

Work and Wealth

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[0:00] Time to move on into, back into our Proverbs series. We're continuing that on. There's a few weeks left. Just so you know what's coming after Proverbs as we're launching our community group term in September.

We're gonna jump into the book of 1 Samuel, which I think is gonna be really exciting. But here we are. We're gonna finish out Proverbs. And I've been enjoying this a lot. Like, I've been, I think Kirk's recommended it a few times.

He's just like, hey man, read a Proverbs today. And I've been doing that. So like, you know, today's the 23rd. So I read Proverbs 23. And you know, it takes you, you get to read a Proverb a day. I love how earthy the truth of Proverbs is.

And it is wisdom. But like, when you start to like read it and resonate with it, you start to realize how deeply theological this stuff is. And we're gonna wrestle without today. We're gonna consider Proverbs and what it has to say about work and wealth.

And before we jump into it, we kind of have to start with this understanding that God created work as a good thing, right? He created it from the beginning. There wasn't, work isn't because there is sin.

[1:04] God created work. And what God creates, he creates for good. And we have to remember this. God creates for good. Satan corrupts for evil. And evil is always wanting to lead us into something that's gonna bring about harm for us physically or mentally or spiritually.

But God's good, what it is intended to do, it leads us to a physical and spiritual well-being that he has intended for us. And the overarching thesis of Proverbs around work and wealth is this.

Work is good and wealth is good when we steward them God's way. But if we don't, they can bring harmful consequences upon ourselves and others. And that can happen very easily.

Now, if God created work to be good, we have to answer the question then, in what ways is work good? It is good because it does good.

And it does good to our souls and it does good to our bodies. So first we're gonna look at how it does good for our souls. Proverbs 13, four says, the soul of the slugger, the guy who doesn't like to work, craves and gets nothing.

[2:13] There's an unending craving there because he's never satisfied. Laziness does that. Laziness brings about a craving of just you're never satisfied while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.

And here's what that last statement is saying. God established work as a common grace to nourish the soul. Think about this. God opens up the Bible and he's working.

He's creating. Right? It's why he says, six days I created, six days you shall work. And you got one day to rest. Again, that was before sin. Work isn't a result of sin.

It's not a bad thing, though the sluggard would treat it that way. We also have to realize sin has affected our work. And that is worth appreciating. Famines, flood, and plant diseases can destroy harvest.

The farmer that works in toils, they can have all that work and toil come to nothing. Then we bring in our own sin into our professional lives. There's greed and scheming and lying and cheating and it can make work feel more like a war zone.

[3:18] People are sometimes fired unjustly or they're just downsized for economic reasons, for no fault of their own. Those things happen. Yet, despite all those setbacks, we never stop working because seeing the results of our hard work does, there is something positive to both our mental and spiritual health that happens to us.

I remember as a teenager, every so often, my dad would just like, you know, no chores for you today. And so it was kind of a Saturday where I got to do whatever I want and typically I would just spend the day, I'd wake up at 1 p.m., you know, sleep in, and then just veg out on TV and would take breaks to snack and that would be it.

But you know what? I would go to bed feeling like that just felt like a waste of a day. That was not satisfying. That was like the ick. You just feel the ick in your soul on those days because all I did was imbibe junk food and junk media.

That was it. Like there was nothing good that I could say I walked away with. But like when you compare that with what happens today on my days off in the summertime and Saturday and there's grass to cut, when I work in the yard and sweat and toil for hours, I can look back on the work and see what's done and there's satisfaction in the soul.

The yard has been tamed. The edges on the driveway are just lined so nicely. They're just like, mwah, it just looks so good. And I'm not gonna, I'm not elevating myself to God's level here, but when I'm done with that, I survey all my work, all the work of my hands and behold, it is good, right? [4:57] You look at that and there's just something that is just soul satisfying about accomplishing something. And we need to learn as Christians, we have to learn to pause and reflect on our work over a day and let our souls find joy in what we've accomplished.

And here's the thing, if you bring God into that moment as well, it makes it even better because you begin to feel His pleasure over those things. You know the old, centuries old prayer of exam and that's what it calls you to do.

It's like one of the steps in there. Consider your day. What did you see that you've done? What are the things that you've done that were good and God honoring and glorifying in your work or in your life or how you interacted with people?

And you can reflect on that. You know what? That builds joy in the soul. But in addition to our own soul being satisfied with our work, good work has a ripple effect that brings about a positive impact on others as well.

