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Proverbs
Work Is Not A Four-Letter Word

Maybe it's just my imagination, but it seems that our culture is becoming more and more crude. We not only hear cursing and swearing from the places we'd expect it, but many of our leaders and prominent figures seem to use four-letter words freely.

Even our president was caught last week when he didn't know his mic was on using an expletive as he talked with Tony Blair.

Well, in this explosion of four-letter words there's a word that I think a lot of people mistakenly think is a swear word and that's the word "work."

Our jobs consume a major portion of our lives. At 40 hours a week adding in lunch and commuting, 45% of our total waking time for the whole year is wrapped up in our job. If you're a mom with small kids in the home it's 100% of your waking hours!

No wonder so many people are wondering, is this what life's all about, put in your time at work and live for vacations and days off?

We can develop some very distorted views of work, like:

1) *I find my meaning and significance in my work.* If that describes you what's going to happen when the company downsizes and they don't need you anymore?

2) *Success at work equals success in life.* Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling were successful at there jobs but I don't know too many people who would say they were a success in life.

3) *You can tell a successful person by what they own and how famous they are.* Did you ever notice the the single mom who raises three kids when their father walked out or the loving spouse who stuck with a difficult marriage for better or for worse dosen't make the World's Most Successful People list.

4) *You've got to do what it takes to get the job done, no matter what.* We're going to see from Proverbs that God values hard work. But what happens when expediency becomes the only value in making decisions? The people, legality, morality all get sacrificed.

5) *I just work to earn a living.* If that's the only reason we go to work then our jobs become something we just endure.

Here at Faith Community Church we believe that the Bible is an accurate, authoritative, and trustworthy guide to life. It tells us how things were, what happened, why they're the way they are today, and what the future will be like.

The Bible tells us about every aspect of life, including our work. It's easy to see work as a curse but the Bible presents a much different picture.

So I'd like us to start today with the first mention of work in the Bible. To do that we need to go all the way back to the first book in the Bible, the book of Genesis, chapter 2.

Turn to Genesis 2 Pg 4 Read vs 7-8, 15

Remember, this was before sin entered the world. The conditions were perfect. Adam walked and talked with God. There were no thorns and weeds, but there was still work to do.

Adam was given a job and it was God who gave Adam that job. That means that work is not a curse, but a blessing.

The Bible presents God as a working God.

Genesis 2:1-2

Exodus 14:28-31 pg 63

John 5:15-17 pg 943

Ephesians 2:8-10 pg 1038

Did you catch that crystal clear statement of where our forgiveness comes from? It comes from the work of God through Jesus Christ. It comes by faith alone in what Jesus Christ accomplished at the cross.

When He had paid the price for sin, with His dying breath Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished!"

God is a working God, and the most conspicuous example is the work of salvation. God planned it. God carried it out. And God offers it to whosoever will.

Our good works come as a response to God's work. Our works are "thank you" to God for His work.

Now all this is important because it shows that work has intrinsic value because God is a working God and He created man in His own image and gave him work to do in the garden.

Ecclesiastes 3:10 & 13 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied...that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor--it is the gift of God.

In Psalm 8 the Psalmist asks this question *What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? (4-6)*

That's a great question. "God, your so big and vast, who are we that we should have significance?"

Here's the answer: *For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.*

Did you catch the answer? We have great dignity because we're co-workers with God.

At this point you might be tempted to say, "I hear that, Ed but I'm having a hard time seeing what I do from 9 to 5 as having anything to do with God's work."

Here's the thing. God says our work and how we do it is important to Him. Now, for the past 6 weeks we have been navigating through the Old Testament book of Proverbs to explore what it has to say about life issues.

Like the other issues we looked at, Proverbs gives us wisdom for the workplace.

It tells us about some bad models for how we should carry out our job, and some good models.

I. Proverbs Shows Us What Kind Of Worker God Dosen't Want Us To Be

1) Lazy **Turn to Proverbs 24:30-34 pg 581**

We looked at these verses last week when we talked about money. What I want us to do this week is to use them as a starting point to see how much God says about laziness.

First of all we need to understand that laziness is sin. This isn't about people with disabilities that can't work, this is the guy who dosen't want to work.

The New Testament has a cure for that. *If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.* II Thessalonians 3:10

God has a lot to say about helping the poor, but not the poor who remain poor because they won't work when they have the chance. Those people need to fend for themselves.

Laziness is a sin. There are 17 references that uses the words lazy, slothful, and sluggard in Proverbs. Most of the time they're translations of the Hebrew word *atsel* which has it's root in the verb "to lean."

If you're lazy you're leaning back in your chair, or leaning against a fence post, or leaning on your plow instead of using it.

