



Work

“ whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Notes:

1. This Bible Study was adapted from a radio program series titled “Thank God It’s Monday” aired February through April in 2001. Thanks to Alice Mathews, Haddon Robinson, and Mart De Haan for their insightful conversations.
2. Scripture used in this Bible Study is from the New King James Version.

If you were to rate on a scale of 1-10 how important your job is to God, what would you say? What do you think of the following possible answers?

1. I’d say my job is a 1 or a 2 with God, my work is completely separate from my spiritual life.
 - This is not true. Clearly God’s desire is to be involved in all aspects of our life. If our faith is genuine, we can not separate faith in God from our work.
2. I’d say my job is a 3 or 4 with God, my work is important to God but not as important as pasturing or missionary work.
 - This is not true either. If God is in control of all things, He has placed us where we are for a reason. Thus we are working where we are to serve God’s purpose.
3. I’d say my job is a 1 or 10 with God, my job is a mission field where I witness as well as make money to fund evangelism.
 - This is closer but still is not totally true. Over aggressiveness can hurt the cause of Christ. If our evangelistic activities impacts the quality of our work for our employer then it is a bad witness.

Why we work

Why do we work?

- God Himself works...

Genesis 2:3 - Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.
- People are created in God’s image so work is part of our purpose in life.

Genesis 1:27 - God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.
- It was ordained by God that we should work.

Genesis 1:26 - Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

- Indeed Adam was working even from the beginning in the Garden of Eden...

Genesis 2:15 - Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.

What kind of work does God do?

God created the universe and He is still at work sustaining it...

Colossians 1:16-17 - For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

How does knowing that we are reflecting the image of God when we work add dignity to our work?

We are joining with God in sustaining His creation when we work. Thus our work has a greater purpose than just getting a job done.

But surely not all work reflects the image of God... Do drug dealers reflect the image of God when they work?

No, the work of drug dealers does not reflect the image of God. We need to make a distinction between legitimate work that helps people and illegitimate work that hurts people.

What is the proper motivation for the Christian to work?

The proper motivation for the Christian to work is to serve others and make a living.

What are the two great commandments of God?

Jesus said that we should love God and love our neighbor: Matthew 22:37-40 - Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." "This is the first and great commandment. "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

How can we love God if we separate our work life from our spiritual life?

We spend a major part of our life at work. If we deny God being a part of that aspect of our lives, we are not loving Him.

How do we show love for our neighbor by the way we work?

- Where are you going to find your neighbor? Our neighbors are people in need that are around us. We are in a position to serve our peers, supervisors, employees, customers, associates, etc.
- We should include our family as being neighbors, indeed they are closest to us. We love our family by providing for them (God provides for us through our work)...
 - 1 Timothy 5:8 - But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

What about disabled people who can not work? If a person becomes disabled and can no longer provide for their family, are they worse than an unbeliever?

God does not expect you do what you can not do so there are exceptions to the general principle that if you are able to work, you should work.

Your job today is the will of God

How does it change your view of your job if you see it as the will of God for you?

Seeing our job as the will of God for us helps us to see the dignity in our work.

There was a factory in England where the workers pushed their wheelbarrows, except for one slow worker: he pulled his wheelbarrow. A visitor asked the foreman why this man was so different from the others. "Oh, him!? He hates the sight of the bloomin' thing!"

Do you think many people feel what that worker felt about his job? What are the consequences of being in a job you hate?

It's a tragedy when you spend the greater part of your life doing something you despise. It affects your family, your attitude toward recreation, free time, etc.

Reference: Ephesians 6:5-9

"Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not

to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him."

What kind of change can Christians make as they look at their job? What kind of change is described in our text?

If you can't change your job, you can change your attitude.

How do you change your attitude?

You can understand that your job is the will of God for you: "...doing the will of God from the heart."

What difference does understanding that your job is the will of God for you make?

It makes your job more of a ministry, something that has a calling to it, something that is bigger than yourself.

Listen to what Paul writes to Christian slaves and masters. Listen to the way the workers and the owners are to think about that they do...

Whom did Paul tell the servants that they are serving?

Paul said that servants should be as servants of Jesus Christ.

Why is it that whoever we serve, ultimately we are serving the Lord?

God is in control of all things and He puts authorities in our lives to act on His behalf...

Romans 13:1 - Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

If your job is the will of God for you, who is your boss?

If you are serving where God wants you to be, then you are serving Jesus Christ on your job. Jesus Christ is your employer. I like the bumper sticker: "My Boss is a Jewish Carpenter."

In the passage, what difference should it make if you know that when you're doing your work, you're really doing it for your Lord or Master, Jesus Christ.

- By the way I do my job, with the decisions I make daily, I have the opportunity to glorify God.
- God has put me where I am for a purpose, He is using me to further His interests even if I don't understand how.
- By my conduct at work, I can be laying up treasures in heaven (a portion of the fruit of my labors are saved for worldly use, some are saved for eternal use).

Do you think the church has done a good job of reinforcing secular work as working for God?

It is rare to hear in church that work as a carpenter or plumber or housewife is doing their Christian duty.

What should we be telling people doing secular work?

That a calling as a carpenter or plumber or housewife is every bit as much a calling as pastor, evangelist, or missionary.

Your Job is a calling

Do you enjoy your work?

We sometimes think that other people have dream jobs and that work for them is a constant delight, but that is seldom the case.

