

Wisdom for the Life's Work

Series: Wisdom for Life (Proverbs)

Brad Bailey – August 12, 2018

Wisdom for the Life's Work...

1. _____ to provide well

Proverbs 24:30-34

I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins.

I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest-- and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

Proverbs 20:4

A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.

Proverbs 20:13 (MSG)

Proverbs 10:4 / Proverbs 17:2

2. Don't chase "_____ " and "_____ pursuits"

Proverbs 12:11 (NLT)

A hard worker has plenty of food, but a person who chases fantasies has no sense.

Proverbs 28:19 (NLT) / Proverbs 13:11 (NLT)

3. Develop your _____ motivation and initiative

Proverbs 6:6-8

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!

It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.

Colossians 3:23-24

4. Don't cheat... rather be fair and forthright in your work

Proverbs 11:1 (Msg)

God hates cheating in the marketplace;
he loves it when business is aboveboard.

Proverbs 16:11

Honest scales and balances are from the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making.

Proverbs 16:8 (NLT)

5. Don't take advantage of those with less ("the poor")

Proverbs 22:16 (NLT)

A person who gets ahead by oppressing the poor or by showering gifts on the rich will end in poverty.

Proverbs 22:22

6. _____ your potential... your skills and strengths

Proverbs 22:29 (NLT)

7. Find rest in knowing the _____ of work and material rewards

Proverbs 23:4-5 (NLT)

Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich. Be wise enough to know when to quit.

In the blink of an eye wealth disappears, for it will sprout wings and fly away like an eagle.

Additional points of wisdom related to work from proverbs...

8. Sow regard for others... from which regard can come in return

A person's gift makes room for him, and leads him before important people. - Proverbs 18:16 (NET)

This is not referring to bribery which seeks to control others, but rather exercising sincere regard that invites mutual regard as well.

9. Thoughtful planning and preparation can make our work more profitable

The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.

Proverbs 21:5

10. Hire Well -

An employer who hires a fool or a bystander is like an archer who shoots at random. - Proverbs 26:10 (NLT)

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Intro

We are continuing in our series entitled “Wisdom for Life.” Wisdom is defined best as the ability to know **how life actually works**...and what is the right response for the many choices we make. The Biblical Book of Proverbs became a means to share divinely inspired wisdom for life. (In particular it is believed to have been written with young men in mind.)

So, we are **drawing upon the Book of Proverbs** to allow divine wisdom to speak to us on various areas of life. **Today... wisdom for life's work.** [1]

I know that the very word “WORK”... may raise a little aversion.

Some may be thinking:

- “You know that “work” is a 4 letter word”...and maybe it's one of those 4 letter words in your mind.
- Maybe your thinking... “How about “Wisdom for play... for fun ...for sex?”
- Maybe your thinking: “It's Sunday, the day I live to forget Monday. I come to worship to forget work.”

But... **God doesn't see life as separated.** Every aspect of life matters... and has value. We will spend much of our lives in various work...and it is essential part of our flourishing. (On average we will spend about a quarter of our lives in a vocation... over 90,000 hours in life's work... jobs.)

I believe God knows that life's work has both **value** and **vanity**... gift now experienced in a world where oppression is at work.

God knows that many may feel that for some the basic relationship to work is: *I need a job... I get a job... I resent a job.*

To this... wisdom raises her voice.

Wisdom for the Life's Work...

I have gone through the Book of Proverbs...and **tried to summarize** what I find as **10 basic truths** which it speaks to us about. (**For the sake of time** we are **going to hear 7** ...but you will see three added at the end of your insert...and there are notes online.)

We will hear these well if we note a couple things...

1. I use the term **basic truth**... because they **may not sound** ... **new** or **novel**. And that's why it's helpful to realize that **some wisdom**... “**basic wisdom**”... reflects that despite what we think we know... because we have heard it... doesn't mean we have fully rooted ourselves in it.

As I get older... **difference** between **hearing** and **heading**.

Just because I have heard something doesn't mean I have headed it.

It's also helpful to remember...

2. The **nature of proverbial wisdom** is to state a **general principal** about **how life works**...not a formula. These are principles which **will generally play out**...**amidst the varying circumstances** of life.

They will clash with other forces...but they remain true nevertheless.

3. As **statements that summarize life principles**... they **don't involve expounding the details** or **qualifying the obvious exceptions**. In this case that means they are speaking about how one engages life's work with their given circumstances...and capabilities.