Let's look at these characteristics of a sluggard and see if any overlap our lives at any point.

a) A lazy person says, "I'm going to get started...tomorrow." **Proverbs 6:6-11**

Ants are the epitome of industry. They have no boss, no one to plan their work schedule, and no one to give a report to at the end of the day.

Isn't it interesting that people who are made in God's image, a little lower than the angels don't even match up to ants sometimes.

We've had an ongoing ant problem in our house. We've tried about 30 sure-fire home remedies along with every kind of ant bait and trap on the market. The little buggers just lay low for a while and then reappear.

Well, God says before you reach for the can of Raid learn from the ant. Ants work hard, they store up for the lean times.

Lazy workers have trouble getting started.

b) A lazy person wants stuff but refuses to do what it takes to get it. **Proverbs 13:4**

Laziness doesn't exclude desire or even creativity. Lazy people desire success like everyone else. They just refuse to do what it takes to get there.

c) Our goal at our job ought to be to see that our employer makes a profit. A lazy person costs their employer. **Proverbs 18:9**

You don't have to purposely set out to destroy something, just don't do your job and you hurt your employer.

In our fallen world everything tends toward ruin if you don't keep it up. Our bodies, our cars, our houses, our businesses, our churches.

God says a lazy person just a demolition expert in disguise. Laziness destroys everything it touches.

d) A lazy person doesn't do anything but usually thinks they know a lot. **Proverbs 26:16** He knows better than everybody else.

e) A lazy person is a master at excuses. **Proverbs 22:13**

"You certainly can't expect me to get the job done under those conditions."

As I read through these characteristics of a lazy person I wonder how many of them are the excuses we use for just plain old not doing what God wants us to do.

Not just at work, but when it comes to reading the Bible, sharing our faith with people, taking the time to be the husband or wife, or parent He wants us to be. Maybe serving in church or in some ministry.

It's clear that God doesn't want us to be lazy.

2) God doesn't want us to be dishonest. **Proverbs 11:18**

When I was in Junior High a friend hooked me up with a job hand delivering flyers advertising a small food market in our town. Back then there was a lot of little mom and pop businesses and this was one of them.

It was winter time and my friend and I picked up our flyers and started going door to door. After we had done a few blocks radius around the store my buddy threw the rest of his flyers in a trash fire.

You used to be able to burn trash in a container behind your house and he just saw a fire and dumped his in. He said, "Come on, it's cold and the guy who owns the store will never know. So I threw mine in too.

I threw the flyers the store owner had paid someone to have printed and paid me to have delivered.

I wasn't a Christian at that time but even then that didn't sit well with me. I decided not to deliver anymore flyers for the guy.

The wicked man does deceptive work.

Often times there can be a real problem here in how we perceive things.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Because God doesn't bring the hammer down on us instantly when we do wrong we can be deceived into thinking we're getting away with some thing.

Not only that, but it looks that way to others too. David wrote in Psalm 73:2-3 *my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

He said the fact that it looked like the wicked were doing fine while the rest of us were struggling nearly caused me to stumble in my faith.

The truth is the dishonest person might seem to be doing great but in reality their life is empty.

Proverbs 13:11, 15:27, 21:6

The movers and shakers at Enron, Arthur Andersen, Worldcom, Tyco, Adelphia, and Global Crossing all were flying high for a while. but the end wasn't pretty.

Proverbs 20: 17 Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, But afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.

Here's the question. If you're the manager and you have people under you, do you want someone who seems to make the company money but has a questionable character, or someone who can't quite match the sales figures of the other guy but you know is honest?

God says, go for the honest guy. In the end you'll be glad you did.

Proverbs 25:19 Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble Is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint.

I can't think of something much worse than a bad tooth. It will cripple you.

So, God doesn't want us to be lazy. God doesn't want us to be dishonest.

3) God doesn't want us to be greedy. **Proverbs 28:20 & 22**

Dishonesty is usually empowered by greed. But even if we're not dishonest we can still fall victim to greed.

What are you willing to do for \$10,000,000? Two-thirds of those polled said they would agree to at least one, some to several of the following:

Would abandon their entire family (25%)

Would abandon their church (25%)

Would become prostitutes for a week or more (23%)

Would give up their American citizenships (16%)

Would leave their spouses (16%)

Would withhold testimony and let a murderer go free (10%)

Would kill a stranger (7%)

Would put their children up for adoption (3%)

Greed is isn't only about wealth. You can be poor and greedy or wealthy and greedy. Greed is about attitude.

And that attitude is focused on self.

John Ortberg tells a story about his grandmother who immigrated to the United States from Norway. After she died, his grandfather found a box of blue dishes in the attic. His first thought was to call Goodwill.