Good work cultivates goodness and it cultivates beauty that blesses other people. Think about this. Think about the rancher. The trucker who raises cattle. The trucker who transports that cattle to the slaughterhouse.

[6:06] The people at the slaughterhouse that butcher that cow. The trucker who transports those steaks from the slaughterhouse to the grocery store. The department of transportation worker that lays down roads and keeps them drivable for those trucks to be able to deliver that steak to the grocery store.

And then the grocery store that sells that steak to you and me. They are all working hard. That's good work. It's hard work. And they're contributing to you and I being able to eat a good steak. From the ranch to the plate there were many people who worked hard to deliver that blessing of beef. It's a good thing. Work has a ripple effect.

Our individual efforts can contribute to something beyond ourselves that blesses others. It's a significant reason why work can enrich the soul and does enrich the soul.

But Proverbs would argue it's work it's the kind of work that we do that aligns with righteousness that creates blessing for all. Not all work is good. Not all work is righteousness. Think mafia.

[7:09] Think drug cartels. Think sex traffickers. They're working hard. There's less of a good ripple effect from them. They're more like a tornado wreaking havoc and chaos and destruction. But righteous work righteous work creates blessing.

And this is where Christians need to pay close attention and put this into practice. Proverbs 10-11 says this When it goes well with the righteous the city rejoices. When the wicked perish there are shouts of gladness.

By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted. By the mouth of the wicked it is overthrown. See there's an importance and there's a meaning for us when we go to work and when we're doing our work.

We need to watch out for a misguided theology that says the world is hopelessly corrupt and it's all going to burn one day and any work that is unrelated to the church or the advancement of the gospel you know what all you're doing is help building up Babylon.

That's going to be destroyed. There's a theological premise and a worldview that looks at it that way. And it would say like sure if you can't if you can't really count for God and do some kind of work as in the church or as a missionary or something related to that then I guess if you have to you

go and do the other stuff but only do it if you must.

[8:29] Friends the Bible doesn't say that. It doesn't. And that has never been a position of the historical church. That's been fringe stuff that has been crept in along the way.

But what we see in the Bible is what it tells us that if you and I as believers and followers of Jesus that if we practice good righteous work and we do that it brings a blessing that impacts our towns our neighbors our cities and even our nations.

Let me tell you a story about Cadbury. You know Cadbury chocolates? Right? Okay. Alright? God bless Cadbury chocolates. They're amazing. They got Hershey's beat hands down.

Sorry Hershey's. So Cadbury is this guy he lived in England in the 1800s. And so he was a Quaker Christian which is a Christian denomination.

And his story kind of exemplifies how his faith and his diligent work generated blessing that extended far beyond just him pursuing personal profits.

[9:33] So they opened up a shop in Birmingham, England in 1831 to sell coffee, tea and cocoa. And before that he was kind of a wealthy merchant had a warehouse but he looked and he saw rampant alcoholism in the city that was destroying a ton of people's lives and he said you know what I need to find a way to make an impact on this thing and so he did that.

That's why he started that and instead of going to the gin joints all over the place he offered to people why don't you come in and have a good tea or a good cup of coffee or a good cup of cocoa instead. He offered them a healthy alternative.

And this is how bad it was in Birmingham and England and London in those days we're talking about at the 1800s it wasn't uncommon to see a kid as young as 10 years old passed out drunk near an entrance of one of those gin joints.

That's the kind of stuff that was happening there. And then all the other stuff that goes around with rampant alcoholism like abuses of many kinds people just mistreating each other in terrible ways.

And so that's why he did it. His face was calling him to push back against that darkness of alcoholism but it just it didn't stop there for him. As his company grew and they experienced success he built out housing for their workers in nearby Bourneville.

[10:48] They created an entire village in Bourneville that was full of homes and shops and parks and swimming pools and schools so that their worker could utilize those things and they could actually thrive.

And you know what? Like they are an example and they had a massive impact on the industrial revolution and how that was developing in society because up to that point people just cared about getting work done.

So they didn't care about the people's work environments. They didn't care about how their workers were doing or paying them an honest wage a livable wage. They didn't care about any of that stuff. But here is an example of a guy who brings his faith into his work and that's good work that he did that brought blessing and contributed to positive change in society.

Good chocolate exultation and causes the city to rejoice. But to summarize the point here when it comes to work that brings blessing.

Whether you are the employee or the employer it boils down to this. Don't cheat each other and mistreat each other. Employee work diligently and do a good job.

[11:55] Employer be fair and honorable with your wages and your work environment. And remember that God didn't create work only to nourish the soul. God ordained work as a means to nourish the body too.