Paderewski was one of the most diligent concert pianists about practicing. He once played before Queen Victoria. She said, "Mr. Paderewski, you are a genius." He replied, "That may well be, but before I was a genius, I was a drudge."

It's not what we do, but the attitude with which we do it that can make a difference in our jobs. In Ephesians 6:5-8, Paul gives Christians a new way to look at their jobs:

Ephesians 6:5-8 - Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

Studs Terkel, in his book *Working* says that most people find their jobs confining and stifling. He quotes Nora Watson, who put her concern this way: "I think most of us are looking for a calling, not a job. Most of us, like the assembly line worker, have jobs that are too small for our spirit, jobs that are not big enough for people."

What is a calling?

A calling is a mission given to us by God. A calling is a purpose in life to do something bigger than ourselves.

Look again at Ephesians 6:5-8, what is the attitude that comes when you are serving Jesus Christ on the job?

We do our work as sacred service *"with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart"* (v.5).

What does it mean we should do our work *"with fear and trembling"*?

This is not fear before our worldly boss, but fear of the Lord. This means that we should work with reverence and awe because it is not just work, it is service to the Creator.

We fear and tremble before whom?

We work before God Himself. Yes God has established authorities over us but God is a "hands-on" manager and knows more about our work than our human supervisors do.

What does it mean we do our work in *"sincerity of heart"* (v.5)?

- We should not just view our work as routine where we are just going through the motions.
- We do our work with integrity, *"not with eyeservice as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ"* (v.6).

What picture comes to mind when you think of *"eyeservice"*?

Our work is not just for show, to be seen as a good worker, we are to accomplish something vital. What we do may appear like a small part but we don't see the bigger picture ourselves and the impact our good work can have on that bigger picture.

What is wrong with working as men-pleasers?

Working as men-pleasers falls short of the mark God has established for His children. We are called to a higher standard. Satisfying men means doing good work when you are in the sight of them. But satisfying God means doing good work all the time whether you are in the sight of men or not.

What does it mean that when we see ourselves working directly for the Jewish Carpenter that we will do our work with goodwill (v.7)?

This means we will have a good spirit concerning our work, that we will be interested in the good of others. Goodwill is about relationship building and this is often more important than the results of the work itself.

What good should we be doing in our work (v.8)? Who should be benefiting from our work?

We do good for our employer. We do good for those who get our product. We do good for those around us by the way we work.

How do I know I've been called to work at TI?

(1) It is where I found myself when I was saved...

1 Cor 7:20-24 - Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

(2) God has gifted me to do this job, He has given me the skills, passion and opportunity (same criteria as given ministers who are candidates for ordination).

(3) I trust that God knows best that I can represent Him best where I am for now.

At a theological seminary or when people are being ordained to the professional ministry, they're often asked, "Do you have a call?" What do you think is meant by that?

A call is God making His will for us known.

Why is it important for someone in ministry to have this call?

If you are not acting in accord with God's will, you will be ineffective, a failure and miserable. God has a mission for all of us but this mission is matched to the gifts He has given us. Our calling must match our gifts or our efforts will be counter-productive.

Do we ever ask if someone who is going into business has a calling?

No, we don't usually think of secular jobs in terms of a mission from God.

Why don't we usually think of secular pursuits in terms of a calling?

People have a propensity to containerize certain aspects of their life. People think they need to have some separation between their spiritual life and their everyday working life. But this is not how God looks at things, God will judge us on how we spend all our time.

If we can see our work as a calling, no matter what that work is, how does that change what we do on the job?

When we see our work as a calling, we should see our work as a way in which we proclaim God's truth.

If we have different work options, how do we know which job is the right one for us?

Here are five questions we can ask ourselves about our work options to determine the best one:

1. Is what I am doing the most productive thing I can do with my life in the present circumstances?
2. Does my vocation make the best use of the talents and skill God has given me? (the best money may not be the best use of your talents and skill)
3. Does my work allow me to treat all persons as being important to God? (if a salesman is required to lie to customers to make a sale, then this job should be rejected)
4. Is the work the kind of occupation I can pray about on the job? Can God work in and through me? (the runner in *Chariots of Fire* said, "when I run I feel the smile of God upon me")
5. Is this the only position open to me at this time? (good, practical advice)

Adorning the doctrine of God

Reference: Titus 2:9-10

"Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things."

That is a basic truth that we find in Paul's letter to Titus. Titus was sent to the island of Crete to establish a church. What do you know about Crete?

Crete was a difficult place to minister. It had a reputation throughout the Roman world because the people had sunk to a deplorable moral level. They were lazy, irresponsible, drunk. Pagans had difficulty describing the dishonesty, laziness, and gluttony of the people living in Crete. One of their poets (Epimenides) described the people as "liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons."

What strategy did Paul recommend to Titus for ministering in that hard place? (What is the book of Titus known for?)

- He was to set up people of character as leaders in the church. They were to be people who taught and modeled the message.
- They were also to make the message practical, to teach people what was in accord with sound doctrine.

Who does Paul say should have good character in Titus Chapter 2?

Paul applies the doctrine of leaders having good character to men (verse 2) women (verse 3), men, and to slaves (verse 9).

Of all the things slaves are to do per Titus 2:9-10, what is the net effect that summarizes what they should do?

