

**Abundant Life—Today and Tomorrow #4;
Work and Self-Discipline**

**2006 Feast of Tabernacles, Third Day
October 9, 2006; Newport, OR**

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Edited Sermon Transcript

Well, as you are aware, brethren, we are covering, now, the theme of my messages at this Feast on abundant life: "Abundant Life—Today and Tomorrow." And so I have been using John 10 and verse 10 as my key text—the anchor text—in which Jesus Christ said He came that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly. And, so, if it is the express will of God that His people experience not just life, but abundant life—enriching, rewarding life—not only in the future at the Millennial reign of Christ, which we are picturing at this Feast of Tabernacles, but even today, even under the burdens and the difficulties of life in a world that is ruled by Satan for a limited time according to the will of God, even in this evil world of Babylon and Egypt. And yet, God said, the people of God should be living abundantly. And we have already seen that this doesn't mean without trial, without persecution, without problems to overcome or with which to deal. Yet, in orientation of mind and heart, we should have all the tools that we need to feel absolutely rewarded, enriched and fulfilled. And so, the question becomes, if we are not living abundantly—if we don't feel so enriched and so full and satisfied—then what is the cause of that? And the problem cannot be on the part of God. The answer must be within my control and your control as members of that Body, because we have been given the promises—He has offered them to us, He wants us to have them because He is a perfect and loving Father. So how are we going to get them? How are we going to have the fulness of those things—that abundant life God desires for us to enjoy?

I've given you the foundation. The foundational requirement is the Law of God—respecting the commandments, the statutes and the judgments He revealed—it is the blueprint for being able to get underway and to be able to give direction to our lives. You can't avoid the penalties, you can't avoid the curses, the obstacles, the

pitfalls of life, unless you have some sort of guide, and that's exactly what the Law of God is. The Law of God—as we have already seen—is not some hard, mandatory thing that God commanded just to make us squirm, to jump through hoops just to show Him that we will. The Law of God is not given as something negative to burden humankind—and I read you the text which says that "His commandments are not grievous." Well, by nature, they are grievous to human beings who oppose those principles. But when we come to really respect and value them, we find out that the Law really is a blessing because it helps us avoid the bad things—we avoid the curses, we avoid the problems, the heartache, the sorrow and the misery, when we abide within the structure of those guidelines. So it is a blessing and it is the foundation of all abundant living.

We saw, then, yesterday, that state of mind plays a huge part in abundant living and that the mind has an incredible effect upon the body. And so we read a lot of texts that show that God built into this system—this physical creation and the makeup of human beings (your physiology and mine)—the fact that your state of mind and your orientation and all these spiritual principles will absolutely govern whether you feel enriched and fulfilled, whether you have abundant life, or whether you do not. And so, when we are plagued with guilt, and when we are overwhelmed with fear and anxiety and trepidation, and when we are continually wearing our hearts on our sleeves and suffering offense, when we are allowing others to rob us of our peace of mind, we are in essence making ourselves victims and giving up the abundance that we should be able to enjoy.

Well, next, brethren, what is another key point in this model of abundant living that we want to cover? Having abundant life, brethren, also requires hard work and diligence. It requires effort on our parts to actually secure it. Now, I'm not saying we are actually going to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps—that we can do it on our own. No, we cannot. It is going to take the divine intervention of God—the miracle of His Holy Spirit—to help us. We can never be successful on our own against all of the challenges that we face. But just because God offers to help us, and to inspire, and to strengthen us, and to fight our battles for us, that does not mean we sit back in our lounge chairs and we watch the show and say, "Okay, God, you do all of the work and I will be the recipient of the blessings." It doesn't work that way. He requires us to expend an incredible amount of blood, sweat and tears in the process of achieving this abundant living. We cannot do it without Him, but He is not going to carry us through it. We are going to have to work hard; we are going to have to show diligence.

Discipline—self-discipline—generates abundance. Self-discipline—planning for the future, actually putting out a model for what you want to achieve and to accomplish, and then setting tasks, step by step, and working to bring it to fruition—generates abundance. Those are all based on spiritual principles and God requires us to do them. He doesn't want us just tripping through blindly and doing things on the fly. He wants us to have a plan and He wants us to work our plan with diligence, with purpose and with perseverance because that is the way He operates. Our God is a God who works, and if we are going to walk in the steps of Jesus Christ, then He also wants us to work—He wants us to be diligent and purposeful in all that we do.

So planning for the future has everything to do with what we call a "strong work ethic." That planning involves investing now—today—to get the payoff for the accomplishment of a goal that we won't see until much later. And so, even outside of God's church, human beings understand these things. It's actually common sense, isn't it? And you will find that most people of wisdom in the world—even human wisdom—recognize the value of hard work and diligence. So this should not seem strange in any way. There are a lot of books that have been written on it. "Experts" give seminars on how to organize, how to plan, and how to bring about your goals—how to accomplish those things that you set for yourself. And many of them have very fine principles. If there is any value in them, it's because they are rooted—whether those authors know it or not—in basic spiritual principles that God set in motion. They may not understand it in the context of religion at all. But they are rooted in strong spiritual principles. And what humanity has proven by its own efforts—even apart from God—is that hard work does pay off. The individual who applies himself with diligence and perseverance to overcome obstacles, will, then, reap a reward.

The thing we need to keep in mind—as I alluded to a couple of days ago—is that if our work is not centered upon God's Law as the foundation, then it's going to come to nothing and it's not going to be fulfilling or rewarding. So we have to be very, very careful and never elevate this idea of hard work for its own sake as being the solution to abundant life. Remember, I mentioned to you briefly, the example of Solomon. Well, let's go back and actually read an example from the book of Ecclesiastes chapter 2 of what Solomon said about the end result of all that he labored to achieve. Now, he was a very, very hard worker. He was very diligent. He persevered to accomplish all manner of great projects and

achievements in life. And what was the end result of his work? Let's see it here—Ecclesiastes chapter 2 and beginning in verse 4:

I made me great works [he said]; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. [Verse 9:] So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem.

