

10 May 2026

Work as Christian Duty

Lesson Text: Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:9; John 5:17-4; Acts 20:33-35



Key Text: *“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”—(Acts 20:35 NIV)*

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, we will be able to:

1. Summarize the main points of each text.
2. Explain the purpose of work from these texts.

Introduction

In today's lesson, we will explore God's design for work, starting from creation and continuing through the life of the first-century church with application for today. While this lesson reviews a variety of Scripture texts, those of primary interest will be Acts 20:33–35 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12, both focusing on words from the apostle Paul.

Lesson Text

Genesis 20:9

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Exodus 20:9 9

Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

John 5:17

In his defense Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”

John 9:4

As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

Acts 20:33–35

I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' ”

I. Work Given by God (Genesis 2:15; Exodus 20:9)

A. Commanded (Genesis 2:15)

15. The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

This verse is crucial to understanding work in God's world. Occurring prior to the fall (Genesis 3), this is evidence that work is good. While the curse following humanity's disobedience renders work toilsome—marked by thorns, thistles, and sweat to bring forth food (3:17–19)—it did not start out that way. The toilsome nature of work is still with us today, but it ought not to distort our view of work itself. God himself is a worker, demonstrated by the creation narratives in Genesis 1–2, and he calls humanity to work alongside him (examples: Ezekiel 22:30; Matthew 28:19–20). For an interesting back and forth on the nature of work, see Ecclesiastes 2:10, 17–26; 3:9–13, 22; 4:8; 5:18–19; 8:15.

B. Limited (Exodus 20:9)

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work,”

This verse is part of the fourth of the Ten Commandments, that of remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8–11; see also Deuteronomy 5:12–15). Work is necessary, and so is rest (Exodus 34:21). God modeled rest from his work of creation in Genesis 2:1–3. The version of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 established God's rest on the seventh day after six days of work as the model for those under the old covenant.

II. Work of God

A. The Son (John 9:4) 4.

“As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”

Here, Jesus uses the terms day and night to represent his own limited time on earth to do the works of him who sent him, the Father. Contextually, Jesus is speaking with his disciples about a man born blind (John 9:1–2). The reason Jesus gives for why this man was born blind has nothing to do with the man's or his parents' sin; rather, it happened so that “the works of God might be displayed in him” (9:3).

The Father (John 5:17)

In His defense Jesus said to them “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.”

This verse is Jesus' response to Jewish leaders who persecute him for healing on the Sabbath (John 5:1–16). Although God rested after his work of creation (Genesis 2:1–3), his providential care continues without interruption (Psalm 121; etc.), and Jesus shows the alignment of his own priorities with those of his heavenly Father. Consistent throughout the Gospels, to heal on the Sabbath is to do the good work that his Father has been doing up to this point (Matthew 12:10–11; Mark 3:1–5; Luke 13:10–17; etc.).

Acts: Lesson Context

Charitable Work

The book of Acts covers events from about AD 30 to 63. Our lesson segment from that book takes us almost to the end of that period. In about AD 58, Paul traveled to Jerusalem after concluding his third missionary journey. Some members of the church in Jerusalem had fallen into poverty. Therefore, Paul's trip included collecting offerings from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Romans 15:25–26; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8:1–4). This offering allowed Christians who were predominately of Gentile background to support the Christians in Jerusalem who were predominately of Jewish background. Paul initially planned to sail to Syria from Greece to deliver the offering. But discovering a plot against him, he traveled by land through Macedonia (Acts 20:3). Paul aimed to arrive in Jerusalem by Pentecost (20:16), which would mark the anniversary of the church's beginning (2:1). This would be a significant occasion for one group of Christians to receive a life-sustaining gift from fellow believers of different backgrounds.

Summary

Work is presented in Scripture as a good and purposeful gift from God, established before sin entered the world, as seen in Genesis 2:15 where humanity is called to care for creation. Though work became difficult after the fall, its value remains, and God also sets limits by commanding rest, as shown in Exodus 20:9. Both the Father and the Son model ongoing work—God continually sustains the world, and Jesus uses His time on earth to carry out God's mission and reveal His power. This understanding of work extends to believers, as shown in Acts, where Paul organizes a collection to help struggling Christians in Jerusalem, demonstrating that work includes generosity, unity, and caring for others.



Daily Bible Readings

Monday: Proverbs 10:1-5, 15-16

Tuesday: Matthew 20:1-16


Wednesday: Amos 5:6-15

Thursday: James 5:1-11

Friday: Colossians 3:12-17

Saturday: Deuteronomy 24:14-21

BLACK HISTORY



“
We are a strong-willed and stubborn people, and since we have survived the Middle Passage and slavery, the Civil War, and Jim Crow, we will survive what is happening in this country. We will keep rising, we will keep going forward, and we will continue to be the hope and the dream of our ancestors.
Karsonya Wise Whitehead, Asaltu President”



Thomas Fuller (1710 – December 1790)

Also known as "Negro Demus" and the "Virginia Calculator", was an [enslaved](#) African renowned for his [mathematical](#) abilities

Thomas Fuller was born in Africa around 1710. In 1724, at about fourteen years old, he was taken across the Atlantic into slavery. Accounts differ on his precise place of origin, but modern historians generally place it somewhere in the region now associated with Liberia or Benin. That beginning matters because it reminds us that his brilliance did not begin in America. It crossed the ocean with him, surviving kidnapping, sale, forced labor, and a system determined not only to enslave Black people, but to strip them of history, identity, and intellectual dignity. A Black man denied literacy and formal schooling still developed a command of numbers so extraordinary that educated white observers struggled to equal him. Fuller's enslavers lived inside a culture built on claims of Black inferiority, yet his abilities exposed how fragile and

dishonest those claims really were. Men came to test an enslaved old man, but Thomas Fuller ended up exposing the contradictions of a nation that depended on Black intelligence while pretending not to see it.