Slaves are to "*adorn the doctrine of God*" in all things (in the way they work).

What is the doctrine of God?

The doctrine of God is what God teaches us through the Bible. It is all about who God is, who we are, why we are here, how we may have purpose in life, etc.

The one place in Titus that talks about reaching people other than establishing a church and teaching the Bible is adorning the doctrine of God in your work. What does it mean to "*adorn the doctrine of God*"? (What image comes to your mind when you think of adorning?)

It means to set the doctrine of God forth in its most attractive fashion in the way we live in ordinary life. We should wear the doctrine of God like clothing. Others should see the doctrine of God as that which covers us.

What difference might wearing the doctrine of God have made in Crete?

Those who wore the doctrine of God would have stood out by being truthful.

Why is being truthful important?

It is necessary to be accepted as being truthful in order to be effective in fulfilling the Great Commission. Being truthful is like God is, it is necessary when you love others as God loves us.

In Titus 2:9-10, Paul is writing to bondservants or slaves, how is this applicable to us today?

I like the word bondservants here better than slaves because the word slave has connotations associated with it as a result of the type of slavery we had in North America. The type of slavery they had in biblical times is better described as bondservant-hood, where people were essentially employees of another like we have today. To be an employee today means that we are obligated to do a job by a contract, a similar concept.

What difference might wearing the doctrine of God mean for us today?

The same as it did in Crete. The pervasive condition in our society today is materialism, the idea that, "*the Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be,*" as quoted by the late Carl Sagan, a prominent spokesperson for the atheist perspective. I believe that the materialism of our age has made lying as common in our society today as it was in ancient Crete.

How might being truthful help us to stand out in the midst of the materialism that is so popular today?

People living out their materialistic beliefs do all things with selfish motives modifying their moral code to accommodate their self-interests. When we are truthful, honest, and act selflessly, we will stand out in a crowd and there will be something about us that people will be attracted to.

How is materialism a religion?

When Sagan said that, "*the Cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be,*" he was making a statement of faith. Robert C. Newman, who has a Cornell doctorate in astrophysics commented on Sagan's creed during a 1981 lecture at Cornell, "*By Sagan's own definition of the methodology of science, this is not a scientific statement. This is a religious statement, Sagan could not have researched everything in the past and it's impossible to do lab work in the future. Thus, 'the Cosmos is all that is,' must be considered a faith statement.*"

Reference: Titus 2:9-14

Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering,

but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

Paul mentions five things that mark out the calling of God for servants as they do their work. What are they?

1. They are to be subject to those in authority over them.
2. They are to try to please their boss in all things.
3. They are not to talk back.
4. They are not to steal from their boss.
5. They are to show all good fidelity, that is, to show they can be trusted.

How do we "adorn the doctrine of God" by the way we do our work?

We adorn the doctrine of God by setting forth God's truth in an attractive fashion.

Do you think that Christians are making a great impact on our society today?

No, it appears to me that it is the other way around, that society is making a great impact on the church. Lives are being changed on a case-by-case basis but society as a whole does not seem to be effected by the church.

If you were to devise a strategy for Christianity so that it stands out in the modern world, what elements might you include?

Just what Titus 11-13 says, that we should be:

denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ

What is our blessed hope?

Our blessed hope is our resurrection into eternal, glorified bodies, the same kind that Jesus showed us following His resurrection.

When will the blessed hope occur?

The church will be resurrected together with those who died in Christ at the rapture, prior to God pouring out His wrath on the earth during the tribulation. When we become like Christ, we will see Him...

I Jn 3:2 - Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

How does looking for our blessed hope make us stand out in the world?

If we expect the Lord to return at any moment, we are continuously making ourselves ready for Him. That means we live righteously expecting that we could be in His presence at any moment. This kind of righteous living is unusual in the world and will be noticed. There are also the byproducts of being in a relationship with God that makes us stand out in the world...

Gal 5:22-23 - the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

As Philippians 4:6-7 makes clear, these fruits of the Spirit stand out in the world because they defy all understanding by those who don't know the Lord...

Phil 4:6-7 - Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Since the Scripture calls us to wear the doctrine of God in our work, it must be common to dishonor the doctrine of God on the job. How do people dishonor the doctrine of God?

It is possible that by our poor work and poor attitudes at work that we actually cause people to blaspheme God and the truth about God...

1 Timothy 6:1-2 - Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.

- Many people have been badly wounded by Christians who cheated them or have done poor work.
- A physician who does poor medicine becomes a poor witness both to his patients and to his colleagues.
- A builder who professes to be a Christian, but doesn't keep his promises and performs work below standard can't be trusted. Such a man undermines the Christian witness in the community thus blaspheming the name of God. Those who do business with such a builder will be repelled from the doctrine he professes.

Serving other Christians

Should there be any difference in our service to Christ based on where we work?

No matter where we work, we should above all serve Christ.

Would you prefer to have a Christian or a non-Christian work for you?

I'd prefer to have another Christian work for me because Christians should do better work given that they are ultimately working for the Lord. That's the theory but in practice, many Christians take advantage of working for a Christian employer and are not as diligent as they would be in another situation.

Would you rather work for a Christian or for a non-Christian?

I'd rather work for another Christian because managers with a bigger picture perspective are always better managers.

There is a tendency to give poorer service to a Christian employer than to a non-Christian. Why?

