

THIRD PRIORITY: Identification of Uniqueness

## Understanding The Nature of Work

### The Relationship of Calling and Career

Os Guinness, in his book, The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life, defines calling as “the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.” Far bigger than our jobs, deeper than our personal accomplishments, higher than our wildest ideas of self-fulfillment, “calling” addresses the very essence of our existence.” So that is what the book promises, and it does deliver on that promise

Calling is obviously a very comprehensive term, including our jobs or “work,” but not limited to them. He addresses the distortions of the concept of calling not only on the Catholic side (with the false secular/spiritual dichotomy), but also on the Protestant side. Whereas the Catholic distortion elevated the spiritual at the expense of the secular, the Protestant distortion elevated the secular at the expense of the spiritual.

These distortions perverted the proper perspective, as recovered by Luther and other reformers, which recognized that “if all that a believer does grows out of faith and is done for the glory of God, then all dualistic distinctions are demolished.” There are no “higher/lower, sacred/secular, perfect/permitted, contemplative/active, or first class/second class” distinctions. And to set things in the proper order, Guinness reminds that “calling means that everyone, everywhere, and in everything fulfills his or her (secondary) callings in response to God’s (primary) calling. For Luther, the peasant and the merchant—for us, the business person, the teacher, the factory worker, and the television anchor—can do God’s work (or fail to do it) just as much as the minister and the missionary.”

Back to the Protestant distortion: it is a distortion which involves equating our calling with our job/work, reducing the original demand that each Christian should have a calling, and boiling it down to “the demand that each citizen should have a job.” This triumph of secondary callings over the primary calling “meant that work was made sacred,” “holy,” or even “entirely good,” in contrast to the Bible which has a realistic view of work, seeing it after the fall as both creative *and* cursed. So this distortion equated the concept of calling with our job, and a man’s worth and purpose in life were defined by his job.

Before a healthy discussion of “work” is pursued these distinctions must be clear in our minds. Our callings from God stand separate from a job choice or career path. Of course, in our work we are to fulfill our holy calling, which is to be a dispenser of God’s glory in all that we do.

## THE ANCIENT WISDOM PERSPECTIVE

The wisdom literature possesses a rich heritage in, and deep appreciation for the uniqueness of each individual. Great value is placed on each individual becoming skillful in his work. The wisdom tradition is filled with examples of very skilled people carrying out their gifts and talents in the community. The word for wisdom literally means "skill in living." It is also used by the Jewish people for the skill of a craftsman. Wisdom is integrated with work and education. Wisdom's normal use means general skill in living, but when used with work it means skillful use of our abilities, to the level of a craftsman. When used with education, it refers to intellectual ability that integrates every branch of knowledge. Concerning skill in work, Exodus 36: 1 states:

Now Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skillful person whom the Lord has put a skill and understanding to know how to perform all the work in the construction of the sanctuary, shall perform it. .

Daniel and his three friends went through rigorous training in the Babylonian University system. They had previously shown promising "intelligence in every branch of wisdom." Daniel I : 17 records:

And for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom. . .

These references from the Hebrew tradition illustrate a particular understanding of abilities used in the context of work and education. That philosophy continues with the Jewish people up to this very day—a mindset that is quite different from the individualism many of us have grown up with. The goal of a Hebrew worker was not so much finding his or her own unique gifts to fulfill his desires or to benefit his own career. But, the goal was to master areas in which he had some skill in order to provide a valuable function within the family and the community as a whole. This goal is probably best expressed in Proverbs 22:29:

Do you see a man skilled in his work?  
He will stand before kings;  
He will not stand before obscure men.

This mastery of an area of life—whether a craft, or a trade, or some type of service, administration, or leadership within the community, or even mastery of the disciplines of wisdom—was seen by the Jewish person as a gift in three different ways:

*First*, it was something that was bestowed upon him, since they believe that their Creator bestows all skills. It seemed to him to be something that he was just born to do. He would eventually perform it at a high level because he was gifted in it.

*Second*, it was bestowed on him in a very real sense through his name. All through the Hebrew tradition, we see that the names of individuals were tied to the core of their life emphasis, skill, or identity. Every Hebrew name had an understood meaning.

*Third*, it was also a product of wisdom, the wisdom of their tradition that they were born into, which in essence was also a gift. All branches of knowledge were understood to be branches of wisdom, thus, related to the skillful living of their lives in some way. Therefore, if they

pursued knowledge, they would become more skillful in their work, which would benefit their extended family, their local community of faith, or their tribe worldwide.

It is hard for us to understand this. The point, though, was not so much discovering their individual giftedness for the purpose of personal fulfillment (often the focus of individualistic modern cultures) but so they could serve the community with greater skill—that they would be useful. Their uniqueness was in their personal signature, and in the quality of their work, not in their own advancement. According to Kotkin’s “Global Tribes” concept, those who possess this focus are at a tremendous advantage in the new global economy.

### **THE TEACHING OF PROVERBS ON WORK** (by *Greg Herrick, Ph.D.*)

There are not as many verses in the book of proverbs dealing directly with work as I expected. Topics searched included: work, labor, toil, diligent, job, industry, gather (and the various inflections of these terms). In total there appears to be about 15 verses bearing directly on the subject.

### **A List of Relevant Scriptures**

10:5; 12:11,14, 24; 13:11; 14:23; 16:6; 18:9; 21:25; 22:29; 24:27; 28:19; 31:13, 17, 31.

### **Principles from Proverbs**

The consistent presupposition of the Proverbs on this subject is that the person being addressed by these pithy sayings is indeed *able to work*. This would include most of us by far, but there are certain people who are unable to work (for whatever reason), and should not feel guilty for not being able to perform the duty described in the proverb. For them God has another word of wisdom (cf. Proverbs 3:5, 6).