In Virginia, Fuller was enslaved by the Cox family near Alexandria, where he spent nearly his entire life laboring on their farm. He never learned to read or write English, and there is no evidence that he received any formal education in America. Yet reports consistently describe him performing complex calculations tied to planting, measurements, fencing, and other forms of practical labor with astonishing speed and precision. Some details of the stories surrounding him changed over time, but the larger truth remained consistent: Fuller trained his mind through repetition, observation, discipline, and memory until numerical precision became second nature to him.

His story is larger than the tale of one gifted individual. Fuller's genius was not simply ignored by slavery; it was absorbed into the system, used where useful, and denied the honor of being openly recognized as genius because the idea of intellectual greatness in a Black man threatened the logic of the entire racial order. His life revealed a contradiction at the center of American slavery: the same society that claimed Black people were inferior relied constantly on Black skill, labor, memory, innovation, and intelligence.

In 1788, reports of Fuller's extraordinary calculating ability reached William Hartshorne and Samuel Coates, men connected to antislavery circles in Pennsylvania. Curious to see whether the stories were true, they traveled to Virginia to question him directly.

One of the problems they posed was simple in wording but enormous in calculation: how many seconds are in a year and a half? In about two minutes, Fuller answered correctly: 47,304,000. They then asked how many seconds a man had lived if he were seventy years, seventeen days, and twelve hours old. Fuller responded with 2,210,500,800. When one of the white examiners insisted the number must be too large, Fuller calmly pointed out that the man had forgotten to account for the leap years.

That moment still resonates because it captures the entire contradiction of the age in miniature. A Black elder denied education corrected a free white man whose status, literacy, and assumptions had still failed him. Fuller's brilliance did not merely challenge stereotypes; it dismantled them in real time.

He was also given a complex breeding problem involving sows over an eight-year period. After the wording was clarified, Fuller solved that problem as well. Contemporary accounts record his answer as 34,588,806. Observers were struck not only by the accuracy of his solutions, but by the method itself. Fuller reportedly carried enormous calculations entirely in his mind with a steadiness and clarity that made other people's written work seem clumsy by comparison.

In January 1789, Benjamin Rush published an account of Fuller in the *American Museum*. Rush and other abolitionists used Fuller's story to challenge racist claims that Black people were naturally inferior in intellect. Yet there is something deeply bittersweet in that reality. Fuller became evidence in a political argument about Black humanity, but the burden of proving Black

humanity should never have rested on enslaved people whose lives had already been stolen from them.

Fuller's reputation eventually spread beyond Virginia and even beyond America. European writers such as Jacques Pierre Brissot and Henri Grégoire later cited him in arguments for Black equality and universal human rights. The world could discuss the brilliance of his mind across oceans while he himself remained enslaved on Virginia soil. Recognition traveled farther and faster than justice, which remains one of the hardest truths in Black history.

One remembered exchange captures Fuller's clarity more sharply than pages of praise ever could. When someone expressed regret that he had never received a formal education, Fuller reportedly replied that many educated men proved themselves fools anyway. The remark carried more than wit. It reflected the insight of a man who had watched literate and socially respected people defend bondage, profit from cruelty, and call themselves civilized while constructing elaborate arguments to excuse what they knew was wrong.

Thomas Fuller died in December 1790, still enslaved. An obituary praised him extravagantly and suggested that, had he received equal opportunity, even Isaac Newton would not have been ashamed to call him a peer in science. Yet admiration after death could not restore what slavery had taken from him. Praise often comes easiest when it demands nothing from the people offering it and changes nothing for the people who suffered.

What remains in Fuller's story is larger than a famous anecdote or a spectacular answer. He stands for the countless Black minds this country used, underestimated, buried, or failed to record because the system surrounding them was designed to waste human possibility. His life tears through one of the oldest lies ever told about Black people: that intelligence, discipline, and genius belonged naturally to others and only conditionally to us.

Black brilliance did not begin with institutions, did not wait for permission, and did not require white recognition to become real. Thomas Fuller should be remembered not merely with surprise, but with reverence. He carried dignity, mastery, and inner discipline through a world deliberately designed to deny him all three.

When we teach his life, we do more than restore one forgotten name. We reopen a wider Black history filled with disciplined minds, hidden gifts, intellectual traditions, and entire constellations of people whom schoolbooks still fail to honor as fully as they should.

Looking back, Thomas Fuller reminds us that our ancestors were never waiting for this country to make them intelligent, worthy, or whole. Looking forward, his story calls us to continue teaching Black history in its fuller truth, especially the overlooked stories that reveal how much our people carried long before the world was willing to admit it.

Association for the Study of African American Life and History

The mission of the ASALH® is to promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community. Established on September 9, 1915, by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, we are the Founders of Black History Month and carry forth the work of our founder, the Father of Black History. We continue his legacy of speaking a fundamental truth to the world—that Africans and peoples of African descent are makers of history and co-workers in what W. E. B. Du Bois called, “The Kingdom of Culture.” ASALH is in short, the nexus between the Ivory Tower and the global public.



The Negro Historical Association with Carter Woodson (with bow tie) seated next to Mary Church Terrell (in white) in front row, center, of this portrait (1925). Source: Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives, Howard University, Washington DC

We are in the final stages of organizing the Northern Virginia Branch. If you have any questions, please contact: *Deac Joe Boutte, Bro Harvey Woodson, or Rev Gillis M. Taylor.*

Come Join The ASALH NOVA Branch!!