- We often think of our Christian "witness" when we're working with non-Christians. We often feel much less responsibility to employers who are fellow believers.
- Paul was aware of this even in the first century. We see that in 1 Timothy 6:1-2...

"Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things."

Why should we actually give better service to a Christian employer?

- We owe honor and good work to anyone, and we owe it to Christians because we are part of the same family.
- Because they're brothers and sisters, they are very dear to us.
- A Christian worker will do everything possible to keep everyone in the community of faith or outside the community from slandering God and His truth.
- God sees the church as an organism, not just as an organization. How we relate to other Christians is important to God. It's important on Sunday morning, but it's just as important on Monday morning in the workplace.

Giving glory to the grind

Reference: 2 Thessalonians 3:7-12

"For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an

example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, you commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread."

Why do people in general work?

We work to earn a living. Anyone who has lost a job can tell you that...

Calvin Miller tells a parable of a king who commanded his wise men to condense all human wisdom into a small and manageable area of print. After 12 years of work, they returned to him with 12 volumes. "It's too large," he said. "Condense it further." They spent another year and came back with a single volume. "No," said the king, "it's still too large. Condense it further." The next day the wise men came back with only one line on a piece of paper: "There is no free lunch."

Why do Christians work?

We don't work simply to live; we live to serve God through our work.

What does the Christian perspective bring to mundane tasks?

A Christian view of work gives a touch of glory to the grind.

How does God supply our need for daily bread?

- One way that God supplies our needs is by giving us jobs.
- Paul wrote to his friends in Thessalonica, reminding them, *"For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat"* (2 Thess. 3:10). In verse 12, Paul said, *"We command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that you work in quietness and eat your own bread."*

Why is idleness a problem?

Idleness can get us into trouble. We enjoy recreation when it is a relief or break from daily work but in excess, idleness can tempt us to sin.

Since work is not optional, how should we regard the way we work?

The way we work gives our life significance. This should be an important part of our witness in the world.

Paul writes a great deal to slaves about the way they work. There is more in the New Testament about our work than there is about the relationships of husbands and wives, parents and children. We have a lot of conferences on family life, but we don't have nearly as

many conferences on the dignity and significance of daily work. Why?

People don't recognize that God is in control and is the One who gives us work to do, that it is a calling for us. People have separated their working lives from the rest of their lives but that is not God's plan for us.

The Christian work ethic

One passage among many helped slaves in the Roman empire and helps us to see our work in a new way. It is Ephesians 6:5-8: *"Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free."*

What do we learn about work from this passage?

We learn that our job is the will of God for us today.

When we talk about the Protestant or Puritan work ethic, what do we mean?

Each person has a holy calling in their work, and their assignment is to render a good account to God for the work they do.

How important is it to render a good account to God for the work they do?

Our whole civilization owes a whole lot more to that theological principle than we realize or that we are willing to admit. Managers can not watch everything you do but God does. Knowing that some day you'll have the ultimate performance review will cause you to do a good job even when your earthly manager is out of pocket.

What is the state of the Christian work ethic today?

The Christian work ethic is breaking down today. A great many Americans don't feel that they have any real responsibility in their daily work. This is because Christians are compromising with the popular culture that believes we are accountable to no one but ourselves...

Deut 12:8 - You shall not at all do as we are doing here today-- every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes

When you hear or see the letters TGIF, what comes to your mind?

Thanking God that it is Friday means we are focused on the weekend when we don't have to work but it would be closer to the biblical principle to thank God that it's a work day.

The value of work

Reference: Proverbs 6:6-8

"Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest."

What can we learn from ants?

Ants can teach us important lessons about the value of work. Ants can help us realize that work is a blessing from God.

When you hear the word Puritan or puritanical, what images or feelings come to your mind?

Part of the Puritan ethic was that work was a blessing from God and it was good in and of itself. The rewards that come from work are far more than the money earned.

Why are the intangible rewards that come from work more valuable than the money?

My work gives me purpose in life and is a creative outlet for me. God has called me to do the work that I am doing. Efficiently solving customer problems is creation. It is one small way I can bring order to the universe. Sometimes I review the work I've done and it amazes me. I could not have really done it, God did it through me. When I'm being creative and bringing order to my areas of responsibility, I'm being like God since He is the Creator and is in the creation business.

Can you take the Christian work ethic too far?

Yes, like any good thing that is over-done can become bad, too much work is wrong.... It's possible for men and women in our society to become workaholics. They're obsessive-compulsive types who can't take one day off in a week.

Why is too much work a bad thing?

- If for example, people work every day, they set themselves up as being more industrious than our Creator. This really denies God's role in making things happen.
- Work can be used to avoid other responsibilities.

One of the characters in the book of Proverbs is the sluggard. What is a sluggard?

- The sluggard is more stupid than an ant. Proverbs 6:6-8 states, *"Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest."*

- Here is a man created in the image of God who is told to go to school where the ant is a teacher.

What does the ant teach about the value of self-discipline (v.7)?

The ant goes about its tasks naturally. It's a self-starter. The ant takes the initiative, it is not responding to circumstance.

What does the ant teach us about being industrious?

- The ant carries its food a grain at a time. It bears a heavy load as it collects enough food for a year.
- You're capable of work and you should work. The Bible is more favorable toward "right to work" laws than "right to eat" laws.