This man accomplished an incredible amount physically—humanly—and it was because of the blessings of God. But he used those blessings that God gave to him—and to the nation of Israel at that time—and he amassed all kinds of great works that made him the most celebrated king, not only in Israel, but probably in all of the known world at that time. "So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem." Certainly, therefore, Solomon must have been one who had abundant life—who felt absolutely fulfilled, encouraged, satisfied, complete. Did he? Let's carry on. He said, "I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me." He was celebrated like no other human being at the time for his great and marvelous wisdom, which we know was a gift of God.

Verse 10: "And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them." He was in a position to have anything that he wanted. We are in the position, as human beings, of *wishing* that we had all that we wanted, aren't we? "Oh, if I only had this, if I only had that, I could be happy." Well, Solomon was in the position to have *anything* he desired. Anything he thought would satisfy him and make him full and complete, he could do it—and he did. He did everything he wanted—nothing was withheld from him. "Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy." And we think about that and we say, "Boy, if I could just be in the position of Solomon so that I could have anything I chose. Wouldn't I be absolutely fulfilled and satisfied. Wouldn't it be a marvelous existence." Was it for Solomon?

"I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour." You see, he didn't use his position as king and all of his wealth just to rest on his laurels and do nothing. He was a hard worker. He used that wealth to actually create great buildings and institutions, and he expanded his kingdom and his reach and his influence. He was not idle at all. He worked extremely hard and demonstrated what a human being with that kind of determination can achieve. "My heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour." His portion—that for which he could take credit, which he could put his name on and say, "I did this. I did that. I'm the one who brought this into being and these great things that men stand in awe of are there because it was my design, it was my vision, it was my planning, it was my execution, my labor, my blood, sweat and tears that brought it into being."

Verse 11: "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." Isn't that amazing? Isn't it absolutely phenomenal? A man who had everything—including the greatest wisdom ever given to a human being as a special gift—and all the resources at his disposal, and yet, for all of his work and his work ethic, all that he achieved was, in the final analysis, absolutely unsatisfying. It did not fill the void down deep in his soul. It left him cold and empty in the final analysis.

Skip down to verse 17. What took place after doing all that he thought would make him happy—how did it affect him in mind and heart? "Therefore, I hated life." And we look at it and say, "Solomon, you idiot. You had everything. You had no reason to hate life. If I could only have what you had, I would be ecstatic. I would feel fabulously blessed and fulfilled and complete." The problem is, brethren, if we think that—if we don't get rid of that idea—then we are not learning the lesson for which God recorded this book of Ecclesiastes, because He wants us to learn not to criticize Solomon and say, "Well, there was something wrong with him because he should have been happy." No, God wants us to say, "Hey, if this was true for Solomon, it certainly would, likewise, be true for me." And He wants us to learn the lesson that the mammon of this world and the works of our own labors are not, in and of themselves, going to make us happy—no matter how great and monumental the resources we have at our disposal.

"Therefore, I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me." Why grievous? They were worthwhile projects. It just left him empty. "For all is vanity"—emptiness, like a wind—you can't put your hands on it. It leaves you with nothing of substance. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me."

Do you know the old saying, "You can't take it with you"? You've heard that one. It's true, isn't it? Remember, I mentioned to you the other night, that there is the human idea—and you see it sometimes on bumper stickers and various things—that says, "The one who dies with the most toys wins." But do you really? Solomon had a lot of toys, but part of the knowledge and wisdom that God gave him was also that which caused him his greatest anxiety and vexation. Why? Because in wisdom he knew that it was not satisfying that hole inside of him. The pursuit of all of these things, materially, in the world, and even these fabulous projects—which were certainly not a violation of God's Law—left him cold and empty and could not fill that void, no matter how great and monumental were his works and his efforts. "I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me." He couldn't take it with him either and he knew it. "And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool?"—the man who follows him, who gets to enjoy all that Solomon built up. Somebody is going to take over after he dies. "Who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity [or emptiness]"—a worthless exercise that has no profit in the final analysis. Isn't it a miserable state? That's what Solomon experienced.

So, I couch the purpose of this morning's message—which has to do with a strong worth ethic and diligence—to let you know ahead of time that hard work and effort and perseverance, in and of themselves, are not sufficient to make you fulfilled and to feel abundantly blessed. Because, if your hard work and your efforts are not focused in the right direction with the right principles, you too will wind up just like Solomon did—having worked a lifetime. You can be incredibly industrious and apply yourself, and yet, if you are doing it in the wrong way, in a human carnal way, the end result of all of your efforts will leave you also empty and with vexation of spirit.

But now, is that the only end that can occur? Of course not. If God said His intention—the very mission of Jesus Christ—was that we might have life and that we might have it more abundantly, then if we follow the rules and we do it the right way, we should not end up feeling empty. We should have that hole filled. We should not be like Solomon. What's the difference, though? Working hard—in and of itself—is not enough. We must have a spiritual focus—that's really the lesson of the book of Ecclesiastes. Because, remember, I read you the text at the very end of the book when Solomon told us what the whole duty of man is. What is it? To obey God's commandments. It's not only the whole duty of man, it is the activity—the orientation of life—that will actually cause you to feel fulfilled. I know it's the hardest thing you will ever attempt to do. I understand why so many shy away from it. I understand why so many who come to value and appreciate those principles ultimately—very often—become discouraged and actually give up. It's because they find it incredibly difficult to be able to put into practice the things we learned. I understand that. We all experience that difficulty. But, brethren, it is worthwhile—it's worthwhile to keep fighting, no matter how many times we fall down. And it's one of the things God told us to do, is it not? Jesus Christ said that we have to work without fainting. Those who endure to the end and faint not are the ones who will make it. That's one of the requirements for salvation. Being able to work hard is critical, but we have to be able to work hard on the right path, with the right focus and the right goal—the right action plan that we pursue. If it's just some physical thing, we are going to end up like Solomon. At the end of the day we're going to be empty. However, if we use that energy and that dedication and that focus toward a proper goal—one that is spiritual—then we are going to find our efforts incredibly satisfying. It's going to be worthwhile.

