

Biblical Anthropology

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion"
(Genesis 1:26 ESV)*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in
place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?
(Psalm 8:3-4 ESV)*

Wisdom For Work (And Witness)

April 21st, 2024

Proverbs

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to the Book of Proverbs; that's on page 527 in your church Bibles. We're in the middle of a series on Biblical Anthropology – that's just a big fancy of way of saying that we are trying to think biblically about what it MEANS to be a human being. For the last couple of weeks we've been talking about WORK. WORK is PART of what it means to be human. Work isn't all of what it means to be human – which is why God gave us the principle of SABBATH; we talked about that last week. Human beings need rhythms of work and rest. We move through life kind of like a swimmer utilizing the breaststroke. We need to come up for AIR and ORIENTATION before plunging back down into the waters of practical life and work, and then we need to do that all again on some kind of reasonable rotation – we were CREATED for the rhythm of work and worship. And of course, properly understood, work and worship are not opposites, rather they enhance, enable, empower and extend each other. They are two parts of the same essential human process.

In line with that analogy then, the last two weeks have kind of been about ELEVATING our perspective on WORK. We've talked about what it is, what it isn't and who it's for. But now I want to plunge back down into the practical depths. I want to talk this morning about the HOW. How do we work? Having SEEN what we've seen and UNDERSTOOD what we've UNDERSTOOD, how do we live that out in the context of everyday life?

That's what WISDOM is all about. Samuel James in his book *Digital Liturgies* writes that:

“Christian wisdom is about living a life that responds correctly to reality.”¹

So wisdom is BIBLICAL ANTHROPOLOGY APPLIED – and today we are looking at Biblical Anthropology applied SPECIFICALLY to the topic of work. Now I've called this message “Wisdom For Work (And Witness)” and I've put the “and witness” in brackets, because actually, when we live WISELY in the world we end up serving as guides and witnesses to other people. WISE PEOPLE, in a dark and confused world like this one are GUIDING LIGHTS. Tremper Longman III makes that point; he says:

“The wise are those who know how to navigate life. They avoid pitfalls and maximize success. If an obstacle comes their way, they know the quickest way out of the mess. Thus they are in a position to give advice to others who are not as intelligent in life skills as they are. They can help those who falter.”²

Of course, you KNOW THIS. When you do marriage WISELY and when you do FAMILY wisely, other people end up coming to you for guidance and you can use that opportunity to lead people to the person and work of Christ. So WISDOM IS WITNESS – and that applies equally to the issue of work; so we're doing double duty today; we're talking about HOW TO WORK as human beings and we're also thinking about how to USE OUR WORK to amplify and extend our witness.

With all that being said, hopefully you have your Bibles open by now to the Book of Proverbs. My intention is to walk you through 7 Wise Imperatives For Work (And Witness).

7 Wise Imperatives For Work (And Witness):

Our first wise imperative from the Book of Proverbs is this:

¹ Samuel James, *Digital Liturgies: Rediscovering Christian Wisdom In An Online Age* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 20.

² Tremper Longman III, *Job* in Baker Commentary On The Old Testament Wisdom And Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 115.

1. Do something useful

Proverbs 12:11 says:

“Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.” (Proverbs 12:11 ESV)

We talked two weeks ago about how the purpose of our work is to glorify God and bless other people. We’re not working to save ourselves and we’re not working to establish the Kingdom – those are things that JESUS DID.

The Gospel is the good news of what God has done in Christ that we could never do for ourselves. We’re saved by the work of Jesus. The kingdom comes because of the work of Jesus. We RECEIVE those things by grace through faith – we don’t make those things or accomplish those things through our own labors.

Nevertheless our labours are important. Properly conceived, properly executed, our labours have the capacity to glorify God and bless other people – that’s the goal that we should aspire to – and to achieve that goal, obviously, we’re going to have to DO SOMETHING USEFUL. It’s going to have to accord with God’s character and it’s going to have to meet some kind of human need.