So let's take a quick run through some divine wisdom for life's work.

As we do... here is what I have found with serve each of us best: **Ask God to speak to you about at least one point that may be most relevant**. All 7 bear His divine wisdom... but I believe there is **at least one which can be your timely reminder** for this particular season of your life.

1. Work hard to provide well

Perhaps the most basic wisdom that runs through this guide to life is the very basic truth that one should work hard...that **it pays to work hard**.

Let's take a look:

Proverbs 24:30-34 (NIV)

I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins.

I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest-- and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

Here we are introduced to the term "sluggard"... the English word that many translations use.

During college years... formed a communal house... my roommate was the highly disciplined engineer... humorously quote this verse when I woke up...

He found I could join the process...as finally one morning I was well prepared and responded with my own Scripture...

"Whoever blesses his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing." - Proverbs 27:14

What a picture of this basic understanding of how life works... the one who is the **sluggard**...which means **lazy...slacker**... will have a world that is deteriorating... unable to sustain itself.

It's important to note that this is **not speaking** of the **diligent who are truly unable** to work or find work...but the basic principle about the value of work. (Wisdom is not a treatise on moral

judgements... but simply the general truth about how life actually works... which the wise understand and the fool dismiss.)

If you **withdraw** into a **state of rest... life will deteriorate.**

It will catch up with you... and what you should have had...and could have had... will have been lost.

What starts to emerge...what becomes clear...is that the one who didn't work is now faced with the harder future. The **easy road looks easy** but once you get on it, it **turns into the hard road.** And the **hard road looks hard... but once you do the hard thing** in life, it **turns out to be the easy thing.** [2]

No other truth is brought home more. [3]

Proverbs 20:4 (NIV)

A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.

Proverbs 20:13 (MSG)

Don't be too fond of sleep; you'll end up in the poorhouse. Wake up and get up; then there'll be food on the table.

Proverbs 10:4 (NIV)

Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.

One might wonder about those who simply inherit wealth...

Proverbs 17:2 (NIV)

A wise servant will rule over a disgraceful son, and will share the inheritance as one of the brothers.

That means that if you are a servant and you work hard, some day you will be promoted over a son who is legally due the inheritance. You will be honored because of your hard work.

Over time... history has proven that out...as those willing to do the hard work gain the trust that is taken from those who don't.

My sense is that **we may not feel** this is a **very valuable** or **insightful word to us.**

Perhaps we feel a little cynical because it seems rather basic... 'hard work pays off' sounds a bit basic.

Why is divine wisdom crying out with something that is so common sense?

Because God knows it is **not so simple...**it's not so easy to really embrace.

We may accept that life requires hard work...but **more** as a **vice ...than a virtue.**

The Bible teaches that work is a virtue...something valuable...but also something that can become vain and oppressive.

Wisdom is telling us **not to miss the virtue and value** amidst the negative dynamics that are also at work. Fallen world... oppressive... ultimate end never intended... life and it's labor will create a dimension of toil.

We can't deny that we **may experience** something in our working experience that is **demeaning**...but that is because of the world itself is fallen...lost the value of people. But it's not the work itself that denies our dignity.

Contrary to what a lot of people think, **work is not a dirty four-letter word.**

Today we equate **easy with good**... and **hard with bad.**

If that is taken as the way life works ...we will become the fool.

Wisdom is calling out to that part of many of us that may tend to procrastinate... to think... no one will know... who prefers the way of no plans, no forethought, no enthusiasm, no diligence. It's the way of the sluggard.

It's **not calling** us to work **excessive hours.** It's calling us not to let life pass us by. The call to hard work is a call to truly **purposeful living.**

> It is a call **not to waste your life** but to get up and get out and **do something with the opportunities** that **God has placed before you.**

Don't just sit there, don't just roll over, don't be a couch potato. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

Use your power, your **intelligence,** your **vision,** your **gifts** and **all that God gave you,** to do something. [4]

Rest and relaxation are good. They too are a gift from God, but they are meant to be a reward for hard work and preparation for more hard work.

Hard work is God's work when you are doing what God wants you to do.

Story: It reminds me of something I heard once about a teenage son who wanted to have a better physique.

So he bugged his dad for a set of weights.

So one day, they went into a sporting goods store, and looked at them.