What does the ant teach us about being prudent and preparing for the future?

- It's not wrong to save for the future. In fact, a savings program is wise.
- Saving is not a matter of hoarding for self-indulgence, but preparing for life's necessities.

Where is the line between covetousness and prudence?

When you accumulate more than you need, that is covetousness.

Reference: Proverbs 26:14-16

"As a door turns on its hinges, so does the lazy man turn on his bed. The lazy man buries his hand in the bowl; it wearies him to bring it back to his mouth. The lazy man is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly."

What do you think of a person who opts not to work when they can work?

Such a person is lazy and has weak character. Continued laziness causes their character to be even weaker.

Do you think of yourself as a lazy person?

Have you ever met anyone who said, "I'm lazy"?

Laziness is an attribute that people just do not want to attribute to themselves. The book of Proverbs gives us some criteria against which to measure ourselves.

What does it mean that a lazy man turns on his bed like a door on its hinges?

A lazy person is a procrastinator, someone who can't get started.

What is the problem with not getting started?

You will not get anything accomplished, you do not fulfill the purpose God has set for you.

If you ask a lazy man, "How long before this will be ready?" or, "When will you have that done?" what kind of an answer will he give if he can't get started?

The lazy person will either have to lie or give an indefinite answer. The lazy person has learned not to be specific in order to avoid lying.

What does it mean that a lazy man puts his hand in the bowl but it wearies him to bring it back to his mouth?

If a lazy person does get started on something, he finds it very difficult to actually finish it. For the lazy person, the effort to finish is too much, so they quit.

How does God expect us to use Proverbs 26:14-16?

God wants us to use this passage to evaluate ourselves as to whether or not we are lazy.

Proverbs 12:27 tells us that *"the lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, but diligence is man's precious possession."*

What does Proverbs 12:27 tell us about the benefits of bringing a project to fruition?

Character is made when I make a commitment and I follow through on it. Such character pleases God and has eternal value.

What kind of a perspective does the lazy person have?

How does a lazy person view reality?

A lazy person won't face things realistically. It's a matter of character when we shut our eyes to reality. The lazy person rationalizes his laziness...

"The lazy man says, "There is a lion in the road! A fierce lion is in the streets!" (Proverbs 26:13).

What does the lazy person spend more time doing rather than actually working?

The lazy person spends more time thinking up reasons for not working than he actually spends working.

- I don't want to be pushed!
- I don't want to be caught up in the rat race of life!
- Work injures health.

The lazy person makes a habit of the soft choice. His character suffers as much as his business.

What is the difference between being a sluggard and taking a break from work?

The sluggard isn't someone who is idle now and then. The book of Proverbs doesn't criticize someone who takes a break from work or who enjoys a vacation. There is great satisfaction in rest that has been earned. The sluggard is someone who will avoid work that he should be doing.

Character

Let me give you some maxims that you'll find expressed in a number of books:

- Your attitude determines your altitude.
- Smiling wins more friends than frowning.
- Whatever you can conceive and believe, you can achieve.
- If you can win friends, you can influence people.

Are these maxims useful?

Personality growth, communication skills, and positive thinking can be beneficial. You do influence people by the way you think and act. The human spirit is very powerful, but as we will discuss, limited and flawed.

Do you see the glass as half-full or half-empty? Why is a positive mental attitude is better than a negative mental attitude?

People are attracted to those who are positive about the outlook. A positive mental attitude gives you more opportunities to influence people.

Why is it a good thing to be in a position to influence others?

Influence is an important ingredient in getting along with people. For the Christian, it is necessary to be able to fulfill the Great Commission.

However, what are the downsides to this personality approach to winning friends and influencing people?

- It can be manipulative... You can use techniques simply to get people to like you in order to get them to do what you want them to do.
- You can fake your interest in the hobbies or interests of other people to get what, but you're still faking it.

What is the problem with being manipulative in human relationships?

Being manipulative is not as effective as sincerity because most people can see through it. It also relies on our own efforts and not God (therefore its value is of the world and not eternal).

Which is better in getting work done, character or techniques?

Traits of character are more important than techniques in the way we do our work. If you have the right traits of character, then some of the techniques are ways of making people comfortable around you.

Which is easier to develop, character or techniques?

Techniques resemble cramming for an exam in school without mastering the subject. Character is like building up the body, but it takes constant exercise over a period of time to develop the muscles of the body.

What does God care more about, what we get done or how we get done what we do?

Notice in the Proverbs that God is deeply interested in the way we do our work:

- Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight (Proverbs 11:1).
- He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live (Proverbs 15:27)
- Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth is filled with gravel (Proverbs 20:17)
- Getting treasures by a lying tongue is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death (Proverbs 21:8)
- Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will increase (Proverbs 13:11).

How would you sum-up God's counsel in these verses for how to have success in business?

When God speaks about success in business, His emphasis falls on character. God is always more interested in what we are than in our techniques for living life.

God delights in honesty

Do you think the average Christian sees much connection between faith and work?

No, people have a propensity to containerize their faith and the rest of their lives.

Do you think the average pastor sees much relationship between faith and daily work?

No, most sermons seem to be on relationships between people. Work is not seen as a spiritual activity.

Do you think the Bible sees much connection between faith and daily work?

Certainly, the book of Proverbs is a book of wisdom and it relates wisdom to the marketplace. It is interesting to note that the word for wisdom in the Hebrew means a skill...

