

Work and the Sluggard

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[0 : 00] My name is Matt Fletcher and I've been married to Kim for almost 32 years and God has blessed us with five children, three daughters and two sons. Pretty early on I realized that God is the only truly good father and the closer I got to him the more of him came through me to touch my children. This brought great hope to me as I pray it does to you. Another thing I realized is that because God's mercies are new every morning, I start every day as a perfect father. Now that may have gone out the window by the time breakfast was over but at least I started the day in a good spot.

After almost 30 years of fatherhood, I look at my children and I am undone at God's goodness. I see wonderful young adults. So dads, I encourage you to get close and stay close to God. Be intentional about it and remind yourself that you start fresh every day. I pray God's richest blessings on all you dads and happy Father's Day.

Hello, welcome One Harbor Church. My name is Brian Hart. I'm one of the pastors. We hope you are ready to worship Jesus. We're going to sing some songs, going to hear the word preached and so we would invite you now at the beginning to turn your phone down or set it to the side and turn the TV up and lean in with expectation that the Holy Spirit is actually going to meet with us. I'd like to start our time off by reading a few verses from a fairly famous psalm, Psalm 139 verses 7 through 10.

Where shall I go from your spirit or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in Sheol in the depths, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me. Lord, we thank you that no matter where we are right now, you're with us.

If we are with our friends in a community group or in a living room, you're there with us. If we're watching this all by ourselves right now, you're with us. We thank you that you're not far off just kind of observing from a distance, but even as we worship you, you are with us actually helping us to hear your words and helping to change us. And so we pray that this morning, by the time that we're finished, God, we pray that you will have made us look a little bit more like Jesus.

[2 : 32] We pray that you would bless our times together in Jesus name. Amen. Let's worship. All I have because of Jesus. All His promise won for me when He paid the highest lesson.

Once for always for my freedom. I will boast in Christ alone. His righteousness and not my own.

I will claim to Christ my hope. His mercy raise. Now and forever. Love will never lose its power.

All my failures. All my failures. Not erased. Now I walk within your favor.

Grace unending. My salvation. I will boast in Christ alone. Amen.

[4 : 09] Grace unending. My salvation. I will claim to Christ my hope. His mercy raise. Now and forever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.

Nothing but the blood of Jesus Yes, nothing but the blood of Jesus Before the throne of God above Before the throne of God above I have a strong and perfect plea A great high priest whose name is love Whoever lives and cleans for me My name is graving on His hands My name is written on His heart

Having so fond an affection for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives because you had become very dear to us.

That scripture reminds me of our eldership team. So if we could pray for them and their families today, that would be wonderful. Let's pray.

[12 : 21] Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Thank you.

[14 : 51] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[17 : 21] Thank you. These laws are how he structured his creation for its highest good, its most harmonious order, and for resplendent flourishing.

So when we follow the way of wisdom, things will go well, or at least better. But by contrast, if we don't follow the way of wisdom, things will definitely go wrong.

I remember meeting my uncle Gary for the first time. I was 10 years old. We flew out to Alabama. And when I met him, he definitely wasn't a Christian.

Thankfully, later on in his life, he did accept Jesus before he died a few years back. But when I met him, when I first met him, his life was a wreck. He was an older man.

He was divorced, kind of isolated from his kids. He lived in a trailer in the woods, no joke, off the grid because he didn't want the IRS to know where he was at because he owed so many taxes.

[18 : 25] And anyway, he was this really fun, hilarious character. And we loved spending time with him. You'd always kind of walk around and then every so often just randomly break into this song like this.

I fought the law and the law won. You guys probably remember that old song, I fought the law and the law won. And we asked him like, why do you always do that, Uncle Gary? And he's like, man, that's my song.

It explains my life and what's going on right now. And that's Proverbs warning to us. It's telling us, man, you can't fight against wisdom. You could either choose Lady Folly or you can choose Lady Wisdom.

But in the end, if you try to fight against wisdom, you know what? The law is going to win. God's immutable laws can't be ignored and broken without consequence.

And today we're going to look at one of God's immutable laws of wisdom, and that is hard work and the sluggard. Proverbs 12, 24 says this, The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor.