Knowing his Dad wasn't sure whether to get them, the son said, "Please, Dad, I promise I'll use 'em every day."

The Dad said, "I don't know, Michael. It's really a commitment on your part," the father said.

And the son said, "Please, Dad?"

"They're not cheap either," the father said.

But the kid said, "I'll use 'em, Dad, I promise. You'll see."

Finally won over, the father paid for the equipment and headed for the door.

After a few steps, he heard his son behind him say, "What! You mean I have to carry them to the car?"

And that's the mindset we all have to conquer.

> **None of us embrace laziness in theory – just in practice.**

This leads to a second truth that wisdom declares. We don't just need to overcome the lack of hard work...but also the **misguided focus on false work.**

There are ways of trying to overcome hard work by **trying to find an easy way to success.**

2. Don't chase "fantasies" and "vain pursuits"

Proverbs 12:11 (NLT)

A hard worker has plenty of food, but a person who chases fantasies has no sense.

Proverbs 28:19 (NLT)

A hard worker has plenty of food, but a person who chases fantasies ends up in poverty.

**As reflected in other translations,
"Fantasies" refers to... "vain pursuits"... "useless projects."**

What is this talking about?

There is **another form of avoiding hard work** that can **undermine one's life.**

It's becoming drawn into what appears to be **"easy street"... the way to get rich quick... without hard work.**

It laziness via an alternative plan.

It's **bypassing the hard-work route** in search of

...the silver bullet,

...the winning lottery ticket,

...the small investment that pays off big,

...the "get rich quick scheme."

This isn't talking about wise investing... or every form of alternative type work...but it is highlighting something that is so relevant today.

So many offers to make easy money...that are generally just ways for other people to make money while undermining your own life.

So many programs are "chasing fantasies."

It may not involve staying in bed all day, but it does involve avoiding the kind of work needed to get ahead. One may be active, and have bursts of effort, but overall, be avoiding the real work of success.

And it's a **form of laziness**, because its goal is to find a way to **make easy money independent of consistent labor.** [5]

We need to beware of that which sounds like a way to make money...but really is unrealistic... a vain pursuit.

Proverbs 13:11 (NLT)

Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes quickly disappears; wealth from hard work grows over time.

The phrase “Wealth from get-rich-quick schemes” ... more often translated as vanity... refers to wealth that is gotten without labor, and literally from 'nothing.' It's can be reflected in gambling... as a way to strike it rich. In hard times it becomes a temptation to find an easy way out. Wisdom calls out... that the slow road is the real road to success.

3. Develop your own inner motivation and initiative

Proverbs 6:6-8 (NIV)

Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!

It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.

What is he telling us to understand? That the **most powerful creature** in terms of **provision...is the one which is not motivated by an outside force.**

This is what has been found true of ants. As one explains:

“There appears to be a total want of subordination in ant life which is noticeable among bees. The ant has no overseer; there is none to regulate or see that the work is done. Each ant apparently works independently of the rest, though guided by a common instinct to add to the common store.” [6]

That is what God wants to develop in each of us. [7] As the New Testament states...

Colossians 3:23-24 (NIV)

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

We are commanded though to do whatever job we are doing as if working for the Lord.

As one writer described,

"The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays -- not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship." - Unknown

4. Don't cheat... rather be fair and forthright in your work

Proverbs 11:1 (Msg)

*God hates cheating in the marketplace;
he loves it when business is aboveboard.*

Cheating is a simple idea: it's deceiving someone. It's tricking, swindling, defrauding. We can cheat in countless ways. Whenever we seek or allow anything but a fair exchange. [8]

Proverbs 16:11 (NIV)

Honest scales and balances are from the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making.

In the ancient near east during that time, **merchants would carry stones of different sizes** with them – primarily in order **to weigh and measure quantities** of silver for payment.

There was **no agency overseeing weights and measures**, and since silver was weighed against a stone weight, weights with dishonest labels on them were used for cheating.

If the scales were dishonest, you didn't get your money's worth, or paid more than you should, or were cheated out of your full measure.

But wisdom understands that the real stones are not the way we play with fairness...but what God knows is true. You can't cheat justice. No manipulation can change what is true. He's the ultimate scale, the ultimate standard, for every human life.

If you try and cheat... you will show that you are not living in relationship with God.

Better to have little, with godliness, than to be rich and dishonest.

Proverbs 16:8 (NLT)

And wisdom further calls us to be fair with those with less power.