Proverbs 12, 11 says whoever works his land will have plenty of bread but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense. Proverbs 12, 14 says from the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied with good and the work of a man's hand comes back to him.

The diligent worker in Proverbs does his body a solid by the return it brings in the material rewards of food, clothing, shelter, things like that.

Right? The law of sowing and reaping. Hard work, Proverbs says over and over again kind of the message that it keeps like hammering home is hard work goes a long way to keep poverty at bay.

Now, we do live in a fallen world and you may work diligently and still fall on hard times but even the diligent have some hope in those hard times because if you have been a diligent worker your reputation goes before you.

[13:01] You have earned favor with others. I can't think of an example of someone who is a hard able-bodied worker that eventually couldn't find employment.

Maybe it took some time but they could have found employment at some part and in large part it's because of the reputation they have built for themselves. They earned themselves a good name.

Look, people like to hire and keep hard workers. That's plain and simple.

Right? But also we know the diligent are going to rebound and be able to rebound well because they're willing to humble themselves to do lesser work if that is what is necessary to put bread on the table.

But more often than not the diligent don't find themselves in the bread line. What they find themselves in is running for upward mobility. By their work the diligent find favor and promotion. Proverbs 12, 24 says the hand of the diligent will rule while the slothful will be put to forced labor. If you work diligently more often times you're going to have better opportunities than somebody who's always taking it easy and always trying to get out of work.

[14:11] Jesus confirmed that ethic right there like hard work gets you somewhere hard work has a reward. He confirmed that ethic in his parable of the ten minus. Right? Jesus gave different levels of different purses to different people with different amounts of money in it and he says hey put this to work.

I want to return on it when I come back. And to those who were faithful and did that and worked hard and diligently it says more was given to them and it says the master came and said well done good and faithful servant.

You've been faithful over a little and I will set you over much. Now we have to say again that sinful world thing that reality is there's there's not that doesn't work all the time right?

Things don't always work the right way. Sometimes the diligent and the deserving are overlooked and for all the wrong reasons but more often than not the trustworthy person that has a good work ethic is going to prevail more often than not.

Now that doesn't mean the sky's the limit and life's always going to be up and to the right always getting better and better and better but diligence is hard to ignore for too long.

[15:21] If you want to be a good worker you want to give yourself hope for upward mobility diligence is a hard thing for employers and bosses to ignore for too long and I want to say this to all of us it is okay to work hard and it is okay to desire promotion when it's possible.

That isn't a sign that you lack contentment that you have some kind of pride that you need to deal with or that you are greedy. Work hard accept promotions take the raise and pay when it's offered. The wise know that they don't need to avoid wealth because wisdom tells us this wealth handled with righteousness produces blessing. What I love about Proverbs is that it kind of rejects the binaries around wealth and prosperity right?

Throughout the you know throughout church history there have been movements and times where people looked at poverty and upheld that as the pinnacle of holiness and be like if you really want to count for Jesus you should just spurn all wealth and become poor.

Now it's one thing for a person who maybe God is calling them to take a vow of poverty and live simply but to bind every Christian to that and say that is the only virtuous way to live that is not anywhere found in the whole of scripture.

[16:41] The Bible isn't like there's only one way to live and you gotta be as poor as you possibly can it just doesn't say that. If you look at Abraham Isaac and Jacob and their lives you know we gloss over the things like they had a lot of herds and a lot of servants and that kind of stuff if you were to take the amount of herds and all their possessions they were talking about and you translate it in today's terms they would have been very very wealthy men very wealthy men but still God's favor was on them and we have to accept as truth that sometimes God blesses someone with the ability to generate wealth there are some people you can give them \$300 and they can turn it into 30 million I don't know how they do that I don't have that gift but some people just do Proverbs 10 22 says the blessing of the Lord makes rich and he adds no sorrow!