- It was used for the builders of the tabernacle.
- It was also used for the people who wove Aaron's garments.
- It was used of Solomon who governed his kingdom with skill.
- It was used in the Psalms of those who sail the seas in ships.

How does wisdom benefit people?

Wisdom is a skill for living. It applies the skill to daily life and has a lot to say about our work.

What work characteristic is God addressing in Proverbs 20:10, 11:1, and 20:23?

- "Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to the Lord" (Proverbs 20:10).
- "Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight" (Proverbs 11:1).
- "Diverse weights are an abomination to the Lord, and dishonest scales are not good" (Proverbs 20:23)

God is addressing honesty in the workplace. God makes it clear that dishonesty is an abomination to Him while He delights in honesty in the workplace.

How could merchants in Old Testament times cheat customers?

Merchants in the marketplace could cheat customers by rigging the scales in a number of ways:

- An overweight shekel placed on one side of the balance required a customer to place too much gold on the other side.
- If the balance could be slightly bent, the customer could be bilked even more.

These may seem like little things, but God says that they are an abomination to Him. They are big with God.

What do you think about the advice that "honesty is the best policy"?

Dishonesty is a bad policy with God. Honesty and dishonesty not only matter to a customer, but they matter to God.

Have you ever gone to another culture and bargained in the marketplace? How do you feel when you do that?

- There is a distinct feeling that you are getting cheated when you can argue for a better price. The merchant would have sold it to me at a higher price and maybe you should have held out for even more of a discount.
- The merchants in the marketplaces of ancient Israel had a number of ways of taking advantage of customers, they overcharged and undersupplied in several ways: "When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit, that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals even sell the bad wheat?" (Amos 8:5-6).

Does God care about what goes on in the marketplace?

Of course He does...

Proverbs 11:1 - "Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight."

The parallelism in Proverbs 11:1 is antithetical. It deals with opposites. What are the contrasts in this verse?

First, it contrasts dishonest with just. Second, it contrasts the Lord's response: abomination vs. delight.

What does abomination mean?

Abomination may be the strongest term in the Hebrew language to speak of God's abhorrence of something.

What does God delight in?

Delight was the word used of God's acceptance of sacrifices and the person offering them. For example...

Leviticus 1:3-4 - 'If his offering is a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it of his own free will at the door of the tabernacle of meeting before the LORD. Then he shall put his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be **accepted** on his behalf to make atonement for him.

What kind of sacrifices do we make at work?

- Work can be a humbling experience because we are all subject to those who are supervisors over us.
- We should even be prepared to yield to those we work with for things to go smoothly at work.
- Work takes time where we set aside our own agenda for that of our employer.

How do our sacrifices at work please God?

Sacrifices are necessary for us to be in the will of God. When we are making the appropriate sacrifices, we are living according to God's plan for us.

How can the way we conduct our work be an abomination to God?

For some people in business, cheating becomes a fine art, but it's an abomination to God. People in garages charge for work they didn't do or install inferior parts and charge for more expensive ones. People lie about a product. You feel that for a transaction to be honest, it has to be put down in writing.

How may God be delighted with businessmen?

God is delighted when those in business deal with integrity. For example, we're delighted with the car repairman who charged less than the estimate when the work was less. We're delighted when that happens, but more important, God is delighted.

God hates dishonesty

Reference: Proverbs 20:10, 23

"Diverse weights and diverse measures, they are both alike, an abomination to the Lord.... Diverse weights are an abomination to the Lord, and dishonest scales are not good."

Why does God hate cheating in the marketplace?

God hates cheating because of what it does to us and what it does to others.

Why did God give us Proverbs 10:10, 23?

God gave us this passage to help us remember to be honest in our dealings with others.

Why do people in business sometimes cheat the customer?

Greed, they want more and they think that cheating is a valid way to get more.

How do you think people who cheat rationalize to themselves what they do?

- Everybody else is doing it. Or my competition does it.
- If the customer doesn't know their being cheated there is no harm done.

Why does God hate cheating in the marketplace?

- It's a sin against God. It is a lie. In the early part of Proverbs there's a constant emphasis on integrity and truthfulness.
- It's a denial that God is in control of all things and that we will some day be judged for our actions.

What example does God give us for how we should work?

God deals with us in integrity. He gives us His Word, and His character is behind it.

Heb 6:18 - it is impossible for God to lie

How should God's character impact the way we Christians do our work?

We as Christians reflect the character of God. It ought to be a family trait. It ought to be part of our witness.

How does cheating affect other people?

- It doesn't do good to a neighbor, but harm. It takes advantage of other people.
- When a culture is shot through with lying and deceit, the fabric of a community is destroyed. A community is held together by promises made and promises acted on.

What do you think God thinks of under-the-table dealings in business?

God does not like under-the-table dealings in business and He warns us about them because what looks like a short-cut to business success can have bad consequences.

Have you ever been in a country where bribery is a way of life?

Mexico and many Central and South American Nations have a problem with bribery that has really held them back economically.

How do you feel compromised in a society that tolerates bribery?

You never know if you are giving enough and it makes you subject to the whims of the authorities. In the business world you don't have an equal playing field because you don't know what is going on behind the scenes.

Why do people make bribes?

Bribes get results. If they didn't, there wouldn't be a problem.