5. Don't take advantage of those with less ("the poor")

Proverbs 22:16 (NLT)

A person who gets ahead by oppressing the poor or by showering gifts on the rich will end in poverty.

Proverbs 22:22 (NIV)

Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court.

There is one main dynamic – those in power should never take advantage of those without power.

The employer should never take advantage of the employee.

The manager or supervisor should never lord it over the person they are over.

Don't use power, or indebtedness, or position, to in any way take advantage of another person simply because they can't do anything about it.

Throughout the Bible, there really is a bias toward the poor and powerless – meaning caring for them, defending their rights, protecting them against oppression.

In fact, in the Old Testament, charging excessive interest for profit with the poor was condemned. [9]

Some have high consciousness for such...but generally... this will involve faith and honor of God. Why?

Because the poor don't generally have the forms of power to force you to change.

They may not miss their spending?

They generally don't have social clout... they are not in positions of power or control.
So they usually don't have to be a part of the system you develop... the business model.
Ex – how we approached retreat a few years ago...and other events.

6. Develop your potential... your skills and strengths

Along with effort... there are skills... skills that can be developed.

Proverbs 22:29 (NLT)

Do you see any truly competent workers?

They will serve kings rather than working for ordinary people.

It's one thing to work hard; it's another to grow in competency and proficiency and skill.

Work is rewarded by effort...but also ability.

So keep developing your abilities.

If you want to make your mark, **be a student for life.**

Be the type of contributor who values **reading, seminars, workshops, learning from others.**

[10]

7. Find rest in knowing the limitations of work and material rewards

Take a look at what it says in Proverbs 23:

Proverbs 23:4-5 (NLT)

Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich.

Be wise enough to know when to quit.

In the blink of an eye wealth disappears,

for it will sprout wings

and fly away like an eagle.

Don't be a Workaholic. Work can become like a drug.

That may sound a little strange... because few of us like work that much.

But we can become addicted to some unhealthy need it is serving.

It may be our sense of importance... the need to validate our lives.

Our work defines us, it tells us who we are, so we build our lives around it because it is our life.

We live for the recognition, the awards, the prestige.

Some of us are workaholics for approval. We don't just value approval ...we work beyond what is healthy because we need it so deeply.

fear stopping work because we fear us

It may be to our sense of feeling guilty when we rest.

It may be to our sense of financial insecurity...maybe because we come from a past that knew or felt insecure.

This is the common drive that is being called out here.

When we lose perspective... it will consume us and our relationships.

Did you hear about the guy who in his death bed said, "I wish I had spent more time at the office?" Neither did I...or anyone. No one...has ever said that.

CLOSING:

Invite you to take a moment... with these 7 truths before us...consider what divine wisdom for life's work may be saying to you today.

ADDITIONAL POINTS OF WISDOM RELATED TO WORK FROM PROVERBS JUST FOR NOTES...

8. Sow regard for others... from which regard can come in return

Proverbs 18:16 (NET)

A person's gift makes room for him, and leads him before important people.

Understand that meeting needs can bring rewards

Build the equity of giving to others

"He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit and he who looks after his master will be honored."

Proverbs 27:18

That is to say, when you watch out for your own affairs, and then when you take care of the business that you are employed in, you will be honored.

Now, don't confuse that with giving a bribe.

The Bible is very clear about bribery being on the dark side of things.

Proverbs 15:27 says:

A greedy man brings trouble to his family,

but he who hates bribes will live.

Being generous is more about the practice of currying favor by doing good things for people when it is possible and appropriate,

...so that you build the kind of relationship and good will that will serve you in your career and business.

When done ethically, appropriately, and circumspectly, it's wise to do it.

9. Thoughtful planning and preparation can make our work more profitable

"The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty." Proverbs 21:5

"The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord." - Proverbs 21:31

This particular proverb captures the intersection of human initiative and divine dependency.

Preparation is essential.

This means there is no substitute for preparation whether in battle... sport... arts... or work.

Victory never just “happens.”

There is a realm beyond us...so prepare and pray.

But don't trust in your plans as able to control your future.

Proverbs 27:1: Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.

Our temporal existence is lived in a world unsettled...and uncertain. So there are plenty of general patterns ..that make planning wise... but we should maintain humility and a connection to God more than our plans.