Then he thought maybe his daughter would want them. He called John's mother and said, "I found this box of dishes in the attic, do you want to look at it before I get rid of it?"

She didn't remember any box of blue dishes her mother had so she went to the house to investigate. She opened the box and found the most fine, porcelain china she had ever seen in her life. Hand-painted. Irreplaceable. In mint condition. Never used.

As they investigated, they found in the community where the grandmother had been raised, the custom was on special events in a woman's life her family would pick out and give to her place settings in a particular pattern of china.

So on special birthdays, on a christening, baptism, first communion, graduation, whatever the occasion, family members would give her place settings of this beautiful hand-painted china. Ortberg's grandmother took it and put it in a box. It never again saw the light of day. It was placed up in the attic. Not even her own daughter was aware she had the stuff.

She looked at those dishes as being so important to her, she didn't think she could share it with anybody.

It became so important to her to cherish this gift that had been given to her, the gift was never used.

Greed wants to gather up stuff and hang on to it.

See we work to provide for ourselves and our family, but we're to do something else too.

Proverbs 13:7 There is one who makes himself rich, yet has nothing; And one who makes himself poor, yet has great riches.

Proverbs 14:21 He who despises his neighbor sins; But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.

Proverbs 14:31 He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.

Proverbs 19:17 He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, And He will pay back what he has given.

Proverbs 21:13 Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor Will also cry himself and not be heard.

Here's the absolute cure for greed. Work hard, make money, and take some and help the poor and truly needy.

I. *Proverbs Shows Us What Kind Of Worker God Doesn't Want Us To Be*

II. *Proverbs Shows Us What Kind Of Worker God Does Want Us To Be*

Proverbs 10:4

Proverbs 12:24 The hand of the diligent will rule

Proverbs 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty

A person who approaches their work with the attitude "I want to honor God" will be the best worker.

In the first century Roman world slavery was a common practice. The Romans defeated nations, looted their stuff, and took their citizens as slaves.

Slavery was, is, and always has been unjust and ungodly. But when Christianity began to spread, rather than calling for a slave revolt, the New Testament writers undermined the very foundations of slavery by telling masters to treat their slaves as Christ had treated them.

And then telling slaves this: *Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.* Colossians 3:22-24

If you're working an honest, legitimate job, you're not just working for an employer, you're working for Jesus Christ.

That means that no job is too small, no job is insignificant, no job is unimportant if you're doing it to honor God.

God rewards diligence. And when we're doing what we do for Him the benefits package can't be beat.

He who tills his land will be satisfied with bread... Proverbs 12:11

We reap the benefits of a paycheck. But there's something more. Something you can't put a price on.

A desire accomplished is sweet to the soul... Proverbs 13:19
There's an inner satisfaction with a job well done.

So God wants diligent, honest workers who do their best on the job ultimately because it honors Him.

Now I'm sure that some people here this morning are still struggling to see their job as part of God's plan and purpose.

But think about this. His ultimate goal for His children is maturity. Remember, at 40 hours a week adding in lunch and commuting, 45% of our total waking time for the whole year is wrapped up in our job.

Could you imagine a good parent saying, "I'm concerned about 55% of my kids life, but we'll just let the other 45% slide? I'm not concerned about that part when it comes to developing maturity."

No parent is going to say that, and neither is God. God is going to view our time at work not only as a time to put Him first, but a learning and growing time.

God uses pressures at work to teach us about responsibility. He uses people at work to teach us about relationships. And He uses problems and temptations at work to teach us character.

We need to learn God's principles in Bible studies. We need to become proficient in a knowledge of God's truth through sermons and teaching times. But sitting in a church service or a Bible study doesn't give us much opportunity to apply what we're learning.

That takes place in the rest of life. Life is the laboratory where we develop the application skills of God's truth.

This is literally on the job training. Because it's every day at work when the pressure is on that we really get the opportunity to apply God's laws.

How does God teach us love? By putting us with the unlovely because real love loves the unlovely.

How about joy and peace? He teaches us through difficulty and stress.

Where do you learn patience? On the beltway on the way to work.

Where do you learn goodness? When the boss puts pressure on us to do something unethical.

How about self control? He'll allow us to be criticized or passed over for that promotion.

Remember, your job isn't an end in itself. It's a means to an end. It allows you to support your family. It allows you to give to the poor and to God's work.

But it also builds character in you as you lean on God and the Bible to see you through.

How do you see your job this morning? Something to endure? Maybe your way to find meaning and significance? Maybe just an evil you put up with, a four letter word. God wants you to see it as so much more. Don't miss out on the exciting things He wants to work out in your life through your work.

Romans 8:28 *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*