There’s a lot to think about. Tim Keller says here:

“We are to see work as a way of service to God and our neighbor, and so we should both choose and conduct our work in accordance with that purpose. The question regarding our choice of work is no longer “What will make me the most money and give me the most status?” The question must now be “How, with my existing abilities and opportunities, can I be of greatest service to other people, knowing what I do of God’s will and human need?”³

So, moms and dads, you should be having conversations like this with your children. Parents in previous generations didn’t really have to do this. For most of human history little boys grew up and assumed the family trade or the family business. Many English last names reflect that tradition and practice. My last name is Carter – so we presume that somewhere back there Great Great Grandpa bought a CART and he drove that cart every morning from the city out into the

³ Timothy Keller with Katherine Leary Alsdorf, *Every Good Endeavor* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2012), 57.

fields and he bought vegetables and produce from the farmers and he CARTED it back into the city whereupon he sold it at some kind of marked up price. Great Great Great Grandpa Carter didn't ask his son what he wanted to be – it was assumed that he would be a carter. We invested a lot of money in that cart and he'd be a fool not to take advantage of that. And likewise back in the day, young girls grew up assuming that they would be moms. They would manage a household and raise up children. It is really only in the last 150 years of human history that people have been CHOOSING their own vocations – and of course the tragedy is that we often have to make that choice when we are least capable of making a good one. Most children have only had personal experience with 3 or 4 different jobs. They know what their parents do, they know what teachers do and they know what doctors do – but that's it! And so we need to get our kids out into the world! We need to encourage our children to have conversations with other adults in the church. Brothers and sisters, this is part of the MAGIC of the church. Where else could you go this morning so as to provide your 15 year old child with safe relationally access to 250-300 different career options? I don't think you can come up with a place that can do what the church can do in this area.

Young people – TALK to every older person you can in this church. Ask them to tell you the story of their first 5 jobs. That will help you discover your options and the various ways and means to pursue them.

Do something useful – and young people, if I could say one more thing to you, be aware that your natural BIASES have been hacked and distorted by Social Media. Young people are naturally inclined to accord PRESTIGE to successful people. It's human nature, there is nothing wrong with it. The problem is that Social Media has distorted what we think of as SUCCESS. Kim Kardashian has 365 million followers on Instagram – which makes her SEEM like a very successful person. We forget that before the accidental release of her “adult home video” she was a CLOSET ORGANIZER for Paris Hilton. That's not a repeatable life trajectory. And I'm not sure that is a BROADLY useful set of skills. So just understand that. Your life will be better and will make more of a positive impact, if you put your phone down after church so that you can have a conversation with some real life grown ups in this church who have lived productive and God-honouring lives.

Christians should be known as people who do useful things in the world.

Secondly, the Book of Proverbs reminds people on many different occasions of the need to be diligent.

2. Be diligent

Do something USEFUL with your life and WORK at it diligently. Proverbs 10:4 says:

“A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.” (Proverbs 10:4 ESV)

The assumption of the Bible is that the world has been wired to respond to human effort. Remember God intended for you to work. He loaded up the world with RAW MATERIALS that he intended you to develop, cultivate and distribute. In Genesis 3 we were told that it would be HARDER now to work and make a living, but we were NOT told that it would be impossible. Genesis 3 says that we’re going to SWEAT – not starve. It says:

“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread” (Genesis 3:19 ESV)