Proverbs 16:9: The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

Proverbs 19:21: Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

It must be his purposes that we are planning for, because only they will stand. Our plans must be not only dedicated to the Lord, but he must get the glory from our success. It's crucial that we allow God to reshape all our goals, steps, purposes, and plans as he desires. He knows best what we need and how to accomplish our plans.

10. Hire Well

An employer who hires a fool or a bystander is like an archer who shoots at random.

- Proverbs 26:10 (NLT)

Five qualities noted by James Emery White that can serve well to consider:

- Character.
- Competence
- Catalytic (Do they bring self-motivation and energy?)
- Chemistry (Can they relate positively with team?)
- Called (Does this truly reflect who and what they are?)

Resources:

Drew some thoughts from James Emery White “Wisdom in the Marketplace” and Ray Pritchard: Hard Work: The Reason We Get Out of Bed and Preparation: Where Victory Begins

Notes:

1. Work is a central aspect of life in which God's perspective....and His presence is deeply needed. Proverbs is a rich source which notably gives great focus on work... the marketplace. It is here that character can be developed – formed and tested. So we should see that our development as disciples is deeply formed in the process of our working lives.

2. As one explained so well: “Do you want to know the ironic thing between the easy road and the hard road? The easy road looks easy but once you get on it, it turns into the hard road. And

the hard road looks hard but once you do the hard thing in life, it turns out to be the easy thing. The easy road is deceptive. It is the way of destruction, poverty, starvation and desperation. It is the way of total financial collapse, the way to wasted days, wasted weeks, wasted months, wasted lives. The hard road which appears to be so difficult is ultimately the road of prosperity, the road of wealth and blessing, the road of fulfillment, happiness, and personal satisfaction. It is the road that leads you to the top. The easy road takes you down to the bottom. The only road that goes to the top is the hard road. It is tough, but it is the only one that goes where you want to go with your life.”

3. Other texts which speak to hard work... with an added element:

Proverbs 14:23 (NLT)

Work brings profit, but mere talk leads to poverty!

Proverbs 18:9 (NIV)

One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.

> Notice that what is understood is not simply that you lacked gain...but you let something go...and it is akin to destroying something...namely a positive opportunity.

4. The Apostle Paul saw that if one chooses to negate the truth about the need to work... they should face the consequences.

"If a man will not work, he shall not eat." - 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (NIV)

5. Another form of avoiding work has been noted in Proverbs...and that is the excuses that withdraw in fear.

Proverbs 26:13 (Msg) says:

Loafers say, "It's dangerous out there!

Tigers are prowling the streets!"

and then pull the covers back over their heads.

6. From the Pulpit Commentary – Proverbs 6:7 - Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler. This statement is substantially correct, for though the most recent observations made by modern naturalists have discovered various classes of ants occupying the same ant hill, yet there appears to be a total want of that gradation and subordination in ant life which is noticeable among bees. The ant has no overseer; there is none to regulate or see that the work is done. Each ant apparently works independently of the rest, though guided by a common instinct to add to the common store.

7. Work, in it's most basic redemptive role, is rooted in God and a reflection of God.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. - Genesis 2:15 (NIV)

8. Further words from Proverbs regarding cheating...

Switching price tags and padding the expense account are two things GOD hates. (Proverbs 20:10, Msg)

Food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man,

but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel. (Proverbs 20:17, NIV)

GOD hates cheating in the marketplace; rigged scales are an outrage. (Proverbs 20:23, Msg)

9. In Exodus 22, the Bible says:

If you lend money to my people, to any of the down-and-out among you, don't come down hard on them and gouge them with interest.

“If you take your neighbor's coat as security, give it back before nightfall; it may be your neighbor's only covering — what else does the person have to sleep in? And if I hear the neighbor crying out from the cold, I'll step in — I'm compassionate.

(Exodus 22:25-27, Msg)

It's not that interest itself is wrong, or can't be a means of profit.

But when it comes to the poor, there is to be compassion – not simply profit – when charging them for the necessities of life.

If anything, you use your position to help them – despite the bottom line.

10. Proverbs also reminds us that we cannot just rest in what we have already done.

“Be sure you know the condition of your flocks. Give careful attention to your herds. For riches do not endure forever and the crown is not secure for all generations.” Proverbs 27:23

Hard work yesterday does not guarantee tomorrow's success. Hard work yesterday has to be followed up with hard work today to guarantee tomorrow's prosperity.