[19 : 25] A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. So what these verses are telling us is hard work reaps good things, while laziness will bring you down.

We're all familiar with that principle that says you reap what you sow. So if you work hard at school or you're working hard in your job, most likely opportunities will open up for you.

But by contrast, if you don't do that, if you're lazy, you don't put effort into school, you don't put effort into your job, guess what? Your options are going to be very limited and often not that great.

It says in those verses, the diligent will rule, right? They are going to govern. You can govern your own affairs as a diligent hard worker and also maybe end up governing the affairs of others.

Think about the parable of the talents, where Jesus teaches us that God will give more to those who are faithful with the little. Let's look at a character in the Bible.

[20 : 28] Consider Joseph's life as a slave in Egypt. Even in that suboptimal context, he was able to work hard and he was rewarded for his hard work in Potiphar's house.

Potiphar ended up putting him in charge of the affairs of his estate. Later, when Joseph was unjustly thrown into prison, it says that he also gained favor with the prison guard.

He was working hard and it says this, whatever was done there, he was the one to do it. He stepped up, he worked hard, he took ownership. And again, we see Joseph's favor, wisdom and diligent work along with God's favor.

Let's not, you know, leave that out. It yielded promotion, even as a prisoner. Here's what I'm talking about. Working hard will yield good returns.

But Proverbs doesn't just talk about any type of person doing work. It talks about a diligent worker. That word diligent, it's probably a good one to define.

[21 : 30] Merriam-Webster defines it this way. Diligence is steady, it's earnest, and it's energetic effort. So wisdom is not just working hard with a bad attitude.

It's working hard. It's diligently working. It's work, doing work that is consistent, that's done in earnest, and is energetic. Now, this doesn't mean that if we do that, we're diligent workers, it doesn't mean that we're going to end up being as rich as Warren Buffett.

Proverbs isn't promising that at all. You and I may just end up, after a life of diligent hard work, we may end up as a typical middle class person. You know what?

That's great. There is nothing wrong with that. Having a roof over your head and three meals a day and plumbing, you know what? In comparison to the rest of the world and the rest of history, man, that is quite wealthy.

We don't work diligently so that we can have a life that could be on MTV's Crips or something, right? We are diligent in our work because work is an act of obedience because God mandated it.

[22 : 40] So work is obedience to God. Genesis 2.15, it says, the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

So right away, God makes Adam and the first thing he does, he puts him in a garden. He gives him a place to oversee and tend and keep and cultivate.

And that was before sin. Now, we live on the other side of Eden because of the fall, because of sin, which means our work is a lot harder and it is frustrated.

And it feels frustrating a lot of the time. We don't always get back what we put in, right? Can I get an amen there? In that way, work can feel like a curse, but the Bible is clear that God didn't curse work, he cursed the ground, right?

God cursed the ground, not the work, meaning God cursed the returns and made them even harder. And that's because of sin. He never cursed work itself.

[23 : 42] So we see that sin brings on this futility in our work and this disharmony and inconsistency to the returns of our sweat equity.

But work is still mandated by God, make no mistake, therefore it is good. And it is good for us to do. Working diligently will produce material rewards.

It will make us able to provide and put food on the table, all that good stuff, all the stuff that's necessary to life. And a lot of times, some stuff that's also enjoyable to life.

But you know what work also does? Work produces an inner reward of satisfaction. Proverbs 13, 4 says this, The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.

What this verse is saying is work is good for our souls. God designed it to be that way. He designed us to receive satisfaction in our work.

[24 : 43] When we work diligently, when we work hard, there is a satisfaction in the work itself, separate to the material benefit. Have you ever had one of those days where you just couldn't get motivated, right?

And a 12-hour Netflix binge later, you have nothing to show for the day, except a head rush from standing up too fast and a perfectly outlined imprint of your body on the couch.

So I've done that once or twice. And every time at the end of one of those days, you know what? I never feel satisfied. I never feel as good. I don't look back and say like, man, I'm glad the day went that way.