God is the source of all true abundance. We can never achieve that on our own. So I am not espousing pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Notice Leviticus 20 and verse 24. Leviticus chapter 20 and verse 24: "But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it." Now, were the Israelites just going to go in and by their own power and strength and might and ability just kick the Canaanites out of that land? Were they going to take possession of it because they were capable on their own? That is not why they inherited the land which became known as Israel. It was because God gave it to them. They could not have achieved that without His divine intervention. "I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people."

God also said it wasn't because Israel was a greater and more deserving people that He made a special covenant with them, because they were actually the least of all people. So they did not become the people of promise because they were more worthy at all—even as you and I are not members of the true Church of God because we are more worthy than anyone else in the world. That's not the case. God chose us in spite of our weaknesses and our unworthiness—which means we have that much more reason to be thankful and appreciative for His mercy in calling us.

Matthew 7 and verse 7—a text that I read to you a couple of days ago. Matthew 7 and verse 7: "Ask, and it shall be given you." Who is the real source of wealth? It is not us that generates it. It is a gift from God.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

So Christ uses even human love—natural love, apart from the influence of God's Holy Spirit—as an example. And we understand that, don't we? Isn't it very natural in the world for fathers and mothers to love their children and do anything they can to help them, to benefit them, and to sacrifice for them? Sure it is. You don't have to have a spiritual orientation to have those feelings. God actually built that into the natural carnal mind. But that's not godly love. That's natural human love. But Christ is saying, if that's true even of human beings who are cut off from God, how much more is God—who is the definition of love—going to want to give to His children?

Verse 11, "If ye then, being evil [that means separated from God, without a righteous orientation at all], know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" So He is a loving, merciful, benevolent Father and He wants you and me to be blessed and fulfilled—He wants us to have abundant life.

So we have to work hard, but never forget, brethren, that while I'm advocating hard work and effort in this message today, don't ever make the mistake of thinking you are going to do it all on your own, because, remember, it always goes back to the gift and the intervention of God which makes it possible for you to succeed and to thrive.

Philippians 4:19 says, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." He is the source of all of those good things—even as He was the source of the wealth that Solomon had. Solomon could not have achieved all that he did—even physically—on his own if God had not poured out His blessings. Why was he blessed? Because He was honoring Solomon's father David who had been faithful. So Solomon was actually the recipient of all this great wealth—the mammon of this world, a kingdom—not because of his own worth but because of his father who was the one who really showed faithful obedience to God. So Solomon had it all given to him on a silver platter and yet, just with the physical gift of all that mammon—the physical, material things—Solomon still couldn't make himself happy. Even though he was an extremely hard worker—he may have even been a type "A," workaholic type of personality—he still couldn't be happy, really fulfilled.

So God is the source of it. But even though you are the covenant people who have been called out and given access to the greatest benefits of all on this earth at this time, you are just the forerunners; you are not the only ones who are ever going to receive it. The rest of the world is going to have their chance at the return of Christ. And then there will be that great second resurrection that we will talk about on the Last Great Day when all of those who have lived and died without that special relationship with God are going to receive the same things that you have today. But right now you are the only ones who have been singled out to be given this special relationship, so you have it all at your feet right now—the opportunity for abundance. But is God going to give it to you on a silver platter? Are you going to be able to just coast downstream and take your leisure and enjoy all of these bountiful things with no effort? No way. God is going to make you and me work incredibly hard if we are going to have abundant life. God does not do it all for us. We must be willing to be diligent and to work hard.

Notice 2 Thessalonians 3 and verse 10. 2 Thessalonians 3 and verse 10: "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." So this is a spiritual principle. "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." What happens to individuals who are not occupied with something worthwhile to do—work of some purposeful, significant kind? They get into all kinds of trouble. What's the old saying? Idleness is the Devil's workshop, or something like that. It really is true. It's based on a spiritual principle that comes right out of the Bible. So God wants us to be workers. He wants us to be occupied with things of value. Does that mean now that you have to do hard physical labor all your life? Well, no. There are occupations of mind as well as of body. But God wants us to be constructively engaged in purposeful, active work. "[I]f any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." Here is a fundamental spiritual principle that God had recorded that says He intends for us each to work and to reap the fruits of our own work. In the Millennial reign of Jesus Christ, which we are celebrating in this seven-day Feast, that is how it's going to work. We are not going to have the kind of corporate, socialist, economic environment in which human governments—under the sway of Satan—convince us that the ideal paradise is for the state to take care of us from cradle to grave. As economic slaves, all of our labor goes into feeding the state, and then the state provides for all of our needs. God never intended that. It's an absolute perversion. You can automatically assume that whatever you see in the institutions of human beings in this world under Satan the Devil is absolutely, totally, one-hundred-and-eighty-degrees wrong because Satan is always going to twist and pervert what God intends. So if you want to know what God intends, look at what's in the world now and do the opposite. And that's what the Millennium is going to be like—the opposite of what we have today. It's not going to be the society of Babylon that we've all grown up in—with the principles of Egypt.

