

Some B.A.S.I.C.S for Life: Industriousness — Dr. Todd J. Williams

Well, good morning. Good to be with you on this Friday morning for the chapel program. As was said, we do welcome our guests, and I'm looking forward to this installment in this series. As we end this week, as Dean Gordon said, we trust that the weekend will be restful for you. I trust that you had a good break and are ready to finish the second half of this semester. And I'd like it if we would open in prayer, and then we'll turn our attention to this passage of scripture and this installment of the semester series. Would you please join me in prayer?

Our great God and Father, we do thank you for this day that you have given us. We do indeed thank you for all the days that you give us. We thank you for your goodness and for your loving kindness, for your mercies, which are new every morning. We thank you and praise you for your faithfulness to all generations, and we worship you for your creative power, for your holy authority, for the work that you do in this world, in your people, down through the ages, from the very beginning of all creation. Father, we thank you for the privileges and opportunities that we enjoy, for the blessings, for the things that bring us joy and make us happy. We give you thanks for all these things. We thank you for the blessing of being in this community, to be together, to have the privilege to study, to earn our degrees and diplomas, to be a part of a community where your son and your word are at the center of all we do. We pray for one another, for all the members of this community, for the students who study here and the faculty and staff members who serve, for our alumni, for our supporters, for the trustees. We pray that you would make us a blessing and encouragement to one another. And for those in our ranks that are feeling under the weather, ill, weak, we pray for grace and strength, that as their days, so may their strength be, that you would cause them to bear up under these trials in a way that testifies to your sustaining power. We pray for those that are feeling overwhelmed and burdened by their responsibilities, that you would grant them grace to think clearly, calmness of heart and clarity of mind to set priorities and to set goals and to make progress. We pray for those that are struggling spiritually, that you would draw them to yourself, that your spirit would be at work in them, to draw them to yourself, to cause them to yield their wills to yours, to bend their knees and bow their heads. For those that are feeling discouraged, we pray that your spirit might comfort them, encourage them, lift their eyes in vision. We pray that your spirit would use your word to accomplish your work in our midst as a community. We know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word, and so we pray, Father, that as we work and serve in this institution where the Bible is such a key part, that you would use our interaction with it, our reading of it, our study of it, our talking about it to strengthen our faith and confidence in you. Father, we pray for the needs that are existing across our community, financial and otherwise we pray that you would cause us to pray for one another often. And we do pray for the needs beyond our walls. We pray for the poor, for those who are suffering, for those who are living in war-torn countries and nations and states. We pray for our leaders. We pray for the church across the world. We pray for your servants, that they would be faithful representatives of you and proclaimers of the good news of Jesus, for we know, Lord, that this is the only remedy for what ails this broken and sinful world. As we turn our attention to your word this morning and think about the things that life requires of us and the things that actually bring about fruitfulness in our lives, we pray that you would give us open ears and attentive minds to think on these

things and to deal honestly with the hard truths of your word, even those we will explore this morning. We pray in the strong name of Christ. Amen.

So as you know, students who are here, guests if you don't, we're doing a series this semester entitled "Some B.A.S.I.C.S. for Life," where I'm just sort of cherry-picking a few ideas along the way that I think really make a difference in us living the life that we've been called to live well and with purpose. I've been reflecting over these things the past several months, particularly in the fall. And so we talked very early on about the importance of our beliefs, of making sure that our priorities are in order in terms of knowing what we believe to be true, and differentiating between belief and sort of wishes, or belief and sort of your own individual interpretation of what is true, but rather to know what we believe to be true in the big things, such as the existence of God, the creator and sustainer of all things, his son Jesus Christ, the Spirit which indwells us, the truth of his Word, its authority and sufficiency, those things but also other areas of life where we have to have beliefs. What do we believe about the family? What do we believe about marriage and human sexuality? What do we believe about any number of things across the spectrum of life? Because it matters that we not simply be winging it through life. And then secondly, we talked about the fact that our lives should be lives of action that are carried out in accordance with God's word and with the things we hold to be true. And then we talked about the importance of being steady, to be emotionally steady, to keep things in perspective, to allow your faith, your belief and your actions to guide you to something other than panic and emotional reaction to everything that happens around you, but to rather have a filter, a mature, spiritually-minded, faith-oriented filter that gives you some steadiness and control with regard to your emotions.