Man, oftentimes it feels like a wasted day and I kind of feel grumpy. Now, compare that to a Saturday doing yard work and, you know, you get out there and you're sweating two gallons of water in the heat of the day.

But, man, you look back after that and you're just, man, there's something of a satisfaction in looking back and saying, gosh, I got some work done. We feel that difference there because we're designed to work.

[25 : 48] Work is obedience to God. And walking in obedience to God in the Bible is called worship. So following that train of logic, work can be one of the ways we worship God.

See, worshiping isn't limited to what we do on Sundays. Worship is a life of obedience. I have a friend who says worship isn't so much a song raised up as it is a life laid down.

Worship is doing God's will. But that doesn't mean all work is worship. I want us to notice those two words that we talked about at the end of Genesis 2.15 where God put Adam in the garden.

He said to work it. But he also said something. He said to keep it. Right? And that word keep it, that's an interesting word in the Hebrew because it's rich with imagery. And it adds an important dimension to the work God has given us to do.

See, that word keep it, it's a word that means work often assigned to what a doorkeeper or a watchman does. So what is the work of a doorkeeper?

[26 : 58] What is the work of a watchman? Well, it's to prevent anything bad from coming in, to prevent anything bad from happening. Adam's job wasn't just to work and cultivate.

At the same time, it was to be on guard to keep evil and sin out. This new dimension of work. See, working from the beginning was more than just a means to provide for ourselves.

Our work is meant to have a righteous purpose and a moral quality to it. Proverbs 20.17 says this, Bread gained by deceit, that's a way to work, right?

Is sweet to a man, right? Man, it's easy to come by, it's sweet to us. But afterwards, his mouth will be full of gravel. Proverbs 15.19 says this, The way of the sluggard is like a hedge of thorns, right?

So the path of the sluggard is prickly and painful and not fun for anyone else. But the path of the upright is a level highway. Proverbs 15.27 says, Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household.

[28 : 13] But he who hates a bribe will live. See, the work that we can do can bring blessing or it can bring destruction. Now, you might be wondering, how can that be in your job?

You know, many of us, we feel like we're just meaningless cogs in this big economic machine that we're a part of. And it's really hard to connect. Man, this little thing that I do, how do I connect that to anything of moral value or purpose?

But think about this. If you're a lineman, man, it is a blessing. Because you're helping to provide electricity to our homes and businesses. An investor, you're a blessing because you're using your skills and your wisdom to help increase wealth for people's households.

If you're a soldier, if you're a marine or navy, if you're in the military, you are a blessing because you help provide protection and security both here at home and abroad.

But here's the thing. If sinful desires like greed and lust and pride and envy start to creep in and taint the motivations for why we work and what we do, we can end up hurting others as well as ourselves.

[29 : 31] Here's some examples. Think of Enron. An energy company gone bad, right? The culture of greed and deceit and lying led to falsifying profits, falsifying statements.

And ultimately, the company went bankrupt because of that. And you know what? A lot of innocent people were just collateral damage. They lost jobs. They lost pensions. And some people lost their life savings.

Or think of Bernie Madoff, a Wall Street investor who used a Ponzi scheme to afford a very rich and lavish lifestyle for himself, but it was at the expense of innocent people.

And at the end of the day, a lot of those people never got their money back. They lost their life savings. They lost their retirement. It ruined their lives. Or remember those soldiers in the infamous Abu Ghraib prison scandal?

Those soldiers that abused their position as prison guards and mistreated POWs. See, they hurt their victims. But they also tarnished the reputation of the military and those innocent soldiers who were doing a good job and were serving well like they should be.

[30 : 42] See, in all these examples, people were selfishly motivated. They weren't thinking of others. And you know, in the end, it caught up with them. If you try to fight the law, the law is going to win.

The law of wisdom is going to bear out. And it brought disaster on themselves and it brought disaster on many others. And this happens when wisdom is ignored. Proverbs 28, 16 says, A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor.

But he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days. Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered. But he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall.

Now, these passages, what they're doing, they're asking questions of our heart. They're asking questions of your heart. And only you and God really know the answers to these questions.