1. Working is essential to living and obtaining the essentials for life.
2. Food is essential to life (12:11a; 16:26; 28:19a).
3. Food in these verses can really be amplified to include any basic necessity of life (clothing, money, etc.).

### **Lessons**

*Lesson 1:* Accept work as God's divine design for you (cf. Genesis 2:15; 2 Thess. 3:10)!

Therefore, it can be said that: (1) People who refuse to work reveal a lack of common sense in their judgment. (2) Sometimes people refuse to do the job that they have because they're always looking for a better one (12:11b). (3) Refusing to work can lead to death (21:25).

*Lesson 2:* Be careful for the "grass is greener on the other side of the fence" syndrome.

But, just determining to see the logic in working and then setting out to work is not enough. It is obviously the place to start, but one must also. . . Prioritize his work. Do the primary things first; the things upon which all else depends.

After determining which things are primary and which are secondary, and depend on the former, determine also, the proper order of the primary and secondary things (10:5).

*Lesson 3:* Do first things first, according to a plan.

Then, once a person has determined to prioritize their work by planning carefully, a person should work hard because. . . Working hard is better than working in a lazy manner.

Hard work brings a profit (14:23a).

Work done in a slack manner is as good as a piece of work which is later destroyed. Both are valueless (18:9).<sup>1</sup>

Slack work leads to poverty (14:23b).

Diligent work leads to control of one's situation (12:24).<sup>2</sup>

*Lesson 4:* If you're going to work, you might as well work hard. . .there are many benefits. In the end, after a person has worked wisely and hard, he will often times find that his. . .

Work can be very rewarding (12:14).

We get encouraged when we say nice things to others.

There is, likewise, a deep sense of pleasure as we reflect upon a job well done.

*Lesson 5:* Enjoy your work--it's God's plan!

As time passes, a person who has worked wisely and diligently will find themselves rewarded by their labor as well as skilled at what they do with the result that. . . People who are skilled at their work are sought out by people (22:29).

Skilled people do not only serve before obscure people.

Skilled people will eventually be called upon to demonstrate their skill be people in positions of authority (including public arenas).

*Lesson 6:* If you are good at what you do, do not be surprised when others want to see you in action.

The ideal wife works so well that she should be honored for her work.

She has skill and ability at what she does (31:13).

She has an obvious plan (15a)

She works vigorously (31:17).

She should be honored by her community (31:31).

*Lesson 7:* Extol your wife and women in general for their fine work.

## **Summary**

Work is God's idea and therefore excellent for man. Any attempt to circumvent this process only reveals an inability to perceive the obvious. However, for those committed to working, they need to know that there are ways to go about it that lead to enjoyment and reward. And those who are very skilled at their work often times get opportunities to demonstrate that skill before the public. Finally, when it comes to work, no price can be paid for the ideal wife who commits herself so wisely and thoroughly to her tasks that she merits

public recognition for her abilities.

## **THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF WORK**

### *The Purpose Of Work*

- To make a living - 2 Thess.3:12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living.
- To provide for our household- Proverbs 31:27 She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.
- To bless others Ephesians 4:28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need.
- To Increase in wealth- Proverbs 13:11 Wealth hastily gotten will dwindle, but he who gathers little by little will increase it.

These ordinary looking reasons for working are God's Commands! There is nothing super spiritual about it. It is just the Christian way to live!

### *The Sin Of Refusing to Work*

Not providing For Your Family is Worse Than the Heathen -1 Timothy 5:8 If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

- It is Disobediant 2 Thess.3:10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat.11 For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work.12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living.
- It Leads to Other Sins- 1 Timothy 5:13 Besides that, they learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.

### *The Curse On Those Who Refuse To Work*

- Hunger- Proverbs 19:15 Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep, and an idle person will suffer hunger . 2 Thess. 3:10 If any one will not work, let him not eat.
- Forced Labor -Proverbs 12:24 The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor
- Ruin-Ecclesiastes 10:18 Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.
- Destruction - Proverbs 18:9 He who is slack in his work is a brother to him who destroys.

### *The Folly of Covetousness*

*Some Christians refuse to work unless the job suits them. The bible never sanctions this attitude! It is just plain selfishness which is idolatry. It results in a curse, not a blessing.*

- It Ends in want Proverbs 28:22 A miserly man hastens after wealth, and does not know that want will come upon him.

- It never satisfies - Ecclesiastes 5:10 He who loves money will not be satisfied with money; nor he who loves wealth, with gain: this also is vanity.
- This wealth evaporates - Proverbs 23:4 Do not toil to acquire wealth; be wise enough to desist. 5 When your eyes light upon it, it is gone; for suddenly it takes to itself wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

### **Preparation for next week:**

#### **Identifying And Cultivating Our Abilities - Evaluate Your Skills and Abilities**

This can be done very effectively by just taking a little time to think over your work, projects, and school subjects. You will need to look for two types of assessment—your own, and those who were around you during those times. Make a list of the following areas:

- work, projects, or school courses and activities which you enjoyed the most, in which you demonstrated the most natural skill, or from which you derived the most satisfaction;
- work, projects, or school courses and activities which you enjoyed the least, in which you demonstrated the least skill, or from which you derived the least satisfaction;
- work, projects, or school courses and activities for which you received the most praise or encouragement to continue on in that line of work;
- work, projects, or school courses and activities for which you received the least praise, and needed encouragement to continue, or regular assistance of some type.

Much work has been done in this area to assist you in the process. Let me suggest a resource, Why You Can't Be Anything You Want To Be, by Arthur F. Miller or SIMA (System for Identifying Motivated Abilities).