

## 2 Timothy 2.15

Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval.

Paul's letter to his son in the faith, Timothy, sounds like every Dad's advice to his kid on the first day of work: Work hard, because hard work is what every boss wants.

If we don't have the context of The Gospel, we could think God is like a cigar chomping, grizzled, demanding boss. The hardest thing about starting a new job is not knowing all that the new job will require. Even doing the same job in a new place has its hazards.

"Do they do things the same way I've learned to do things?"

"Do I have the right experience?"

"How will I get along with this new crew of workers?"

"Is there a good place for lunch nearby?" Wait, that's probably not in the Top 10 of new concerns, but it's on the radar.

The Gospel is good news for us because thankfully, the Boss' son, Jesus, told us *exactly* what the work scope is.

Jesus talks about 'the work that God requires in John 6. Jesus' words are so important for us as we look at this "work hard" passage from 2 Timothy.

Jesus has been teaching a huge crowd of people about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus says in **John 6.27** (NLT)

"Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval."

What does "spend your energy" sound like? Where do you spend about 40 hours a week to earn a paycheck? I spend that time at work. It's likely your life looks like mine and you spend time at work doing work. Working *is* 'spending energy'.

Jesus says 'make your work seeking the eternal life that the Son of man can give you.'

Then Jesus says he already has God's approval.

Paul told us to work hard to present ourselves to God and receive his approval. Jesus says he already has God's approval.

This prompts the audience in **John 6.28** (NIV) to say:

"What must we do to do the works God requires?"

Since Jesus has spent John 6 performing 2 miracles (feeding 5,000 and walking on water - though only his disciples saw the walking on water part - feeding 5,000 is no small feat!) the question is reasonable. What does God require to receive his approval?

Jesus answers (**John 6.29**):

"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

Is Paul right in saying that we have to "work hard" if that hard work is *only* believing?

Or maybe 'only' believing is another oxymoron, like 'military intelligence', 'jumbo shrimp', or 'responsible government'. Maybe believing *is* hard work. The good news from God, The Gospel, says that Jesus already has the approval of God, so everything we need has already been accomplished by Jesus. Jesus says "believe in me".

Still, there is nothing 'only' about believing. Nothing about it is easy. Believing is hard work. Thankfully, the Bible describes faith and belief as a fruit of the Spirit (**Gal. 5.22**) and assures us that God is working in us, producing 'desire and power' to do what pleases God. (**Philippians 2.13**)

Believing God is hard work, and God is hard at work in us to produce what pleases Him. Jesus has said he is "The Way, the truth, and the life" and that no one comes to God except through him (John 14.6). Belief is hard work, and the Good News is that God Himself is working in us so that we can believe and trust in all that Jesus has done for us!

**Questions:**

1. Does it seem unfair that believing in God is hard?
2. Look up Galatians 5.22. Which of the fruits of the Spirit help us in believing God?
3. Look up Philippians 2.13. How many things do believe because you want to believe and how many things do you believe because they are inescapable facts?
4. How much of belief is based in desire? Does 'wanting' something to be true help you have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?
5. Is there anything good in your life that requires no work at all?
6. Does it still seem unfair that believing in God is hard? Does knowing that the Bible promises that God is working in you to help you believe change how you think about your belief in Him?