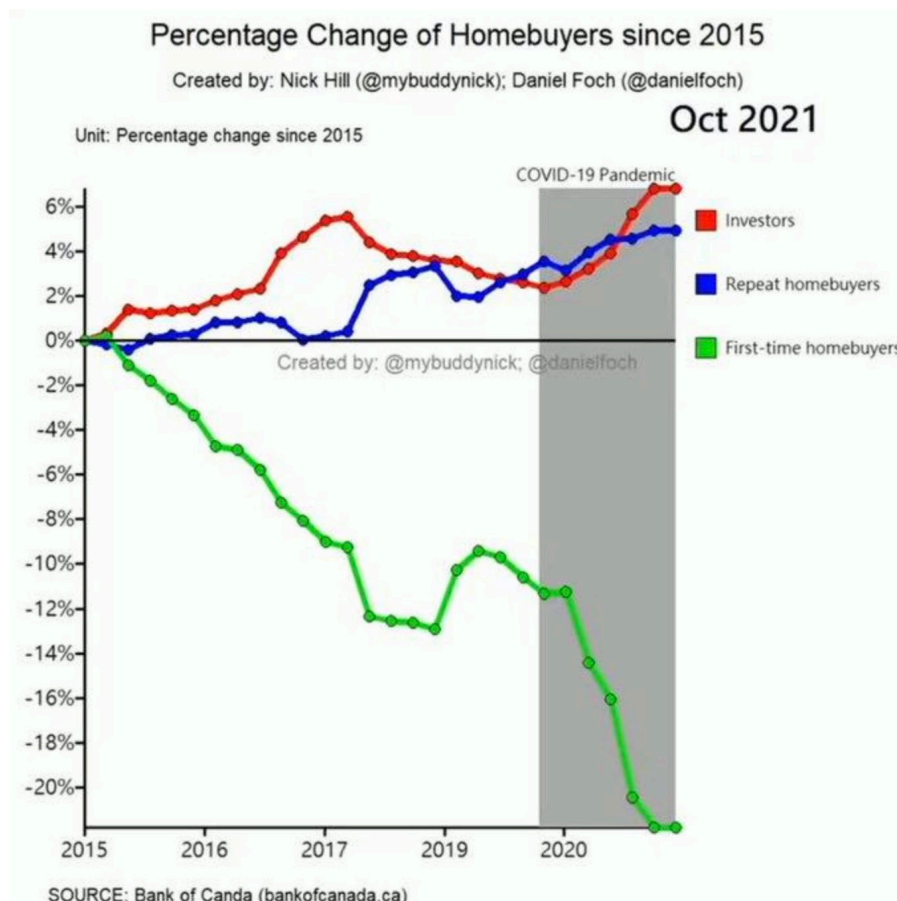
Well, to state the obvious, that’s not just a curse, it is also a promise. By the sweat of your face YOU SHALL EAT BREAD.

The Bible is saying that if you work HARD you will eat. That’s STILL the design of the world. Now, the Bible acknowledges that SOMETIMES if the whole system is corrupt, hard work might NOT produce the level of wealth that it should. Proverbs 13:23 says:

“The fallow ground of the poor would yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.” (Proverbs 13:23 ESV)

So if the system is broken, things might not work out the way they should – at least in the short term and I think an argument can be made that the system right now in Canada is a LITTLE BIT broken. The housing crisis that is happening right now is a REAL THING. Since 2015, due to the explosion in immigration rates, the BOOM in Air B&B type short term rentals, and the expansion

of foreign investment, it has become essentially impossible for young people in this country to buy a house. (Show slide)



That's not good.

BUT – at the same time – over all, young people today AREN'T doing as bad as they tend to think. When you can't buy a house, you put your money in other investments, and you spend less money on maintenance and repairs. It's not ideal – but according to the statistics, it is not quite as bad as it feels. Jean Twenge in her book *Generations* notes that:

“By 2019, households headed by Millennials actually made more money than Silents, Boomers, and Gen X'ers at the same age – and yes, that's after the numbers are adjusted for inflation.”⁴

⁴ Ibid., 260.

My point is simply this: It has always been hard to be young! Young married couples have always felt poor because young married couples have always been poor! The truth is, it is a little harder for Millennials right now to enter the housing market – but they are not poorer than their parents were at the same age – they are doing worse in some ways and better in others and if you zoom out even further you see that they are still doing a LOT BETTER than their Great Grandparents did. They had to go through a little thing called The Great Depression and World War 2 – so things will go back and forth between a little harder and a little easier – but even still, on the whole the world still PRODUCES for the people who do work and life right. Brad Wilcox in his recent research with Wendy Wang found that:

“only 3 percent of millennials who earned at least a high-school diploma, worked full-time, and waited until marriage to have children were in poverty by the time they reached young adulthood.”⁵

They call that The Success Sequence because even in this economy, it almost always works. So don't let the devil convince you that work is pointless and that you'll never get ahead. That's not true. Even in a world laboring under the curse, even in a country with some structural problems:

“the hand of the diligent makes rich.” (Proverbs 10:4 ESV)

So find something useful to do, work very, very hard at it, and generally speaking the world will provide for you. By the sweat of your face you will eat bread. But even still, it's important to know when to quit; that's our third imperative.