So when no one is looking, what do you do? Are you honest? In your job, do you do it with integrity? Do you cheat your customers? Or do you cheat your employees?

[31 : 47] Do you cheat your employer? Do you give your best? Now, there's another side of this.

There's pressure that we get into. Pressure situations when you're asked or ordered to do something that is immoral and unethical. So an easy extreme example, we can look at soldiers in Nazi Germany.

They did atrocious things. And they tried during the Nuremberg trials. One of the things was, it's like, well, we were soldiers. We were just following orders. And you know what? No one was buying that.

At the end of the day, yeah, you're a soldier following orders. But you also have a moral responsibility for yourself. Here's a more common one.

A boss asking you to pad the numbers on a report to please a client or get that sale. And you have a choice in that moment. Are you going to give in to keep your job?

[32 : 47] Are you going to give in to, you know, meet your sales quota? Or are you going to risk and stand up for righteousness?

See, we all have decisions to make regardless if the pressure to do something wrong is coming from inside of us or outside of us. And ultimately, we're going to be answerable to God. And in these moments, we have to remember this.

We work before the audience of one. Colossians 3, 22 to 24 says this. Bond servants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service.

So you don't just obey when people are watching. Because if you do that, you're a people pleaser. But with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord, whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men.

Knowing that from the Lord, you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. One of the old pillars of our faith. One of the old pillars of Christianity is this phrase, *quorum Deo*.

[33 : 56] Fancy Latin word, but a beautiful thing. And it means this. It means something that is done in the presence of God or before the face of God. That's what our faith teaches us.

Our faith teaches us that we live *quorum Deo*. All of our life, even our work, is lived before the face of God. And this passage in Colossians is telling us that because this is true, we should work heartily.

We should work hard and diligent. Not because men are watching us, because God is watching us. We're living before his face every single day, every single moment.

Now, does that sound wonderful to you? Or are you starting to feel a little micromanaged by God? Man, are you thinking, is God really looking at me all the time?

I mean, does he ever blink? Does he ever take restroom breaks? Can I get him distracted by something maybe a little more important as I pad my hours on this invoice? So if this idea of living before the face of God, if that's bad news, let's be honest, it's because we want to keep on sinning.

[35 : 08] We don't want to be held accountable. And that misses the good news of this reality. That misses the good news that, man, working for God isn't so that you can earn his blessing and his favor.

Or by contrast, working for God isn't so that you can make sure you're in his good graces and avoid his wrath and him being upset at you. Now, it says in that verse we read in Colossians, it says that we work heartily knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward, right?

It says that God has richly rewarded you in heaven already. And it's not because of work you've done, but it's because of the work of Jesus Christ and what he did for you.

See, we don't work so that God has to owe us something in return. We work in response to his grace that has given us everything we need and everything we want.

God lavishes on us the blessings of salvation, eternal life, rewards in heaven, relationship with him, peace with him, and peace with others. And you didn't do anything to deserve those things.

[36 : 23] He's not up in the sky like some scolding father taking away some of your heavenly rewards every time you sin, you know? He's not up there and be like, well, don't get that anymore. Sorry, oh, you did that. Don't get that anymore.

He's not doing that. Because you didn't do anything to inherit. You didn't, sorry, you didn't do anything to earn the inheritance from God.

And so you can't do anything to unearn it either. See, living before the face of God, it's great news. It's the best way of how you approach work.

And all the ways that your hard work goes unnoticed, all the ways that your hard work goes underappreciated, all the ways that your hard work goes underpaid, God sees it.

And he delights in it. And you know what? He does something else. He gives us, he gives you what you need to work according to his will. So Philippians 2, 12, the second part of verse 12, it says this.

[37 : 26] Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Okay, this is working, this is on me. For it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. So this passage starts out with this personal responsibility.

Work out your own salvation. But that isn't where it ends. That isn't the last word. Actually, there's a qualifying clause. Because it's saying you can only do that because God works in you.

God is at work in you. And what is he working in us? Well, it says here, it says he's aligning our motivation. He's aligning our will with his will.