And today, as you may have surmised from the passage that was read and thinking about what I might mean, we're going to talk about the issue of industry or industriousness. The importance of working, of being productive, not in the same way we talked about in the second installment around action, that our faith should have action, we should live a life that is consistent with our beliefs and with God's word. More here about a very practical aspect of your life, which is you are supposed to, you are called to, you are actually better off working. To actually be productive, to avoid the sin of idleness with all the energy you have and direct it towards things that are actually beneficial and productive and fruitful. And this is, I think, an important aspect of life.

Years ago, I have an uncle, I had an uncle who recently passed away, and years and years ago when my son was very young, my uncle would actually sort of relish, he didn't have grandkids of his own at the time, and he would relish sort of coming to our home and speaking to my son when he was four as though he were one of you. And sometimes I used to think that it would just go right over my son's head because my uncle really wanted to impart this wisdom, but he spent a lot of time over the years when he would travel in from the west coast talking to my kids about what are the things that actually distinguish you from others. He was not a believer in Jesus Christ and his orientation was different, but his point was it's not that hard to distinguish yourself from others. And one of the themes that kept coming up over and over and over again, for probably two decades, was it's not hard to distinguish yourself, just work hard. Do what you set your hand to do well, earnestly, with diligence, and when you're done, look for the next thing

to do. Do not be caught idle. He was giving professional advice to my three-and-a-half-year-old son.

This issue of working, in our culture, I think so much of what is happening around us is work is seen as the enemy. I think the provost last year addressed this, or the year before, that so many of us in our orientation culturally think, well, we work so that we can rest. The weekend is coming, thank God it's Friday. But the way Sabbath is designed is that you rest from your work so that you can get back at it. The Lord God, on the seventh day after creation, rested and didn't quit. He had other work to do. Someone said to me years ago, when I was coming up working at a Christian camp, I got in an argument with a friend of mine multiple times a day for years, and he would really push back against this issue of work, sort of this oppressive idea of toil and labor as some sort of political and social class struggle. And he said, I want to live a life like Jesus. I said, be careful what you wish for. What is it about the life of Jesus that you think is so attractive? He said, well, he just walked around talking to people. No. I mean, he did that. He was often hunted down while he was walking around talking to people. He was constantly teaching. He was correcting the disciples. He was healing the sick and feeding the hungry. And this was for only a short period of years after serving alongside his father for the previous three decades of his life. No, Jesus was not an entrepreneur looking to eliminate work. Rather, he is our exemplar. In fact, all you have to do is read the Gospels and see how many times Jesus withdrew to a quiet place to rest, to refocus, to be recharged, only to return to his ministry and his work very soon thereafter.

That is the picture of Scripture. We were designed for it. We were created in the image and likeness of God with the inclination and ability to create, and given the assignment to subdue the earth to work as a result of the curse that work is complicated, made harder, referred to as toil. You'll eat by the sweat of your brow. In other words, this is not going to be as easy as it would have been otherwise. This idea that Paul is driving at here in 2 Thessalonians, writing to this church, is without varnish. There's no varnish on this. There's no cleaning it up. There's no softening it. There's no sort of contextualizing the message of 2 Thessalonians 3. He isn't trying to lighten the impact of things. You know, I often think people say, well, Paul was really good at giving people the rough stuff. He'd build them up and then he'd give them the rough stuff. I don't know if you've ever received rough criticism, exhortation, or instruction from anyone, but no amount of buildup on the front end makes it easier to take serious, strong exhortation. It's so easy to push back, and this is a passage of Scripture I think that's hard to face up to, but it's in God's Word and it is true and it is delivered with force, but also with the best interest of the readers in view.

As Dean Gordon read for us, Paul starts out in chapter 3 of 2 Thessalonians, that he wants the Lord of Peace himself to give you peace at all times. That's really the issue. Paul has their best interest in mind, and so what he is doing here is commanding these brothers in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to keep away from any brother who's walking in idleness. This is a problem then. Paul isn't just saying that idleness is a problem for you, he's saying that another man's idleness is a problem for all of us. This is a very serious treatment of the issue of idleness, and I want to be clear: Paul's not talking in this example, in this passage about idleness, about people

who have an inability to do the same thing that other people do. It's not like Paul's saying, well, you know, this guy, he works really hard and he can climb trees and then this person can't climb trees and that person should be avoided. Paul's not talking about that. He actually clarifies this later in the passage when he says, the one who refuses or is not willing to work. The issue in here isn't what kind of work, it isn't even what necessarily differentiates us from one another in terms of the skill. Trust me, if the work at hand was oil painting, you don't want me on your team. Some of you in this room will be much better at that. I do not paint artistically, I don't even paint walls well. Some of it's on purpose because then my wife will do most of it. But the idea is that it doesn't mean we will all do the same work at the same level of quality. What Paul is driving at here is something else. He's saying, look, there's idleness among you. There are those among you who do not want to work. And not only is it a problem for them, their idleness is a problem for you. How do we know that? Because he says here, "I command you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that you keep away from the brother who is walking in idleness."