And so the simple principle that is going to rule in the physical kingdom of human beings—ruled by the God Family during that thousand-year period of time—is going to be that families are going to work. We are going to go back to an agrarian society. Now, there will be other occupations—you always need a full range of economic specialties and skills. Everyone can't be a farmer or else where

are you going to get your farm implements. Somebody has to be able to provide tools and all kinds of other skills and crafts. But, fundamentally, it's going to go back to the idea of family farms where families are self-sufficient. You don't depend upon the state or the government to take care of you, and you are certainly not held hostage. You are independent. You stand on your own two feet. And guess what? If you work and apply yourself, and you are obeying God's laws, He is going to bless you with the increase so that your work pays off and you are able to feed your family—you are able to have the things that you need to take care of yourself. You will, then, receive the fruit of your labor and you won't have ninety percent of it taken away in taxes.

But if that is true—if that's the new system that God is going to bring in under the reign of Jesus Christ—what else is true? What about the one who is too lazy to work? There is going to be no welfare program. Oh, there is going to be help for the poor and needy because, as God said, they are always with us. There are always those who fall into difficult circumstances and need a helping hand. That's what the third tithe is for. And so there is an institution within Israel which will be propagated in the world, during the Millennium, to take care of those who are down and out—who need a helping hand up. But its purpose is to get them established so that they can take care of themselves—not so that they can live off of the work and the effort of others. There is going to be no place for laziness—for couch potatoes—in the Kingdom of God. He's going to want everyone to work, and those who don't work—even as it says here—are not going to eat. ". . . that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." That's the way it is going to be.

By contrast, what do we have today? Not only are we more socialistic than ever before and moving in greater and greater measure toward removing any autonomy or the possibility of independence from families in this world, we are being made slaves so that we cannot eat our own bread. We are having our bread taken away from us and then parceled out to us as someone else decides. Not only that, brethren, but the morals of our societies have broken down and we have gone very far away from accepted Biblical principles of moral living. We are not teaching our children to be industrious—to work hard—in this world today. And I can understand to some extent how it happens. There is an orientation with certain parents who did work hard and had to dig themselves out of economic trial and ultimately achieve success. And what's the tendency? It is for a parent to say, "I

don't want my children to have to suffer the way that I did." It's in love but it's unwise. And so what do they do? They make the mistake of lavishing so much upon their children that they fail to teach their children to work and to scrap and to take care of themselves. So their children don't learn the same work ethic that they themselves had to employ. And you end up with a lot of lazy young adults who aren't willing to put out any kind of effort whatsoever to take care of themselves.

Now, I also understand that because of the Babylon that we live in, the state makes it harder than ever for young people to become independent. There are many young people who would, and are working hard, but the whole system is so much against them that they can't even get their own stake in life—to buy their own home, to have a piece of property that they can afford, to be able to work and support themselves. And so, more and more, you find children having still to depend upon their parents. They can't go out like God intended and work for and have their own separate, independent estates. Families are having to live like they do in third-world countries where you have three or four families under one roof, collectively, with multiple ones working just to make ends meet. That's not the way God intended it to be. So I understand all of these different factors are at play. But, fundamentally, brethren, the one that we are focusing upon for the purpose of this message is the work ethic. What's in your mind and mine concerning the diligence that God requires us to exercise?

The best thing you can do as parents is to teach your children to work hard. Don't let them develop habits of laziness—of taking advantage of the work of others—with a feeling that others are obligated to support them. And my boys laugh because I tell them repeatedly, "Your job right now is to get your education. You work hard and do the best that you can." The ultimate grade that they are able to achieve is not the important thing, but the fact that they are doing their very best with the gifts that God has given them so that they can achieve. Because learning the work ethic involves not just going out and having a paying job but even the schooling and education itself, you see, because you are learning to practice those same values that are going to help you in life later on in whatever you do. The day is going to come when they are going to be working and earning a living. And I tell them, "My goal is for you to have a strong enough education so that you can go out and get a good job and make enough money to support me in my old age" [laughs]. So they hear that all the time.

In this world, in the decades to come, who knows what the future is going to bring between now and the return of Jesus Christ? We have no way of knowing what kind of new obstacles and threats will present themselves. We know it's going to continue to get worse and worse, but all we can do is work on the things we are in control of— isn't that true? And what we are in control of—every single one of us—is our own level of self-discipline and perseverance. You may have everything else in this world against you, but that's no excuse for not doing your best and applying these spiritual principles in order to accomplish everything possible. And I can tell you, brethren, if you are putting first things first—if you are doing what I have already talked to you about—putting God's Law first in your life, then guess what? I don't care how many things are against you in this Egyptian and Babylonian society, God will make the miracles to open doors for you. Don't look out there and say, "It's impossible to get ahead. The whole society is stacked against me being able to achieve anything of significance." And, therefore, you don't even try—you just throw up your hands and you let somebody take care of you. No. You put God first, you follow these principles and you work and you scrap and you do your level best to prepare yourself, and God will open the doors and He will provide what you need. Now, I'm not saying He will provide everything you want. Remember, we are not talking about a goal of achieving great wealth like Solomon did in the world. It's empty, it's worthless in the end, if that is your goal. But it is worthwhile and an appropriate goal to try and position yourself to be able to take care of a family and to fulfill those obligations which God said are noble, good and just. Depend upon Him who gives all—He is the source of all of that wealth and all of those blessings. Never forget that. Ask Him for the things you need, but then you are going to have to work like crazy to bring it about. If you are doing that, it's going to seem as if you generated it. You are going to have to work so hard that it will seem as if you are doing it, but the reality is that God is there with you, opening the doors and helping you achieve it. You are in partnership with God in achieving anything of value—physically or spiritually.

