord' all the work we do, they would learn true happiness. Instead of feeling that they must be allowed to do what they like, they would learn to like what they do.

St Ignatius Loyola prayed, 'Teach us, Good Lord, to labour and to ask for no reward save that of knowing that we do Thy will.' As I learn to pray that prayer, I find that there are many more rewards that come along as fringe benefits. As we make an offering of our work, we find the truth of a principle Jesus taught: Fulfillment is not a goal to achieve, but always the by-product of sacrifice.

*From an old English parsonage, down by the sea  
There came in the twilight a message to me;  
Its quaint Saxon legend, deeply engraven,  
Hath, as it seems to me, teaching from Heaven.  
And on through the hours the quiet words ring  
Like a low inspiration—'DO THE NEXT THING'.*

*Many a questioning, many a fear  
Many a doubt, hath its quietening here.  
Moment by moment, let down from Heaven,  
Time, opportunity, guidance, are given.  
Fear not tomorrow, Child of the King,  
Trust them with Jesus, 'DO THE NEXT THING'.*

*Do it immediately, do it with prayer,  
Do it reliantly, casting all care,  
Do it with reverence, tracing His hand,  
Who placed it before thee with earnest command.  
Stayed on Omnipotence, safe 'neath His wing,  
Leave all resultings, 'DO THE NEXT THING'.*

*Looking to Jesus, ever serener,  
(Working or suffering) be thy demeanour,  
In His dear presence, the rest of His calm,  
The light of His countenance be thy psalm,  
Strong in His faithfulness, praise and sing  
Then, as He beckons thee, 'DO THE NEXT THING'.*