

# THREE APPROACHES TO WORK: THE BAD, THE BETTER, AND THE BEST

**Ephesians 4:28**, “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”

**Introduction:** Paul wrote this letter from prison to instruct the Ephesian church in doctrine and practice.

**The nature of God:** God is a working God.

- ❖ **Psalm 121:4**, Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
- ❖ **John 5:17**, But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

**God has created us in His own image:** As working beings

- ❖ **Genesis 2:15**, The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.
- ❖ **Exodus 34:21**, “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest.
- ❖ **2 Thessalonians 3:10**, For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

## 1. THE BAD

**Ephesians 4:28**, “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands...”

**Three characteristics of the bad:**

**A. The Bad—Robbing:** “Let the thief no longer steal...”

- You have been stealing in your pre-converted state, but now, being a believer, you must no longer steal.

**What is stealing?** Taking something forcibly for yourself that rightfully belongs to others.

**The eight commandment in the Ten Commandments states,** “You shall not steal” (Exo. 20:15).

**Latest Crime Rate Report of India 2023<sup>1</sup>:** The most common crime in India is theft, followed by robbery and assault.

## **B. The Bad – Laziness**

**Ephesians 4:28,** “Let the thief no longer steal, **but rather let him labor...**

**Three kinds of lazy people:**

- Some don't work and labor and try making money the easy way by robbing others.
- Some don't work and labor; they remain idle and burden others to support them.
- Some work, but they don't labor and are lazy in their work.

**Kopiaō (κοπιάω):** to work until you are weary and exhausted.

**Characteristics of laziness:** They don't labor.

**If you don't work:** You are a burden to others.

- ❖ **2 Thessalonians 3:6-10,** 6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us... 10 For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

**If you are not laboring in your work:**

- ❖ **Proverbs 10:26,** Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.adda247.com/upsc-exam/crime-rate/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20total%20crimes,Maharashtra%2C%20Delhi%2C%20and%20Bihar.>

**Pastor and full-time Christian workers: 1 Timothy 5:17**, pastors must labor in preaching and teaching, and only those are worthy of double honor. Don't help lazy pastors, for we spoil them. In my experience, the most lazy people I have found were pastors.

**Note:** The dignity of work is not in its professionalism and paycheck but in its sincerity and welfare for people.

**Caution:** If you are a student, labor in your studies to work well later. Don't waste your time on that which doesn't help you in building a healthy career.

- ❖ **Proverbs 12:24**, The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor.

### **C. The Bad—Dishonesty**

**Ephesians 4:28**, "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands..."

**Note:** We are not just commanded to work. We are called to work honestly.

**Why?** Because God is a God of holiness, faithfulness, and honest.

- Lying to the authorities and customers.
- Exaggerating how many hours we work.
- Breaching the confidentiality of the company.
- Misuse of company's things (bringing them to home)
- Misuse of company's time (work from home)
- Dishonesty with money.
- Absent during online meetings but giving the present impression.
- False leaves.
- False claims of benefits.
- Bribery.

**EMBROKER (2023):** Is your company a den of thieves? Shockingly, 75% of employees admit to stealing at least once from their employer... Everything from scrolling social media during a meeting to sharing confidential documents with an outside source can be considered workplace theft... More than 30 percent of business bankruptcies are due to employee theft...<sup>2</sup>

**Subtle deception, Decent thieves:** Borrowing from others with a claim to give but would not return. (books, money, other things)

**According to a 2022 survey** by Creditcards.com, 42% respondents said they had lost money through loans made to friends or family members.

❖ **Psalms 37:21,** The wicked borrows but does not pay back...

## 2. THE BETTER

**Ephesians 4:28,** “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands...

**The Bad:** Steal, Lazy, and Dishonest.

**The Better:**

- They put their time and energy into work and progress in their responsibilities.
- ❖ **Proverbs 22:29** Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.
- They are honest, trustworthy and work with integrity.
- ❖ **Proverbs 28:20** A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.
- They are not a burden to others but work with their own hands.
- ❖ **1 Thessalonians 4:11** aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, 12 so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.embroker.com/blog/employee-theft-statistics/#:~:text=Is%20your%20company%20a%20den,forms%20and%20at%20varying%20degrees.>

### 3. THE BEST

**Ephesians 4:28**, “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”

**They are not Bad:** Steal, Lazy, and Dishonest.

**They are Better:** Labor, Honest, Not a burden to others

**They are the Best:** Share with anyone in need. What makes them the best is not just their labour and sincerity but essentially their generosity.

**What is the purpose of work?** So that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

**Who are the Needy we must help?** Not the lazy and not the dishonest people. But those who are diligent and faithful and are still in need.

**Note:** The purpose of work is not just to provide for ourselves and our families but also to share with anyone in need.

❖ **Acts 20:33** I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

**Terrible possibility:** It is terribly possible to be hard workers and sincere in work and yet not live a generous life.

**Praise be to God:** For some in the church who love to be generous.

**1 Timothy 6:17** As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

**Gospel:** Why must we aim to be the best workers and not the bad or the better?

**Ephesians 4:20** But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus [THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST], 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. [EPHESIANS 4:28 IS A REFLECTION OF A LIFE TRANSFORMED BY THE GOSPEL]

**In my blog, “Message For Our Age”, article “*From Burglar to Benefactor*” (June 2, 2012):** As I reflect on my life before Christ, I feel ashamed of being a thief. I was clever at stealing from the time I was a small kid, stealing toys in shops. When in my teens, I remember once robbing a set of products from a big shop. My friend was a decent guy and was so afraid of joining with me in this theft. Nevertheless, I persuaded him not to fear to steal the products.

Somehow I was observed and was caught outright. My friend and I were dragged to the nearby police station. When we watched other thieves badly beaten by the police, my friend was too afraid and shivered. As we were waiting for our trial in the station, we subtly escaped and ran like a deer from its predator and jumped into a running bus.

As I grew, I became more active in stealing things. I robbed enormous amounts of money from workplaces, got involved in the distribution of counterfeit currency, produced fake identity cards and stole various things as I got opportunities. I was robbing so much money in my youth, not knowing where to store it, I used to dump money in a box, buying material things and enjoying a luxurious lifestyle. Influenced by some people who gained a lot of money from burglary, I was even forming a gang and planned to rob houses.

If I had not been transformed by Christ at that time, you could imagine what kind of a stigma I would have been to my family and a great trouble to the society. If not for Christ, I am sure I could have either become a smuggler or a criminal.

When I trusted in Christ Jesus, another thing I have noticed in my life is that the Lord turned my heart from greed to generosity. My heart broke when I saw people in need and God gave me His abundant grace to help others. Earlier I robbed things which belonged to others, but after knowing Christ, I have learned to share what belonged to me. This doesn't mean I am perfect and selfless, but progressively growing in the grace of generous living.

In all more than 25 years of my life in Christ, I am grateful to God for using a once-upon-a-time thief to help countless people in various ways. Such is the power of the gospel. This is what Christ does when He comes into a sinful life, turning a burglar into a benefactor.