Proverbs 6 and verse 6—supporting my commentary on the laziness of the younger generation because of those parents who are trying to save their children from the kind of difficulties that they had. And many times they are not doing their children any favors, because they are not teaching them to work hard. Proverbs 6 and verse 6:

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.

There is probably no more dynamic, energetic, busy, working creature than the little ant. And so God used that created little creature as an example for us so that we can understand what it means to work hard.

"How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." "Ohhh, just five more minutes. Oh, just hit the snooze button [laughs]. I just can't get myself up this morning." I had a friend like that I knew a few years ago and his parents allowed him to get away with that kind of behavior all the time he was a teenager. He never learned the self-discipline to get himself up in the morning. And guess what? Ultimately he was out of high school and had to work for a living. And do you know how many jobs he lost because he simply couldn't get out of bed? He couldn't make it to work on time because he had never learned the capacity to regiment himself according to a schedule.

I never thought about it at the time but, boy, my dad would never let me get away with that. I had to get up in the morning and it was just expected. There was no question. My dad wouldn't even come in and wake me up. My mom was nice and soft, "Honey it's time to wake up" [laughs]. Dad would open my bedroom door and start talking: "Okay, here's what we're going to do today. I need you to get up and first do this and then do this and then do that." I learned so that as soon as I heard my father's voice I was awake. Sometimes I was standing on the floor next to the bed before I was even awake [laughs]. But I was conditioned to respond and to get myself moving, and I appreciate the efforts of my parents.

How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

If we allow ourselves to fall into these habits of weakness and we just can't motivate ourselves to work, to be disciplined, then it says our end result is going to be as if we were a victim of armed robbery—highway robbery. Traveling bands

of marauders who make victims of us and rob us of our substance. That's the imagery God uses to describe the end result of a lazy individual.

Proverbs 13 and verse 4. Proverbs 13, verse 4: "The soul of the sluggard desireth . . ." Oh, how many lazy people have great plans and dreams and aspirations for good things. They are not without ideas. They can just never make them happen. Ever known anyone like that? "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing"—the individual that day after day, year after year, in spite of all of his grand plans, never seems to improve himself. He's always in the same spot. "The sluggard desires, and has nothing, but the soul of the diligent," by contrast, "shall be made fat." That doesn't mean we will be made obese. We'll be made full—content, satisfied. It's a spiritual principle that God wrote into the fabric of our existence upon this earth.

Proverbs 26, verse 13. Proverbs 26, verse 13: "The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way." And I always think of Mr. Jean Aviolat when I read this text because he quoted this during one of my visits during Pentecost a couple of years ago—and I've related this story to a number of you. But when I go there, I try and make myself useful. I don't like to just go and stay with brethren and then kind of be idle if there is something I can do to help out. And he has a few farm animals and some things to do, and so in the past I've actually helped him bring in some hay or some work on his property. And so a couple of years ago I arrived for a visit and I said, "What do we need to do? I'm ready to go." And he jokingly said, "No, today there's a lion in the way [laughs]. So today we rest." So this is what he was quoting: "The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way"—meaning there is a lion blocking the road. "I want to go. There is work I need to get done, but I can't. It's not within my power." "There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets." So he says, "I have no choice but to sit at home behind my closed doors and take my ease. It's out of my power to do anything else. It's not my fault." "There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. As the door turneth upon his hinges . . ." You know how that works, don't you? A door swings left and right, open, closed. "As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed." The alarm clock goes off and you turn over and you hit snooze and then roll back over on this side. And then a little while later you roll back over on the other side—back and forth. That's the image that God is giving here of the lazy individual. "So doth the slothful upon his bed."

Drop down to verse 16: "The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason." It doesn't mean that certain lazy individuals are not very smart and don't have a lot of ability and capacity. The problem comes in when they use it to make excuses for not having achieved anything. "The sluggard is wiser in his own conceits . . ." He can come up with a *million* excuses for why he can't do anything but what he's been doing—he can't achieve anything more than what he's done to date. Very persuasive—all kinds of things that make you say, "Well, yes, that makes sense." But the end result—when you put all of the excuses and explanations and reasons aside—is that he doesn't accomplish anything. Zero results for his existence. "The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason." I can think of individuals I have known since my youth who fit this bill. They are very smart, and they can tell you how to make *your* life successful. They can give you all kinds of explanations for what you should be doing and how you can achieve more. And one day you wake up and say, "Now, wait a minute. What about you?" They don't do anything except dispense advice to other people. It's amazing how God captured all of these principles in His Holy Scripture. There they are, and human beings have repeated them, generation after generation over the last six thousand years, as part of human carnality.

Now, there are those on the opposite extreme, which are the workaholics—and that's just as dangerous, because God intends us to be balanced. And so somebody who thinks that they are setting such a marvelous example because they work twenty hours a day to the neglect of other responsibilities—including their families—are also breaking cardinal principles. And some of you by nature are going to have that workaholic tendency rather than the lazy tendency. Whatever your tendency is toward an extreme which violates balance and prudence, you need to come back to what God says is the right path—the right orientation in keeping everything in the proper balance. You work hard, you are diligent, but you make sure you are looking at all your priorities—including your personal time, important time, with your family and your loved ones—and you manage them. That is part of the plan—that's part of an overall vision for how you are going to have abundant life. Because what good is it for you to expend all of your time in a career where you just sell your soul to some company or some employer and you give them all of your blood, sweat and tears at the expense of your family and your personal obligations? And what do you have at the end except money? You have forsaken all of the good things in

life. That's not abundant living either. So it all has to be done with proper balance.