3. Know when to quit

We'll have to start moving a little quicker here. Proverbs 23:4-5 says:

“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.” (Proverbs 23:4–5 NLT)

⁵ Brad Wilcox, *Get Married: Why Americans Must Defy The Elites, Forge Strong Families, And Save Civilization* (USA: Broadside Books, 2024), 215.

The WISE PERSON knows that you have to work hard to earn a living in this world but he or she also knows a little something called “the law of diminishing returns”. The law of diminishing returns states that:

“profits or benefits gained from something will represent a proportionally smaller gain as more money or energy is invested in it.”⁶

So applied to the principle of WORK it means that working 40 hours a week will greatly improve your life. Working 60 hours a week, however, will probably not make your life 50% better because whatever you add in terms of income will likely come at the cost of happiness and satisfaction somewhere else. Working 80 hours a week will DEFINITELY not make your life 100% better, in fact, it is likely to make your life significantly worse. If you work 80 hours a week your life is going to become a country song: your wife is going to leave you, your kids are going to leave you, your dog is going to leave you and your going to be drowning your sorrows in some dusty saloon next to the devil and Johnny Cash – that’s the law of diminishing returns.

You have to know when to quit!

The Apostle Paul taught this principle to the young men in his care, he said:

“But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.¹⁰ For **the love of money** is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through **this craving** that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” (1 Timothy 6:8–10 ESV)

You see it’s the CRAVING for money that gets you into trouble. The CRAVING for wealth is like a carrot on a stick that leads those who lack perspective and self-control over the cliff.

The wise person knows when to quit.

Fourthly:

⁶ Oxford Languages Online.

4. Become an expert

Proverbs 22:29 says:

“Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.” (Proverbs 22:29 ESV)

I love spending time with people who are experts in their field. When I think about those experts, I notice that one thing they all have in common is that they’ve all done very well for themselves. And not all of them are particularly well educated – some of them didn’t graduate from college or university – but they chose a field and they MASTERED IT – and if you do that then, generally speaking, you will have a great many people competing for your work and offering to pay great sums of money to purchase it.

People pay for quality. They pay for expertise.

So put in the time and become an expert.

A couple of years ago Malcolm Gladwell made a bit of splash when he asserted that, generally speaking, it takes 10,000 hours to master a typical human skill or talent⁷. Now, you might say 10,000 hours! Whose got time for that? Well, actually, you do. 10,000 hours is 40 hours a week for 5 years. That’s what he’s saying. He’s saying that we should understand that it usually takes a long time to develop mastery in any discipline – but over the long haul it is worth it.

Now, of course, as Gladwell concedes, you have to have talent, you have to have a natural inclination for the work or the skill in question but the general principle is hard to deny: mastery requires a great deal of time and energy but in the end, it is worth it. If you put in the work, you will eventually have something that other people will highly value and esteem. That kind of mastery – in almost any trade, skill or discipline - will result in the ability to provide a generous income for yourself and for your family and a great benefit to the broader mass of society. So do the work and put in the time to become an expert.

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1uB5PUpGzeY>

And that leads very well into our fifth wise imperative:

5. Play the long game

There are no reliable shortcuts to wealth. Proverbs 13:11 says:

Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it. (Proverbs 13:11 ESV)

Did you know that 70% of lottery winners end up broke and a third end up declaring bankruptcy? True story – according to the National Endowment for Financial Education.⁸ Giving lots of money to people who lack wisdom is like pouring water into a bucket with a bunch of holes in it. Eventually you’ve got exactly the same bucket as you had before. How do I know that these people were unwise in the first place? Because buying lottery tickets is a time-tested way of turning 1 dollar into 53 cents, which is not a wise investment. For every dollar you put in, in terms of buying tickets, they only give out 53 cents in prizes – that’s how they make money! They take a dollar from 10,000 people and then they give one person \$5,300. That person thinks the lottery is the greatest game in town – but the other 9,999 people go home with nothing and the lottery company – or the government in many cases – goes home with \$4,700. That’s the math behind the system. Buying lottery tickets in Canada is voluntary taxation. It’s a scam that disproportionately affects the poor. A recent study found that the poorest of the poor are spending as much as 9% of their income playing the lottery⁹.

That’s criminal. That’s sinful – and someone is going to answer to God for that. The Bible says:

“You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 19:14 ESV)

It is sinful to take advantage of people who don’t know any better, and that’s what the lottery system is doing.