And it says he's also giving us everything we need to do the work. Second Corinthians, sorry, 9 verse 8 says this. And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

God isn't setting us up for failure. He's setting us up for success. That's what his grace does. So here is what I want us to walk away with today.

[38 : 38] What do you do between Sundays? What do you do between Sundays in the workplace? Because I want you to realize what you do matters as much, if not more, than what you do at church on Sunday.

God's presence isn't reserved for those who walk through church doors. He's there when we rise to go to work. He is there with us at our work, at our job, at our job sites, in our schools when we're studying.

He's with you when work is satisfying. And he is with you when it's not. In any and all circumstances, he is there with us and giving us what we need for each moment.

Why does he do that? Because he loves us, because he's a God of grace, but also because working hard for him is part of the good works package he prepared for us.

Ephesians 2.10 tells us that. And our good works, what they do is they point to our good God who enables and empowers us. Matthew 5.16 says this, In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[39 : 51] God's mission is for your workplace too. We think of missions happening in the nations or what pastors do. The reality is that more mission happens outside the church and in workplaces than it does in any other space.

And here's how a second century anti-Christian Roman philosopher complains about Christians in his day. In the women's chambers, in the cobbler shops, in the mill, the gospel spreads.

We have to see how in private homes, wool workers, cobblers, and millers, together with the most uneducated and coarse people, bring up the strangest things. He's talking about the gospel. Now, by the second century, the spread of the gospel shifted primarily from apostolic missions, so guys like Paul going out and doing things, to locals sharing it with each other at work.

No programs, no super saints, no theology degrees, just simple, hardworking, often uneducated people bringing their faith with them to work.

And you know what? It frustrated the Roman Empire who wanted to maintain their version of pagan worship and religion. They wanted to suppress the gospel.

[41 : 05] They wanted to oppose it, but it was impossible. Their thinking was, or the big change was, the gospel wasn't being spread by a few people like Paul and the other apostles.

You know why? It's a bummer for them because it's easy to stop one guy, right? It's easy to blow out one candle, not so easy to blow out hundreds of candles. Our work is our mission field.

Your workplace, your work is your mission field. Let your obedience to God, your worship, and diligent, honest work open the doors to the gospel.

If you're watching and not a Christian, I want you to think about these things. Work is good, but you know what? Your work can't save you. You could be a good, hard, diligent worker.

You could work for a nonprofit. You can work and donate most of your riches to various charities. But you know what? That isn't going to save you. And that's because you have the same problem we all do.

[42 : 08] We are all sinful. And no matter what we do, we can't pay off that debt of sin. We have hate and lust and pride and all these things work at us.

And we need Jesus. You need Jesus. Just like everyone else, you need his righteousness. You need his work of salvation. And so I'm going to invite you that what you can do is the Bible says you confess your sin.

You confess that you are sinful, that you need salvation. And you repent of those things and you trust Jesus as your Savior. You trust and you believe in him as your Lord and Savior and the promises you will be saved.

And I want to invite you watching to do that right now. You can say a very simple prayer along those lines. Now, if you're watching and you're a Christian, how can you adjust your attitude toward your work and your workplace?

How does living before the face of God, how does working before the audience of one cause you to rethink your attitude when you go in to do your work?

[43 : 12] How does it cause you to see work as, man, something that can be a mission field? And I want us to encourage us, man, this week, think about that. Every time you get up, for those of us who are still able to go to our jobs, think about how you can take that attitude into your work.

And hopefully, and the goal is, man, through some hard, consistent work, people can look at your life and maybe some doors get opened up for the gospel.

Now, as we take communion, remember that you live under God's grace. Man, you don't need to be perfect. You can look back and say, man, I've totally missed, I've totally had a rotten attitude towards work.

Man, this has really exposed some sin. You know what the good news is? You can repent. God always forgives you of those sins. We get to come to him. Communion is a reminder that every sin is forgiven.

By Jesus' death on the cross, and we live under the grace of God. You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to have a perfect track record and do it right all the time to enjoy his love and his delight over you.

[44 : 20] Jesus earned that for you. He earned that for me. And as we take communion, man, let's give thanks and praise that Jesus came to earn our righteousness and secure our reward in heaven.