"A present is a precious stone in the eyes of its possessor; wherever he turns, he prospers" (Proverbs 17:8).

Why is "bribe" translated "present" in Proverbs 17:8?

Seldom do people who deal in bribes call them that name. They let them take the form of "gifts" to buy influence.

Why do people receive bribes?

- From the perspective of the person who takes the bribe, it promises his prosperity.
- Those who take them see them as little gems. They prosper, but that isn't the entire story.

How does the taker of bribes hurt himself and his family?

The stock manipulators who sought to beat the market by paying for insider information were ultimately brought down by their greed. Their families were hurt.

"He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live" (Proverbs 15:27).

When a person takes a bribe, he teaches his children to be dishonest. Often the person taking the bribe gives "favors" and shuts his eyes to what he should see. He brings that spirit to his household.

How do children learn integrity?

Although parents may not intend it, they teach it by their actions. They can easily teach their children the vice of dishonesty.

How do bribes undermine a society?

Bribes pervert justice...

"A wicked man accepts a bribe behind the back to pervert the ways of justice" (Proverbs 17:23).

- Bribes favor the rich against the poor.
- If "justice" is sold to the highest bidder, then the poor will always be outbid.
- Time magazine did a cover story on Africa in which they reported: "Salaries in Africa (9/7/92) become living wages only by unofficial dealing by baksheesh or bribing. A telephone company repairman in Lagos earns \$60 a month. Therefore the only way to get a phone repaired is to 'offer him a little something' on the side. In one day the repairman can pocket his monthly pay.

No tips, no repairs which may be why most phones in Lagos do not work." Business firms that could have helped Africa have left because of the demands for kickbacks and government policies that encourage this.

- A form of bribe in our culture is the "soft money" given to political parties, from the tobacco industry, the gun lobby, unions, etc. This soft money gives powerful interests a voice that corrupts the democratic political process in a society.
- Wicked is the harshest word the Hebrews had to describe evil behavior. Bribes are no petty crime. The entire society is threatened with them.
- An executive of a large airplane manufacturer is a Christian. He is often offered bribes to purchase supplies from one vendor rather than another. Safety can be sacrificed in the process.
- Tom Phillips was president of Raytheon. He refused to do business in a country where the official demanded a bribe. He felt that once that got started, it would permeate his entire organization. Rather than take that risk, he gave up lucrative contracts. But he knew what bribery does within a company.

The value of truth

Reference: Proverbs 20:14, 17

"It is good for nothing," cries the buyer, but when he has gone his way, then he boasts.... Bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel."

Here's a proverb that comes out of the marketplace: "It's good for nothing, cries the buyer, but when he has gone his way, then he boasts." What picture comes to your mind?

They are doing more than haggling over a price; there are deeper issues in view...

What are the deeper issues here? What do you gather about love for neighbor in this scene?

The buyer is not showing respect for the vendor and is berating him to get a better price.

Do you think that both buyer and seller are trying to arrive at a fair price?

In this case, the buyer is trying to get more than a fair price and is willing to berate the vendor in order to get a better deal than is merited.

What can you decide about truth as it governs this transaction?

The buyer is not being truthful about his valuation of the product in order to get a better price.

Lying in the marketplace is often honed into a fine art so what is the problem with it?

Lying in all its forms always has bad consequences.

Proverbs 20:17 tells us that "bread gained by deceit is sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth is filled with gravel."

Why do you think the writer says "bread gained by deceit is sweet"? How might that proverb apply to business practices in the 21st century?

- If you are caught in a lie, you feel guilty, or at least embarrassed.
- You feel uneasy in the presence of the person if you're with them again.
- Your integrity is no longer an asset. People caught in one deliberate lie take a long time to win that confidence back.
- You can lose the customer, although you may have made the sale.
- You make a short-term sale but lose a long-term reputation for integrity as a Christian. You lose your witness for Jesus Christ.

Lying is destructive

Reference: Proverbs 21:6

"Getting treasures by a lying tongue is the fleeting fantasy of those who seek death."

The Hebrew word here translated "fantasy" is the same word translated "vanity" in Ecclesiastes. What does vanity mean?

It means "senseless, meaningless". It can also be translated "a bubble, a vapor."

What is that picture when the writer says "the fleeting bubble or vapor of those who seek death"?

Whatever advantage they gain by lying is short-lived

How can lying be a kind of death wish for those who practice it in the marketplace?

It can be a death for a business.

- Car dealers now do everything they can to assure the customer that the transaction is honest. Why?
- If you knew that the supermarket had dishonest scales on which to weigh your meat or produce, how would you react?
- We would not need "truth in lending" laws if people in the marketplace practiced "truth in living."

It can be death for a nation.

- What happens in a culture where lying becomes the norm?

- Does it matter that citizens lie on their income tax returns?
- What happens when employees cheat on their expense accounts?
- What happens when hospitals overcharge patients for aspirin?
- What happens when politicians lie to get elected?
- What happens when people think nothing of pocketing money that was given as an error in their favor?

It can be death for a witness for God.

Get-rich-quick schemes

Reference: Proverbs 20:21

"An inheritance gained hastily at the beginning will not be blessed at the end."

What "get rich quick" schemes have been pitched to you?