to it see getting wealth the right way and using it for the right means man it can make rich this verse is also saying that God who gives wealth he has expectations for how we use it wealth can be a blessing like how the Cadbury's used it those with wealth they can start companies hire people into good paying jobs or they can lend to help people when they have needs for capital they especially can be a blessing when they give generously to bless others and only suffers want whoever brings

blessing will be enriched and the one who waters will himself be watered now you can argue that this passage may only be talking about kind of the spiritual rewards of generosity but again that's putting a false binary on the passage it does have in mind a spiritual reward for sure but also there are positive material consequences that were intended to know about too the principle from Proverbs is that generosity will make you a richer person in a lot of ways you will be enlarged in heart and soul and kindness and compassion all of those things so yes there's a definite spiritual reward to generosity and possibly quite possibly with God entrusting you with more I'm not saying it's a formula like if there is a stream of preachers that say like man whatever you say God's going to reap it back to you every single time you can't turn these things into a formula these are principles to live by generosity is always going to enlarge you in some way shape or form definitely for the heart and soul definitely for your benefit in that way and sometimes it may also enlarge your portfolio and generosity when we think about it when it comes to wealth it's one of the key ways to honor God with it the wise are generous and Proverbs would underline especially to the poor contrary to the wise the foolish they're stingy and they hoard because they need wealth for reasons of identity and security and if you depend on wealth to keep you from dangers of the unknown future if that's where you're putting all your hope or you depend on wealth to live a lifestyle that promotes a certain image to impress others then it will be very hard for you to be generous generosity is wisdom because at the root of it it is spiritual warfare right there's a warfare going on in our hearts and that spiritual warfare fights against this misuse of wealth to build a false identity around the lies of

I am what I have and what other people think about me and that is such a tempting lie to build an identity around it fights against looking to wealth instead of God as our security and our sustainer and another real danger of desiring wealth for the wrong reasons is that we'll try to get it quick and easy Proverbs 13 11 warns about this wealth gained hastily will dwindle but whoever gathers little by little will increase it here's the thing if you are convinced wealth is the only way for you to feel secure in this world to be happy in this life then you aren't going to wait patiently to build it you're going to want it now or as soon as possible the wise they don't approach wealth that way the wise build their wealth slowly and securely I mean it is well known that when people living in poverty if they win the lottery they tend to waste it all they go broke!

quick easy come easy go because you know what the thing you work hard to get is the thing you tend to value more highly to appreciate it more and when that wealth grows slowly it also trains us in patience and along with patience comes prudence knowing and thinking carefully and wisely how to invest forward with it not in a foolish way trying to get quick returns on things and wealth in the hands of I live without this thing and

[22 : 25] I get that nobody is excited about moving into a smaller house or dreams of trading in a new caddy for an old beater we are not thinking about that that's not the way we want to go in life we don't want to buy our clothes at Walmart when we have been able to afford them at Belk it's not a thing!

There's a balance to strike that's what Proverbs is trying to get us to see there's a balance to strike here don't foolishly waste wealth don't foolishly pursue it but also don't live in fear if it goes away and then suddenly you have to go from a champagne budget to a beer budget having wealth and managing it wisely can be good however the Bible strongly warns us against putting our faith in wealth putting our hope in wealth in fact it says don't make the acquisition of wealth the purpose of your work Proverbs 23 4 says do not toil to acquire wealth be discerning enough to desist when your eyes light on it it is gone for suddenly it sprouts wings flying like an eagle toward heaven Proverbs 37 to 9 says two things I ask of you deny them not to me before

I die remove far from me falsehood and lying give me neither poverty nor riches feed me with the food that is needful for me lest I be full and deny you and say who is the Lord or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God the wise place glorifying God above glorying and wealth if you make wealth your great protector!

and great security it is going to let you down like you look on it and you think you got it and suddenly it's gone it's what Ecclesiastes! says all this stuff is like vapor it's like a mist it's easily gone it doesn't have staying power right you know in the bible the idea of glory is the idea of weight of heaviness of density it's when things are dense and heavy it means they're going to last a long time when it talks about God's glory it talks about the thing that is going to last and never go away wealth is not that wealth is a vapor it's easily lost and if you live with your hope and security in that you're going to live

with anxiety and fear of losing it you're going to live your life always looking out scanning for threats and when your eyes are always on the future always looking out to anticipate what may be coming that's going to rob you of your wealth and the thing you think you need!

it means you cannot enjoy life in the present you can't find joy in the things that you're living with right now and placing security in wealth is a guaranteed joy robber look at all the billionaires we know of today they got all kinds of good stuff but if you look at them are they great examples of joy and peace but there is an example for us to look to you right the ultimate personification of wisdom Jesus Christ he came and he lived a life that showed us what wisdom truly is and his life put on display exactly how we are to hold work and wealth that sets us free to glorify God and not glory and wealth to be generous and to do good with our work and our wealth and he showed us what it is and it's a posture of stewardship the Jesus think about it stewards can't be selfish why you know why they can't be selfish because they don't own what they are managing whatever is put into their hands they understand this is not mine it is the master's and

