

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 25 – Work

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Introduction

Isaiah 46:10 *“Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’”*

God is purposeful in all that He does. He was purposeful in creation, He is purposeful in calling people to salvation, He is purposeful in our sanctification, He is purposeful in the establishment of government, He is purposeful in providing us material resources and He is purposeful in providing us a means to gain those material resources. Because He is sovereign over all He is working every thing out for His good pleasure.

However, man in his depravity has chosen to ignore God and His purposes and has corrupted, perverted and twisted them in an attempt to satisfy our own lusts and desires. This is made evident by what we stick on our cars: I owe I owe so off to work I go; I had a life but my job ate it; Hard work never killed anyone...but why take the chance?; Work is that annoying time when I am not fishing; A steady job has ruined many a good hunter; Born to _____...Forced to work (fill in the blank with your favorite past time); Living for the weekend; or TGIF.

In taking on these attitudes and actions we miss the opportunity to take pleasure in and enjoy the perfect purpose God intended in work. Today we are going to look at work and see how man has twisted it to his purposes but also see what God intended when He gave it to us.

What Is Work?

As usual it is important to define what it is that we are talking about. First the secular definition:

“activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result”¹
This is a good general definition. Work may take many forms physically and mentally and there is not specific implication of whether there is compensation or not. It is just effort to achieve a purpose.

There are a lot of different Hebrew and Greek words used in the bible that are translated work. One, m^elaka, Sending forth one’s hand to accomplish a task² captures the thought as well. In the old testament the words for work often carry the thought of service and duty, and although are used to describe ordinary work they are often used in regard to the service and duty to God in carrying out the work in the tabernacle and temple.

¹ Google definition, accessed September 6, 2014

² **William D. Mounce, ed.**, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006)

For the purposes of this lesson we will focus on work as the activity surrounding the purpose of providing for ourselves and our families and gaining material resources to accomplish God purposes. This is one more area that God uses in our lives to accomplish His purposes. First work is a tool to provide for our needs and the needs of others. Second it is a way to test and refine our faith. Third it can be a testimony to His goodness and glory.

How are we to view work?

Having a proper view of work is foundational to us executing it in a God honoring way. Work permeates the Bible both old and new testament:

The bible is “an album of casual photographs of laborers...A book by workers, about workers, for workers – that is the bible”

Paul Minear “Work and Vocation in Scripture”³

Work is something that was demonstrated for us and commanded of us prior to the fall, so it should be viewed as a good and righteous use of our time and talents. It is something that we should embrace. It is one more opportunity that we have to serve God, to accomplish His will and bring Him Glory. Work is a gift from God

Ecclesiastes 3:13 “*moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—**it is the gift of God.**”*

Ecclesiastes 5:19 “*Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; **this is the gift of God.**”*

Work is a Blessing not a curse.

Why Are We To Work?

First and foremost I believe we are to work because as those created in the image of God we are to be reflecting God’s qualities into the world. We are to work because God set us an example and pattern for work...In the creation process God worked six days and rested the seventh.

Exodus 20:9-11 “***Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.**”*

The 7th day was the opportunity to not do regular work but be about the work of reflection of what God has done. And God continues to work carrying out His purposes in our lives

John 5:17 “*But He answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.’”*

Philippians 2:13 “*for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”*

We are to work because God established the expectation that we work in the garden. Adam was assigned work before sin and death entered the world through His choices.

³ As quoted by R. Paul Stevens, *Work Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012)

He was to subdue the earth

Genesis 1:28 *“God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*”

He was to tend the garden

Gen2:15 *“Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it”*

He was to name all of the animals

Gen2:19-20 *“Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field”*

As all this occurred before Adam sinned, while the Earth was perfect, work is then a good thing...It is of and from God

We are to work because it is the primary means that God has given us to provide for our family’s need and not be a burden to others. The Bible gives examples of four ways to rightly obtain material possessions:

We may receive a gift. We see gift giving throughout scripture as a valid form of passing wealth. Jacob to Esau (Genesis 33:11); Nebuchadnezzar to Daniel (Daniel 2:6, 48); Wise Men to Jesus (Matthew 2:11); Believers to Paul (Philippians 4:16). A gift is not something that we ask to receive...it is given fully at the choice and discretion of the giver. A gift is a voluntary means of honoring another and supporting their work.