The next point: What is the primary work? We're supposed to work hard but what is the primary work that we are supposed to do to achieve and to enjoy abundant living? Well, John 6 verse 28 tells us. John 6, verses 28 and 29: "Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Here are these industrious individuals, now; they are so motivated. And they come running up to Christ and say, "We are willing to work for you. We accept you as a prophet of God"— I doubt they accepted Him as the Son of God in the flesh. But they said, "We *know* you are doing the work of God and we want to be your helpers. We are motivated, we are energetic. Tell us what to do," they said. "What shall we do that we might work the works of God? Should we go out and do some big radio program or pass out leaflets—spread the gospel? What can we do?" They had their own ideas, unfortunately, about what they thought that work should be, and they didn't quite like Christ's response. Because He said simply, verse 29: "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Now, they were way beyond that. They were up to the point of saying, "Give us an assignment." They wanted to do something explosive—monumental—that made an impact upon the world. "What do we do? Let's do the Work." And Christ basically said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, back up. Your first responsibility—the most important responsibility in doing the work of God is to 'believe on him whom he hath sent.'" Who was this Christ that we are supposed to believe? The personification of the Ten Commandments. He was the Word made flesh—which means that Christ was literally saying, "Get back to the foundation of the Law of God"—even as I have been telling you throughout this Feast. "You center all of your activity—first, foremost and primarily—upon obeying God's Law. Don't allow yourself to be distracted and to get off on some tangent which is a violation of the Law in which, just because you are working hard, you think you are accomplishing something."

The point is, brethren, we have to learn to work smart, not just hard. Have you ever heard that? That's one of those corporate buzzwords, and I like to avoid those because I had to deal with them for so many years. But there is some truth in that one. I used to have people who worked for me in the offices that I managed, and they loved looking busy. And some people are really, really good at looking busy. Some people don't just look busy, they are busy. The problem is,

they don't accomplish things that are worthwhile. The company defines the job they need that person to do to help the company be successful, and they find all kinds of busy-work to do other than the primary task. And so, at the end of the day, the company suffers because they are not putting first things first. And, yet, they were very busy all day. The problem is they were working on the wrong things. Yet, they want to be rewarded because, "Oh, I put in such a hard day. I did so much." Yes, but you were spinning your wheels. You were working on the wrong stuff. Work on the right stuff—first things first. Work smart, not just hard. It means, brethren, developing real faith in the revelation of Jesus Christ which we call the "faith once delivered." And it doesn't matter if you are all fired up spiritually; you want to fulfill God's will; you want to ride elephants and shoot tigers and do all of these great things in the name of God; but if you are forsaking the fundamental commands of God that He told us to do, you will not achieve anything of value. You will find yourself just as empty as can be at the end of the exercise.

You have to start with the foundation of the simple commands of God. Remember what happened to the Israelites when they went off to war and God hadn't told them to go? They were motivated—they were all psyched up for it. They would rush into the battle and get slaughtered. "What happened?" That wasn't one God authorized. You forgot to pay attention to what God said. Now when God told them to go and to fight, it was a different result, wasn't it? Then they couldn't lose. Then they had everything and more that they needed—their energy, their diligence and their work ethic—and they prevailed against the enemy, no matter how great they were. But it first had to be the work that God ordained. And if it's not the work that God ordained, you can work as hard as you want—twenty-four hours a day—and it will fail.

So you have to work smart, not just hard. Pick the right goal—and that is always according to the foundation of what God said is right and what God said is wrong. Luke 13 and verse 23. Luke 13:23: "Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate." God says it is not going to be a cakewalk into the Kingdom. You have to put your hand to the plow and you have to be ready for some tough, uphill work. And I understand why people shy away from it. Because it is an obligation that requires discipline—to overcome the carnal mind. It's the hardest thing that you and I will ever do. "Strive"—and that's the word which, in the Greek, means to

labor fervently—it means to endeavor; it means you are going to have to put out some effort. It's not going to be easy. Endeavor—labor fervently—"to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in . . ." Oh, there are a lot of people who see the value of that Kingdom—that Millennial reign of Christ—from afar and say, "Oh, yes, isn't that marvelous? Isn't it going to be great when Christ returns and we have a paradise on this earth ruled by God? We are no longer going to be underneath the weight of the rule of Satan. No more human governments to take advantage and to abuse us. Oh, it's going to be so wonderful." But they are not willing to put in the effort to prepare themselves to have a part in it. They agree with God. They like the goal. They like what this Feast represents for the future of humanity, but they just can't get themselves stirred up enough to do the work right now so that they can have a share of that Kingdom in the First Resurrection—that's the sad part. It's just like that lazy individual who has all kinds of good intentions—oh, he has great desires and a vision for what he is going to accomplish, but he just can't seem to get around to it. "I just can't get myself out of bed." "Strive"—work hard, labor—"to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." They won't have the self-discipline to do it.

2 Timothy 2 and verse 4. Second Timothy 2 and verse 4: "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life . . ." Meaning, if you are one who has been called to be a soldier for God, which just means you have been called out of this world to be a true Christian and to walk in His footsteps, then you stop going after the goals of humanity in this world, which is the pursuit of human, carnal lusts—the mammon of this world. You change your orientation and now a whole set of spiritual guidelines—purposes—become important to you. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." What good is it to be a trained, fighting individual—a soldier—with the capacity to fight and succeed against enemies, if you won't take instructions from the general, your platoon leader, or the individual who gives the orders and determines what the purpose of the battle is, where it's to be fought and how? What good is it to be a trained, fighting instrument if you decide on your own to go off and use your skills in one direction, when the army is supposed to be somewhere else? What good is it? You can work as hard as you want, but if you will not mold yourself in order to be teachable and to do it the way God says, your efforts are worthless. "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who

hath chosen him to be a soldier." If you are going to be a soldier, you have to learn how to take instructions and orders.