[26:31] I am accountable to him for what I do with these things and he's going to come back and say what did you do with my stuff the apostle Paul had to address this with the Corinthian church who was wealthy in spiritual gifts but they lost sight of stewardship and so what they did they began to misuse God's good gifts that he had given to them for their benefit and they began to use it for selfish gain to promote themselves above and over and against others and what God had given to them for their common good they used as a way that brings about division and destruction again that timeless principle God gives good things but Satan corrupts that's what he wants to do and to address this problem Paul writes a letter 1 Corinthians and he reminds them of what is true about them and that posture of stewardship that they need to find is one of their key identities 1 Corinthians 4:2 says moreover it is required of stewards that they be found faithful and then he goes on a long diatribe for a little bit and then says at the end of verse 7 what

Corinthians what do you have that you did not receive because you are acting like you got this stuff all by yourself you are acting like you own these things and they're for you and you earn them somehow what do you have that you did not receive if then you received!

why do you boast why do you live in a way as if you have not received it friends your bank account your job your kids your house your home all these things you have them because God gave you the ability and the means and directed your life in a way for you to have those things as you can be a steward and you hold those things with open hands and you say Lord please direct me on how to use this for your glory so that I don't glory in them because when you glory in them what you do with God's stuff is you go like this these are mine that's ownership God says no no no stewardship we live as stewards all that we have is from God we're accountable to him and we're going to be tempted away from this all the time Jesus was tempted those three temptations from Satan I mean one of the things that we can overlay of those temptations is thinking about working well thinking about how we steward our lives he goes to Jesus he says Jesus if you're the son of God if you're the guy who has that calling then turn these stones to bread go ahead and prove that you got what it takes step outside of God's domain and show me prove to me then easy road then finally he just like makes it very clear hey bow down and worship me and I'll give you all the kingdoms of the earth Jesus God's way I know the calling he has on you that son of God way it's going to be long and it's going to be difficult and you're going to come into those things with a lot of pain and suffering but you know what I have an easier and better way for you to get that Satan whispers all those same lies to our hearts all the time and those lies they don't lead to freedom they lead us into slavery because if you have to do something to prove yourself to anyone to God or to others there's always going to be competition in your work and wealth at best you're never going to feel like you're measuring up because there's always going to be somebody that's just a little bit better and a little bit wealthier than you there's always going to be someone out there who isn't impressed enough with what you got and you're going to have to work harder to get a little bit more to impress them that's that's not freedom that's slavery that is being enslaved to work and wealth for all the wrong reasons and when you find yourself in slavery it means somewhere you traded worshipping

God as his steward to embracing Satan's lie but here's the good news friends here's the good news Jesus overcame all those temptations around work and wealth and identity and all those things all those things that we tend to fall into and that is why Jesus went to the cross for us even for the way we mishandle the gifts of work and wealth and we don't use them for good we use them selfishly he

went to the cross for that he paid the penalty for those sins but not only are we freed from that penalty we are freed from sin's power to get back on track to live as stewards that glorify God with our work and wealth salvation in Jesus means that he not only paid the penalty for us but he is now working out in us as sons of God proper stewardship that will glorify God so don't dismay wherever you are at today if you're just like

[31:26] Jesse you're hitting me right between the eyes the Bible hit me right between the eyes right now don't dismay come to Jesus today repent and trust in what he has done so in his atoning sacrifice for all the ways you maybe have gotten this wrong so far turn to him and hope in his power that is at work in you and for all who believe he is there for you he has the grace that you need to do this well in the right way so as the band comes up and we look to respond I want to say for those of you in the room who aren't yet a follower of Jesus man it is not working your way into heaven you have to come to Jesus as you are you don't just step away and be like I guess I'll become a Christian later I got to get this all fixed and figured out and come all clean and tidy no no Jesus loves a mess come to him just as you are he's in for that come to him just as you are he knows how to patch you up he knows exactly what you need to set you back on the right track he knows exactly how to minister to your soul so come to him as you are there is no sin too great there is nothing you have done that is too far for his!

atonement not to have believe in him you get to now learn the way to follow him there's going to be a prayer if that's you there's a prayer on the screen for you to pray and I would encourage you to pray that before you go and for the rest of us in may seats right now to you for the first time, praying that prayer. Meet us right where we are.

Lord, encourage our hearts. We thank you that you are an amazing Savior. You are a great Savior who loves us, and you have a beautiful, wonderful design for the life that we live.

That includes our work and our wealth. So help us to be good stewards, to glorify you in our work and our wealth. Amen.