**Work**

In the judgment on Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, God told them that labor would be in their future. For Eve it was pain and labor in bearing children. What God actually said to Eve was that he would “greatly multiply pain in conception.” This has to do with all the problems women share every month—bleeding, bloating and pain, as well as birthing pain. To Adam God said, using the exact same word in Hebrew, translated “painful labor,” that Adam would have to make his living by the sweat of his face. The ground was cursed, so that thorns and thistles come up. The serpent was also cursed, but Adam and Eve were not cursed; they were punished.

But what most people don’t realize is that there was “work” before Adam and Eve sinned. God said that Adam was to “dress the garden, and work in it.” (Genesis 2:15) Apparently, the work before they sinned was not difficult or painful, but relaxing and useful to help pass the time.

According to Ecclesiastes and other scriptures, work is good. It helps us have good nights of sleep. It keeps us from being useless or bored. We work to provide for ourselves and for our families. We work to learn responsibility. We work to have something to provide for others in need. The Apostle Paul wrote, quoting the Jewish teachers, “He who does not work must not eat.” So work is good. But the painful parts of work exist in every job. I’m a teacher, and I love the classroom, but I hate grading papers. Most of the time that is painful drudgery to me, but occasionally I will read a paper that is well-written and exciting. And sometimes, even after 43 years of teaching, I’ll learn something new from a student. That is a wonderful experience.

I have done all kinds of work, beginning at age five, helping my older brother carry a paper route. I did that job for 10 years. Later in college I did it again, driving 80 miles a day, six days a week. Then I’ve worked in a library, I’ve unloaded boxcars and trucks of everything from powdered clay (50-100 lbs. per bag) to small, 50 lb. blocks of lead. This was a job that it took me weeks to get used to. I was tired all the time. It was hot and painful work. We ate salt pills and drank lots of water. We were paid by the ton, so the faster and harder we worked, the more money we made. We had to wear activated charcoal masks to protect us from the dust and fumes. We used to say that if anyone enjoyed that work, they would also enjoy hell. I worked in a clothing store, as a teacher and pastor, and many other jobs.

Every job had parts that I hated. But the worst job beyond measure was the job unloading boxcars and trucks in the heat of summer.

But most jobs have brief spots of incredible joy, too. The feeling at the end of a school year of a job completed. The feeling when dealing with people when someone has a quantum leap of faith or understanding. And of course, a paycheck is a joy.

The best kind of work is helping people. In fact, this is the Biblical definition of *agape* love. It may not be joyous when we do the work for others, but upon completion of the work, we always feel joy and satisfaction. This is what we are here on earth for—to help others. May God use us to do this work for others with commitment and joy.