"And if a man also strive for masteries . . . " There is another word translated as "strive" and it means to contend in a competitive game. It means you are competing. "And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully." So what good is it to be a great athlete and be involved, for example, in the Olympic games, if you break the rules and get disqualified? How many athletes today are in the news for doing that very thing—with steroids and all kinds of performance-enhancing drugs? Oh, they are very accomplished athletes. The problem is, they break the rules. They might appear to achieve something of value, and then they have it stripped away because it is discovered that they cheated. So what was their labor and effort, and all that they put into it with years and years of training? They didn't strive lawfully. They didn't follow the rules—the basic foundation, the blueprint which was required—and so in spite of all their hard work, and their diligence, and their effort, they still lost. So it is for a true Christian, brethren. It requires that we follow the rules—the ones I keep pointing you back to. And I'm sorry for being repetitive, but I hope we all get it: It's the Law of God—the Ten Commandments, the statutes, the judgements, the blueprint that God gave. It is the owner's manual for how to have success and how to avoid the penalties and the curses; how to have the brass ring; how to live an abundant life. Start with obedience to the Laws, and don't think there are any shortcuts. There is no way to get around those rules. There is no way to cheat and end up with the desired goal at the end while failing to follow the path that God said is required to get there. You will not find a shortcut. It's going to take hard work to walk the path and do what God says.

Those who cannot discipline themselves to make those necessary changes in life will not be there. It's all about self-crucifixion. Remember, we talked about that earlier as well—that old man that we were supposed to have buried in baptism. And we say we don't want to live according to the natural dictates of a mind which we know is defective—that's always going to lead us astray. It feels so right—it's so natural—and, "Oh, it comes to my mind, so it must be good." And we come to recognize that, no, it's not; we have a faulty instrument. It's like having a compass that points in the wrong direction. It's an instrument; it has a needle; it certainly does move, but if you follow it, you end up in the wrong place. And you and I must come to accept the fact, sooner or later, that we have a faulty

compass in our heads. God gave it to us because He wants us to learn to overcome it: "Stop trusting the faulty compass. Figure out it's faulty and use instead the one I am offering you—which is spiritual. You don't have it, in and of yourselves. You have to get it from me. And if you follow it—even though it doesn't come naturally and it doesn't seem right to you by nature, but you come to say, "Yes, it is right" and you begin to walk forward and follow it—you will end up in the right place. That's what it is all about. That's what self-crucifixion really is—it boils down to the fact that you stop trusting what comes to you, in your own gut, and you simply say, "Yes, Lord," and ask for the power that it takes to step out and do the things that He requires, which do not come easy for you and me.

Those who cannot discipline themselves to make those necessary changes—to crucify self—will never have real abundance. It will be an elusive goal. They will want it—they'll desire it like all human beings do—and they will never achieve it, even as Solomon never achieved it without the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. James 1 and verse 21. James 1 and verse 21: "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness . . ." That means iniquity—a violation of God's Law—the same thing we've been talking about. "Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." What is the engrafted word? The commandments, the statutes and the judgements. It's the same thing.

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." He's saying it doesn't get you anything if you just come to accept and believe that the laws of God are good. It takes God's call in order for you to be able to accept even that—to know that they are valuable and they have purpose and meaning. But it's not just enough to come to agree with the Law of God and say, "Yes. You know what? I've come to accept that it's important to keep the Sabbath—it hasn't been done away like the Catholics and the Protestants believe—and that the annual Holy Days that God commanded to ancient Israel still apply to New Testament Christians. I believe that is true. So I believe that we should come and keep the Feast of Tabernacles. But, you know what? I have a lot of things back home—really pressing issues—you know, and I just can't make it this year. Hopefully, next year I can come." That's an example of someone who is a believer of the Word but not a doer of the Word. And we all have those challenges in different aspects of our lives in actually putting into practice the things God has commanded. We all struggle with it.

Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself . . .

Oh, he looks in the mirror and says, "Man, I have to do something about that. I'm not in good shape. I have some serious problems. I need to change my habits here. I need to get into better physical condition. But, you know what? I'll turn away from the mirror and go about my business and put that out of my mind, and go back to doing the same things I've been doing which continue to keep me in bad shape."

"[H]e is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." He sees his defects according to God's Law—he recognizes that when he compares himself to the standard of Jesus Christ he falls far short, but then he shrugs it off and doesn't do anything about it.

Verse 25, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty [those same commands], and continueth therein . . ." That means they actually put out some effort to do it—to practice what they believe is right—and make the necessary changes in their behavior to actually begin to conform to what God says is necessary. And that takes work; it takes sacrifice; it takes effort—you are going to have to work up a spiritual sweat in order to stop doing what comes naturally and what has become habit to you in your life, and actually begin to change and do it the way God requires. "[W]hoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein [he is a doer], he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." What does it mean to be blessed in your deed? You experience abundance—you get the end result of that which Jesus Christ said He came to provide. What is that? The base text for this series in John 10:10: "I came that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." That is the key.

"If any man among you seem to be religious . . ." And, oh, there are a lot of those—a lot of individuals who use the name of Jesus Christ and they make all kinds of efforts to do religious stuff. Does that mean that God favors them? No. "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridled not his tongue, but

deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." So, there is a way to tell—here are some fruits that are evident. And an individual who claims to be a Christian but has the particular weakness and proclivity to talk about people behind their backs, that's not the manifestation of Christ, and I don't care what they do otherwise that seems so magnanimous. Well, that's just one weakness. That's a key one because as James said, the man who can control his tongue is a perfect individual. That's the hardest thing for a human being to do. The tongue is a reflection of the defect of the mind which you and I both have. And so none of us, in this flesh, successfully control our tongues. But if we recognize that and we are warring against it—we're not giving vent to it and we are asking God for forgiveness and the power of His Spirit to help us get better—there should be improvement there. There should be a track record of overcoming which is a manifestation of our work ethic and our diligence.