⁸ <https://www.lovemoney.com/galleries/64958/lottery-winners-who-won-millions-but-ended-up-with-nothing?page=1>

⁹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/03/amazing-the-poorest-households-spend-9-of-their-income-on-lottery-tickets/255304/>

Have nothing to do with it.

Slow and steady really does win the race. So do something useful. Work hard at whatever you do. Develop expertise - and in the end you will be much further ahead than if you squander your money playing silly games.

“The hand of the diligent will rule, while the slothful will be put to forced labor.”
(Proverbs 12:24 ESV)

A wise person would rather take a long road that leads to something than a short-cut that leads to nothing, so play the long game.

And maintain your integrity – that’s our sixth wise imperative.

6. Maintain your integrity

Proverbs 11:1 says:

A false balance is an abomination to the LORD, but a just weight is his delight.
(Proverbs 11:1 ESV)

God delights in FAIR COMMERCE. If you make a good product and sell it at a fair price – God delights in that! But if you are scamming people and lying to people and taking advantage of people – God hates that. That is an abomination to the Lord.

Might I add – particularly if you are scamming senior citizens. The RCMP, the OPP and the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre said in a statement in February of last year that:

“over \$9.2 million in losses were reported by seniors who fell victim to such scams in 2022 — up from \$2.4 million in 2021. Those numbers may only represent five to 10 per cent of all victims, as the vast majority do not report being scammed.”¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://globalnews.ca/news/9455006/emergency-grandparent-scams-canada-rcmp/#>

Based on that data there is about 100 million dollars being stolen from our parents and grandparents in this country every year by people willing to do just about anything for a buck. Anything but WORK that is. I often wonder how much money these people could make if they took all this technical skill and creative genius and applied it to HONEST WORK – we'd all be working for them instead of trying to hide our money and our senior citizens from them.

Listen – have nothing to do with dishonest gain. That is a short-term plan that you will struggle to explain to the God of all creation on Judgment Day. Trust me:

“Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice.” (Proverbs 16:8 ESV)

There is a final audit at the end of the game brothers and sisters, so make sure that you maintain your integrity.

And then finally and most importantly, whatever you do, whatever your calling in this life:

7. Commit your work to the Lord

“Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.” (Proverbs 16:3 ESV)

That's an interesting phrase: commit your work to the Lord; what does that mean?

We certainly recognize that terminology; it's very biblical. Psalm 37:5 for example says:

“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.” (Psalm 37:5 ESV)

The Hebrew word translated as “commit” in both of these verses is *galal* which literally means “to roll”. You can sort of picture a worshipper lifting up his or her work and rolling it into the lap of the Lord. Allen P. Ross says here:

“It portrays complete dependence on God. This is accomplished with a spirit of humility and by means of a diligent season of prayer, but the plan also must have God’s approval.”¹¹

That’s the approach we need to take with our work. We need to go to God with the plan. We need to say: “Father, here is what I’m thinking of doing. These are the gifts, talents and opportunities I believe you’ve given me. This is how I intend to glorify you and serve my fellow man – will you bless this Father? Will you use this? Will you shine a light through it? I give it you as an act of trust and worship.”

Have you ever done that?

Have you ever offered your work to the Lord?

If you haven’t, then do it right now in your heart! ROLL THAT PART OF YOUR LIFE right now into the lap of your heavenly Father. Ask him if you’ve got it right. Invite him to edit and refine however he will. Ask him to use your work to feed your family, bless your neighbours and to open a door for gospel witness. Ask him to establish the work of your hands – that’s a good prayer, brothers and sisters. It comes right out of the Bible:

“Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!” (Psalm 90:17 ESV)

That’s our prayer, heavenly Father, and we lift it to you now. Guide us, direct us, empower us we ask. Use our work to provide for our families and to bless other people in this community. Give us the wisdom to do useful things. Give us the strength to work hard. Remind us to rest. Train our hands for productive labour. Give us endurance, guard our steps. Refine our witness and use us to guide others in the ways that lead to abundant and eternal life, we ask in Jesus’ precious name, amen.

¹¹Allen P. Ross, “Proverbs,” in *Proverbs-Isaiah*, vol. 6 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Revised Edition*. eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 145.