That's very strong. In other words, if we have someone who is basically saying, I refuse to work, I do not want to be productive, I will not set my hand to anything, I'd rather lay around, I'd rather fritter away my hours, I have no intention of doing anything productive or meaningful. Paul's saying that you should actually keep away from that individual. Now why does Paul say that? Wouldn't it be great if we could actually lift that person up? Well, Paul's pretty clear here. No, keep away from the person who is walking in idleness. That's not in accordance with the tradition that you receive from us. Well, what is that tradition? He goes on to clarify it. "The tradition that you have from us is that you know how you ought to imitate us because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it. But with toil and labor, we worked night and day that we might not be a burden to you." Then the apostle Paul's saying, look, our example to you was we came into your midst to do the Lord's work, and we did not wish to be a burden to you. In a social and cultural context that is so driven by entitlement, what Paul is saying is we did not want to be a burden to you. But more than that, it isn't just we wanted to go easy on you, we wanted to set an example to you. What's the implication? That you would not want to be a burden to others. What Paul is talking about here is we worked hard so that we knew you were in need. We worked hard that we would not be a burden to you. And so in doing this, Paul sets an example for them, not just an example that he hopes they will follow, an example that he actually exhorts them to follow. You should do as we did, follow this tradition, follow this example. "It wasn't because we didn't have the right to claim to you to be the servants of the Lord and have you meet our needs, rather we wanted you to learn this important lesson. For even when we were with you, we would give you the command that if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat."

This is perhaps one of those phrases in all of the Bible that is very difficult to deal with. Because it's often abused to say, oh, you know, if a man won't work then he doesn't eat. That somehow that negates the requirements and obligations concerning charity. That's not what Paul is saying here. Paul isn't saying that you're free from the obligation to feed the poor and to care for those in need and those who can't work. What he is saying is idleness is a sin. Don't associate yourselves with those that are embroiled in that sin and understand that you should work not to be a burden, rather you should be a contributor. I think about this often. I think this passage is a

very, very strong argument. For our desire to work to not be a burden to others, which means that we should learn and develop the ability and produce in ways that we are self-reliant. Now the problem with self-reliance in any contemporary culture is we somehow think that means pull yourself up by your bootstraps, take care of yourself and forget everyone else. Actually, if you think about the tone and tenor of this passage in the context of the New Testament church, there's something really interesting that cannot be missed here. Without those who are able and willing to work hard and be self-reliant, there is no one to care for those in need. The issue of working hard to not be a burden to others actually means that you have what it takes then to meet those who cannot work, who cannot meet their own needs. The reality is that self-reliance is required for community. If all of you were completely dependent all the time on me to get you up for class, I would probably quit and you would fail. Some of you have no problem getting up in the morning. This is kind of a weak illustration, I admit. But some of you have no problem getting up in the morning. You're disciplined, you don't even need an alarm clock, others of you listen to the alarm clock, and some of you, well, you're serial snooze button people. You roll out of bed with a minute and a half to run across the campus to get to class. You enter the class sweaty and sleepy, which is not a good combination. Who's going to get you up? The people who are already up. Those that love you who can actually say, you know what, you need to get up, we need to get to class. But if all of you are sleeping in, no faculty member is going to sign up for an 8 o'clock class. Nobody will show up.

The issue here, Paul says, is we didn't want to be a burden to you so that you could care for those who cannot care for themselves, because we were capable of working. And the more that you do that, the less desirous you are or intentional you are to be a burden to someone else, the more capability and capacity you have to meet the needs of others. Your self-reliance is not the enemy of community, it's a requirement of it. It's a requirement of it. And Paul is saying here very clearly, we set an example for you not to be a burden to you as a body, but rather to work hard to be able to pay for our own food when we were in your midst. But don't let those who refuse to work drag you down. They refuse to work, they should not eat.