- Telephone solicitors call to assure us that the investment they offer "can't miss" and a fortune is to be made.
- Playing the lottery promises us fast, easy money if we win.
- Magazine sweepstakes assure us that a huge prize is already waiting for us. It's a lie.

While this Prov. 20:21 deals with an inheritance, it refers to the wider danger of getting rich suddenly.

When you talk about an inheritance, what are you talking about?

Something of value received as a result of the death of a family member.

Is the proverb warning about all inheritances?

What does "gained hastily" imply?

It refers to gaining an inheritance by other than natural means such as causing the death of the family member to obtain the inheritance.

What do you think it means when it says, it "will not be blessed in the end"?

This means that the person gaining the inheritance will not get the benefit of it. Instead of a blessing, the money could be a curse.

What wider application beyond an inheritance does Proverbs 20:21 have?

When we take moral shortcuts, they may lead us into dead ends in both business and in life.

Have you ever wished that you could win the lottery? What makes it so attractive?

It means I would no longer have to work. I could live where I want, do what I want, and not have to be concerned with the daily grind.

Would the lottery solve all of your problems?

No there are certainly some problems that money can not solve. Relationships for example are not necessarily strengthened by money, they are more likely to become strained.

What could be a downside to winning the lottery?

- It could cause us to lose our dependence on God.
- It could cause us to lose our friends as we suspect them of having designs on our money.
- It could cause us to be lazy.

How could an inheritance gained hastily or a quick buck become a curse?

- The individual may not appreciate its value and the responsibility of wealth, and thus fail to use it wisely.
- The individual may not get great satisfaction from what she or he has not worked for or waited for.
- Whenever a Christian gains a fortune, there's always a question of whether God will gain the fortune or lose the Christian.
- People who are not willing to wait for financial gain often take moral shortcuts that can destroy them...
Proverbs 13:11 - "wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished, but he who gathers by labor will increase."

Reference: Proverbs 10:22

"The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it."

Do the Proverbs criticize riches?

No, instead, they warn about the way we make wealth.

What is the blessing of the Lord in Proverbs 10:22?

The blessing of the Lord obviously refers to more than money, but it can involve wealth made in the right way with the right spirit and with the right motive.

What is the sorrow that comes with wealth that is not a blessing from the Lord?

Wealth that is a blessing from the Lord is not a false promise but something we can count on. The sorrow that comes from quick-rich-schemes is the realization that we have been duped.

How do bunko-artists thrive on the gullible?

The bunko-artists thrive on the gullible who ignore the principles of get-rich-quick schemes.

- They always promise an immediate return.
- There is a great deal of truth in the warning, "If something is too good to be true, it probably is."

What kind of blessing from the Lord could make us rich?

The Lord can make us rich in many ways besides just in monetary terms... in relationships, in a creative career, in *treasures laid up in heaven*.

How does hard work have rewards beyond the salary?

If we prosper because we have tried to honor God and serve our neighbor, then we are rich indeed.

- We don't live with guilt.
- We are not the legitimate objects of scorn.
- We have not taken advantage of someone else's weakness.
- We have not racked up obligations to do things for others that we should not do such as bribes.

There is no sorrow in that kind of prosperity.

What are two guiding traits of godly character that every Christian should bring to the workplace?

Integrity and love are the two guiding traits of godly character that every Christian should bring to the workplace.

- Integrity means that we deal in truth and honesty with others.
- We will attempt to run our business so that the other person is benefited as well as we are.

Usually these traits in the workplace pay off in profits. They always pay off before God.

The skills to do the work

Reference: Ephesians 6:5-8

"Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free."

Reference: Exodus 35:30-36

"And Moses said to the children of Israel, 'See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic

workmanship. And He has put in his heart the ability to teach, in him and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do all manner of work of the engraver and the designer and the tapestry maker, in blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen, and of the weaver--those who do every work and those who design artistic works."

The Kellogg company peddled corn flakes with an interesting slogan: "Taste them again for the first time." What do you think that slogan is saying?

Even though they have been around for a while, they are still good. If you taste them like you haven't had them before, you'll realize how good they ate.

What difference might it make for Christians to look at their work again for the first time?

They can recognize that their work is the will of God for them. In that way, the work done by a truck driver or a farmer is as significant as that of a musician or a minister.

How may we add a touch of glory to the daily grind?

Recognize who we are ultimately working for, that the work we do is service for Jesus Christ.

Is there a fundamental difference between the secular and the sacred?

- We tend to think of service for Christ as religious or something we do in church. That's not biblical.
- God gives us the skills by which we do our work. Exodus 35:30-36 describes some of the people who built the tabernacle.

When Christians think of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, what comes to mind?

- Often they think of Him as the One who inspired the Bible and gives spiritual gifts.
- In this passage we find the Holy Spirit active in the day-to-day work of the building and textile trades.

God ordained His people to work but will any work do?

God calls His people not only to work, but to do work just as He commanded.

How does quality matter in our work?

God holds us accountable for the quality of our craftsmanship. The people that God called to build the tabernacle were not famous leaders like Moses or Aaron. They were working-class people with ordinary job descriptions.

- Dorothy Sayers wrote, "Work is not primarily what one does to live, but what one lives to do, the medium in which one offers oneself to God."

- A sculptor was chiseling with great care the back of a figure which was to be placed high in the eaves of a cathedral. Someone asked him why he took such pains with the details that no one was likely to see. He replied, "God sees it."