We may receive an inheritance. An inheritance is a good thing to leave your family.
Proverbs 13:22 *“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children,”*

We see Jesus mention the practice in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:16-32). In this case the practice was not condemned but the inheritance was squandered. Biblically passing on an inheritance was a means of providing for yourself into the future. Your retirement if you will. That is why the eldest son got a double portion (Deut 21:16-17). The expectation was that they would care for the family...including you when you can no longer provide for yourself. This is another way you may receive money but again the amount and timing is fully at the discretion of the giver (or God)

Receive a return on investment. This may be accomplished by earning interest or working to earn a profit. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-28) commends this practice from the labor side. There is profit in labor

Proverbs 14:23 *“In all labor there is profit, But mere talk leads only to poverty.”*

The Proverbs 31 woman has earnings and gain through her investment of labor (Proverbs 31:16, 18). A return on investment is primarily under your control and is done at your discretion.

As we look at what is the norm in scripture, it is work, either paid or unpaid, that we are to use to provide for ourselves rather than primarily receiving a return on investment (where no physical labor is involved), relying upon gifts or an inheritance.

God expected Adam to work for his food after the fall. It did however become toil because of the curse (Genesis 3:17-19).

We are to provide for ourselves and not be a burden to others

2 Thessalonians 3:7-10 *“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, **but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you;** not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, **so that you would follow our example.** For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: **if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.**”*

It is not strictly the domain of the male of the household

Titus 2:3-5 *“Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.”*

We are to provide for our extended family (Tim 3:14).

We are to work so that we have the resources to serve and provide for others (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

We need to work in order to have the resources to accomplish God’s purposes in our own lives and the lives of those around us. We are to work to bring glory to God and to accomplish his purposes through the furtherance of the common good.

How are we to work?

Many of the commands surrounding how we are to work given in the Bible are in regard to the master/slave relationship. Here in the U.S. we are not masters or slaves but we can lift those principles and apply them to our current work situation. Even though we are not slaves we do need to understand that there is a God ordained authority structure in the work place (Ephesians 6:5-9; Col 3:22-4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; 1 Pet 2:18-20). God is sovereign in establishing where you fall within that authority structure.

- As we work we are to honor those over us so that God will not be dishonored
1 Timothy 6:1 *“All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor **so that the name of God and our doctrine will not be spoken against.**”*
- We are to work in subjection and to be well-pleasing to those over us so that they may adorn the doctrine of God in regard to salvation
Titus 2:9-10 *“Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing...showing all good faith **so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect**”*

- We are to obey...except when we are commanded to sin (Colossians 3:22 / Acts 5:29)
- We are to respect and fear our “masters” (Ephesians 6:5)
- We are not to talk back or argue (Titus 2:9)
- We are not to steal (Titus 2:10)
- We are to serve wholeheartedly, not to please men but as if working for the Lord (Colossians 3:23-24)
- We are to work to the benefit our employer, even more so if they are believers (1 Timothy 6:2)
- We are to do this even to unjust or harsh “masters” (1 Peter 2:18)
- There are even directions to the “master”
 - You are not to threaten or use intimidation to “motivate” (Ephesians 6:7)
 - You are to remember that you are a slave of Christ and to be doing the will of the Father (Ephesians 6:9)
 - You are to provide what is just and fair (Colossians 4:1)

We are to work in such a way as to provide a testimony of God’s goodness and to gain opportunity for the gospel.

Real Life Scenarios

Yourself

You find yourself constantly focused on getting to the “weekend” and contemplating your next recreational activity. What attitudes might this communicate to those around you? What scriptures might you turn to in order to evaluate and potentially modify your attitudes?

Someone Else

A believing friend is spending 70-80 hours a week at the workplace on a consistent basis. What questions might you ask to evaluate the situation?

Conclusion

God has given us the opportunity to and expects us to gain resources through work to accomplish His purposes in the world. How we view and accomplish that work is an opportunity to test, refine and demonstrate our faith. If our attitudes toward work and the way we accomplish work reflect God’s image then there is also great opportunity to advance the gospel...because the world is watching and godly work is going to be notable.

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

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1. How does knowing that God called for work before Adam sinned change the way you view work?
2. What ways are you using work to serve those around you?
3. What temptations do you face while working? How are you working to deal with those temptations? What scriptures are you bringing to bear?
4. If you really believe that you are working for God and not man, how does that change your attitudes and actions at work?
5. Take a moment to pray for your boss, your employees or fellow workers and your effect upon them as you work.
6. Memorize Colossians 3:23