In actuality here, I don't know how much Paul is spelling out for them a policy to be enforced and regulated as much as it's a universal principle. If you don't work, you cannot meet your needs and the needs of your family. Then he goes on to say, look, there's a problem, for we hear that some among you "walk in idleness." It's a very interesting turn of phrase. There's obviously a problem in this church, and it's not that some of you are struggling from time to time and have a bad week and aren't feeling well and aren't really getting after it. He says walking in idleness. The picture of walking in the scripture is life. That you're living a lifestyle of idleness. It's not to be continued, Paul says. There are some among you that are walking, actually living a lifestyle of idleness. Not busy at all, but rather busy bodies. How does someone who is idle, not doing anything, become a busy body? There's an old saying, I don't know how many of you have said it, I don't know how many of you have heard it, I don't know how many of your parents have said it, I'm pretty sure your grandparents have said it. It could well be that you have to go back to your great-grandparents. But idleness is what? The devil's workshop. No? That, I mean, maybe I was just a really bad teenager and my grandfather laid into me pretty good. But idleness, idle hands are the devil's workshop. This is what it is. Idle hands are the devil's

workshop. If you're idle, you don't have anything to do but look for trouble. So Paul says that's exactly what happens. If you're living a lifestyle of idleness, be aware you will not be busy at work, rather you'll be a busy body. That's detrimental to the body of Christ. That's why he says stay away from these people. Don't have anything to do with them. Put yourself away from them, those that live a lifestyle of idleness, because they're not busy at work, rather they're busy bodies. And such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ, do your work. Do it quietly, without accolades, without calling attention to yourself. Do your work quietly and earn your own living.

It's very interesting to me that this is at the close of Paul's second letter to this church, which means he wants them to not forget this. That's how important this is to the Apostle Paul when he's looking at what is happening in this particular church, which is something we all struggle with as human beings and probably in our day, this is a pretty serious issue. Well, one of the things I think that's interesting is, I think the Apostle Paul is just stating something here that he wants to see present in the church. He's warning you as a hard worker. Be careful about the idle. He's warning you as the idle that you really need to get over this quickly and get moving because this isn't good for you, it isn't good for anybody. And I think that the interesting thing is that this is a universal truth. We see it in the Proverbs. Solomon says, you know, "I walked past the field of the sluggard, I stopped and observed. I saw that the wall had broken down, the thorns had grown up, the ground had gone barren. and I looked and received instruction and I came to this conclusion, a little sleep a little slumber, a little folding of the hands, and poverty descends upon you like a thief." Now, the wisdom of that writer was not saying sleep is bad. We all get that. There's plenty of other Proverbs about the importance of rest. What he's saying is idleness, sluggardliness, that will ruin you. That will ruin you.

Well, we don't need this, but we don't need an Ivy League university to tell us this truth. But Harvard University ran a longitudinal study for almost 85 years, it began in the 30s, looking at the impact of doing chores in your youth for your success later in life. Guess what they found? They found that those children who were required to do chores in both an urban and a rural setting had a greater sense of responsibility, a clearer and more identifiable work ethic, greater empathy for the people they work with, a higher degree of self-worth and confidence, and were more successful personally and professionally. Well, good grief. You mean work actually makes us stronger and better people? That's what the Apostle Paul is saying, because if he thought idleness would do it he'd say, there are some among you that are idle. Find out who they are and hang out with them as often as possible. That's not what he says. He says, don't have anything to do with them. Get away from them. Keep away from those that are idle. The Harvard study is an interesting one, 85 years, multiple generations, a longitudinal study, which means they were following people over the course of their lifetime, is a pretty significant study. And what it means is that the younger we start children doing chores, sweeping the sidewalk, going for groceries, cleaning the house, taking out the trash, feeding the hogs, baling the hay, walking the dog, whatever setting you're in, the more accustomed we get to work, the stronger we are in terms of our own humanness. We actually develop some self-confidence, some sense that we can do something that is productive, that accomplishes a purpose, and it builds our self-confidence.

Well, if this is the teaching that Paul is lining out for these Christians and it is so beneficial to us and to our community, then what gets in the way? Well, lots of things get in the way. Our nature, for one, our sort of propensity towards ease and comfort, our own sinfulness, our own self-interests. But there are other things that get in our way. Distractions, examples of idleness that we hold up, that we think sort of the be-all and end-all is to get to the point in your life where you don't have to work. We think that's the ultimate goal. And I'll just say this, you know, men, if you're thinking I want a life where I don't have to work, then I would tell whatever woman is interested in you to run the other way. And gentlemen, if you're looking at a potential spouse who thinks the Proverbs 31 woman is a fool, I would run the other way. When two people are committed to actually doing something other than being idle something really powerful happens, not just in your pocketbook and your bank account, but in your life and in the lives of those around you. Productivity is a good thing.