Verse 27, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." That means, instead of going and doing things the world accepts, we are actually looking to the Law of God and we are saying, "This is what I am going to do instead." That is the individual whose religion is not in vain. That's the one who makes it more than a pretense—"I hope to one day. I agree with it, but I just can't get myself to do it yet." That takes it out of the category of vain religion and we actually become doers—hard workers that manifest fruits.

There are some employers for which putting on a grand show gets you a good review, and you keep your job and you might even get a raise. I came into operations like that where I inherited a bunch of employees who—as I told you before—were used to being able to appear busy, and their bosses said, "Oh, isn't that marvelous." But the only reason I was sent in to take over operations like that was because the office was not performing well; the service to the customers was lousy; it was way too expensive; and my superiors wanted it fixed. And so I had the nice task of going in and trying to diagnose what was wrong. And very often I would find a lot of busy, busy people, but the things they were working on were not getting the results in order to make the company successful. And they had former bosses and managers that kept giving them these glowing reviews just because they worked so hard. The problem was, they were obviously working hard on the wrong things, and so the company was failing. We have to learn to follow the rules and to achieve the right ends for our labors, and then be very, very diligent to make it come to pass.

1 Corinthians 9:24. 1 Corinthians 9 and verse 24: "Know ye not that they which run in a race . . ." Here Paul uses the example of a race—a contest. "They which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?" So that's the way it is. They all line up on the starting blocks and they run, but only one gets first place. "So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." The individual who is able to win—even in a human race—is the one who is better prepared and disciplined. Isn't that the case? You can decide you want to be a runner. You can have the goal and the intention, but if you don't train, it's the idea that, "Well, I'm sure on race day that I will be able to put out the effort to make a good showing." But you are not willing to do the hard work, day in and day out, to train and to prepare your body and your mind to be successful. The individual who wins the race, Paul is saying, is the one who strives—puts in the work of preparation so that when race day comes, he or she is in top-flight condition. "Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." That means he is dedicated—he follows through and keeps first things first in order to achieve that particular goal.

"Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown"—meaning what value is it, in the final analysis, to be a great athlete and to be able to run faster than anyone else, or to be able to pole-vault the highest? You get some acclaim for the short term. But how many Olympic athletes are remembered for very long? Some of the great ones. Not too many in this country. Other countries seem to value and celebrate their Olympic athletes a lot longer. In the United States, Americans watch it just for that two-week period and then we forget who they are. How long does the glory last? They have a few endorsements and make a little bit of money for a short period of time and then they are forgotten. And in the final analysis, what good is it? It's a corruptible crown. It took an incredible amount of diligence and effort to achieve it, but it was just like Solomon: In the end, it wasn't really all that satisfying and it left him empty and cold. Yet, Paul uses it as an example of the kind of orientation of mind we must also have as Christians in order to achieve a worthwhile goal.

"Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown [something that's not really worthwhile]; but we an incorruptible." The race we are in, brethren, is for eternity in the God Family. And the good thing about that is that there is not just one winner. It's not like all of these individuals are going to train and prepare and only one person gets the prize, because there are thousands and millions of offices in

the Family of God that He is seeking to fulfill, which means that you are not really running against the person next to you in this congregation. You are running against yourself to be an overcomer—to make progress; to achieve more; based upon where you are. And God starts us all out with different levels of ability and in different physical circumstances in life. Which is why He said, "Don't try and compare yourself to someone else. Don't judge your neighbor. That's not what is going to get you into the Kingdom. It's being an overcomer." Based upon where God started you with the talents, the abilities and the gifts He gave you, you have to show effort to improve and to put on more and more of the mind of Jesus Christ. So, there is not just a single winner in that race.

Verse 26, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." That means he is using discipline to train in spiritual things, so that he can be one of those who will hear those words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into life." Paul says, "lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." We recognize that the Apostle Paul was a faithful servant of God and he accomplished very much in his ministry with the help of Jesus Christ, but, you see, one of the things Paul always continued to have was a fear—a healthy recognition and fear of his own physical failings. This is one of my favorite texts in the Bible. I may actually frame this one at some point and put it in my office. I like to remember this, because here I am standing before you, preaching to you about all of the things that we need to do. But don't assume that because I am laying out the principles that I have the tiger by the tail, or that I have mastered it myself. I have not. I'm just as much in jeopardy as you are if I don't hustle and apply these things. And I myself have a long way to go in my own life. I guarantee you that. Which is why I keep this in mind. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." That means it's a daily struggle, brethren, to keep fighting against the natural carnal mind and to learn to replace it with the discipline of the mind of Christ. "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest . . ." What happens if I don't do it—just as Paul was afraid? "Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." What an absolute abomination would it be for me to stand up here for all of these years and to tell you what it takes to get into the Kingdom, and I myself were not willing or able to muster the gumption to do it myself, and I become the one who is left out? Paul had a healthy fear of that possible outcome. So do I. I don't want to be one who tells you and then fails to put it into practice in my own life. But it could happen if I am not very careful.

Those, brethren, who receive the real abundance—both physically and spiritually—will be the ones who work aggressively to achieve the right goals. They will pick the right plan of action toward success based upon the Truth of God and His Commandments and then work aggressively to achieve those goals. The ultimate abundance in store for you and for me will be Sonship in the very Family of God where you will have the opportunity to rule with Jesus Christ in that thousand-year reign which we are picturing in this Feast of Tabernacles.