Now, let me just say a few things here. Scrolling, streaming, gaming, not work, not productivity in the way that I think Paul is talking about here and the way we think about it in real life. You spend a lot of time doing those things. Some of you are quite good at it. Proficiency does not equal productivity. Just because you're good at something doesn't mean that thing is productive. That thing could be an expression of idleness to avoid other kinds of work. (27:42) It could be a distraction. It could be a way of wasting time. Somebody after chapel is going to corner me and say, let me tell you how my gaming is productive. I get that. I would just exhort you to do a little self-examination, because we spend so much time on these devices that they are, in a sense, leading us down a path of idleness. You ever do it? You ever start on the Insta? You think, this is fun and entertaining. This is comic relief and mental health remedy. Ha, ha. You see? Ha, ha. Calling your people over. Did you see this one?. Sending it to 50 people. You're having fun. I do it. You're having fun. And you look at the clock and say, "wait a second, 3 hours and 45 minutes?" Now, I've never done 3 hours and 45 minutes, but I know at least one of you that has, because you confessed it to me, right? This is the reality.

These things in our life actually are putting us on a path to idleness. So I want to offer just some practical advice. Identify the obstacles to productivity in your life and work. What are the things that are leading you to idleness? Because idleness kills ambition and productivity. It kills industriousness in you. And industriousness and productivity, in turn, kill idleness. It's a very interesting relationship, but you should spend some time thinking about those obstacles to industriousness and productivity in your life. Those obstacles to work.

Look, I know you all have work to do, because you register for courses and have to go to classes. I know you have work to do. And I'm not walking across the walkway saying "they're on a bench, why aren't they working?" I don't do that. It's going to be nice. Sit on a bench, right? 80% of you are begging your professors to take class outside. I get it, right? The issue is, in what ways are you wasting time and avoiding the work you've been given to do? Because it will instill in you a tendency toward idleness, which is not in your best interest and harmful to those around you.

So spend some time thinking about the obstacles in your life to industriousness and productivity. Here's a tough one: This passage starts out with saying you should keep away from any brother walking in idleness. I'm going to tell you right now, if you're in a group, or spending inordinate amount of time with people who clearly have an aversion to anything productive, to any kind of work, to any kind of industriousness, I would encourage you, and as your president, I give you permission to change your friend group, because it will not help you. And it's not in your best interest. Enabling your friends who you love to continue to walk in idleness is not a good thing. You should spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not affirmation of their idleness. You should be engaging with one another along those lines. But if you cannot exhort them to get moving, then be very careful about those whom you are associating with and spending inordinate amounts of time with, because it will cost you.

Paul gives this exhortation not to punish the idle person, but to keep idleness from spreading like a disease. Do some self examination, exhort one another, get at it. Just start. I think in one of the previous ones I mentioned that there is a clear differentiation between motivation and emotion. Some of you say, "I have no problem working." Doing things you actually like to do? That's the easy part, right? You play a sport, you don't mind practicing. Some of you play sports and you know there are some things you enjoy more than others. You love certain drills; you hate other drills. I'll be in the batting cage all day long, just don't ask me to do a lap. Musicians, I love to play music, but I don't want to do scales. Students, I love to get the credits, but I don't want to read. I don't want to write. I like the other stuff. I like the classes where we sit in a circle. Great. If you can find a job where you go every day and sit in a circle, have at it! But the reality is, you need to work, for your betterment and the betterment of the lives around us and for your family. The Proverbs 31 woman is the most industrious person in the entire Bible. The Proverbs are calling men to take responsibility and to provide for your families. To work. And the Bible isn't saying this is a part of the curse, it is what we were given to do from the beginning. It's harder because of the curse, sin, and the fall. But this is what we are called to, and the Apostle Paul, in the closing letter to this church, in the closing passages, exhorts them to avoid the idle and to shun idleness in their own lives. Rather, work quietly. Earn your living. This will go well with you and will be of benefit to all those around you. See, not only does community benefit from self-reliance, those who can do have capacity and capability to help others, but it actually benefits when there are shared values that are consistent with our faith. And I think what the Apostle Paul is doing here is not only helping individuals say this is a problem for you if you are given to idleness and it's a problem for the community if you allow the idle. But the bigger issue is that we can't allow idleness to somehow become a virtue, because the Bible doesn't. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your word and the power that it has to divide between joint and marrow. We pray that your Spirit would use it to strengthen us in our faith, to teach us, to instruct us, and to lead us to good and righteous living. And we pray these things in the strong name of Jesus, amen.