

Family Bible Series for Jan. 1: Work was a part of God's original plan

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Work was a part of God's original plan

- Genesis 1:26-28, 31, 2:15; Proverbs 6:6-10; Colossians 3:22-4:1

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Depending on which survey you look at, as many as two-thirds of American workers are dissatisfied with their current jobs. Yet, apart from sleep, we spend more time at work than any other activity.

At the heart of the problem is that most people now view what they do for a living as a job or career rather than as a vocation. Work is seen as a chore or necessary evil rather than a calling from God.



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The idea of God calling a person to a certain job most often is seen as being reserved for missionaries and ministers. Yet the Bible is clear that a person's work is important to God and is a part of God's plan for each person.

God gives each person specific gifts and abilities and calls him or her into specific vocations (whether into the ministry, business, education, or industry) in which he or she may use these gifts and receive the most fulfillment in life. The key is to see work in its proper perspective as ordained by God from creation and seek to develop a biblical work ethic that will lead to personal fulfillment and satisfaction at work.

Genesis 1:26-28, 31, 2:15

When many people think about the origin of work, they first think of God's punishment of Adam after the fall in Genesis 3:17-19. They read these verses and conclude that work was a part of the punishment for sin and was never a part of the original plan.

This conclusion both misreads the Genesis 3 passage and overlooks other verses in Genesis 1-2. The emphasis in Genesis 3:17-19 is not on the inauguration of human labor but on the fact that labor will be difficult following the fall. The ground is cursed and will make work more difficult by producing weeds and thorns.

According to both Genesis 1 and 2, one of God's first statements to humanity dealt with their work. Humanity was given the responsibility to tend and take care of the earth through tilling and harvesting. Humanity also was allowed to exercise dominion over the rest of creation. All of this was assigned to humanity before the fall.

Thus work is not part of God's punishment on humanity for sin, but is a gift from God and a part of the original plan. Through our work, we are allowed to participate with God in maintaining the created order.

Proverbs 6:6-10

Not only is work a part of God's plan for us, it also is beneficial to us. Many times in the biblical wisdom literature, the author points to the benefits of labor and contrasts it with the folly of laziness or sloth.

In Proverbs 6, the author calls on the reader to consider the ant. Though it is one of the smallest creatures, it constantly is at work, so it continually is prepared with all of the food and provisions the colony needs for every season. It does this without having to be coerced by a commander or supervised by an overseer.

Those who are tempted to spend their time resting or sleeping should understand it is through work that we have the things we need. Without working, we are unable to provide food, shelter or clothing for ourselves and our family. Poverty and scarcity quickly overtake those who give in to the temptation toward laziness.

These verses certainly are not intended to encourage the reader to become a workaholic who never rests. Indeed, the Bible teaches the importance of rest in the proper amounts. These verses simply remind the reader of the fact that honest work has its benefits.

Colossians 3:22-4:1

The New Testament writers also were very much aware of the place of work in God's plan and its benefits. These writers often state that, because of these factors, we should do our work in a way that honors God.

The Apostle Paul discussed this a number of times in his letters. In his letter to the Colossians, he discussed guidelines for the relationship between slaves and their masters.

Many modern readers are troubled by such passages because Paul does not condemn the practice of slavery. Yet such a view overlooks the major cultural differences between our society and that of Paul. The slavery of Paul's day was completely void of the cruelty associated with slavery in the Old American South and was often voluntary and temporary servitude.

Also, we must remember that Paul was focusing on the theological issues of interpersonal relationships rather than attempting to encourage social reform. Paul may in fact have felt that if people began to carefully consider the theological implications of their actions, they might come to decide for themselves that the practice was unethical.

Such concerns finally can blind the modern reader to the modern applications of these passages. Since Paul was addressing the relationship between a worker and master, modern readers can apply these passages to the relationship between employers and their employees.

In this light, we can see that Paul is encouraging both parties to conduct their business in a way that pleases God. For the employee, this means carrying out their tasks as if God was their boss. They should avoid all hints of dishonesty or laziness and should seek excellence in all they do. For the employers, this means they should treat all employees with respect and

equality.

Work is indeed a necessary part of life. Yet we should not look at it as a chore or burden. It is a gift from God that allows us to participate in God's plan for creation. It is beneficial to us as it is done in the proper perspective, and God intends for it to be done in a way that honors him.

Discussion questions

- Do you see your work as a job or as a vocation? Why?
- How are you doing your job as unto the Lord?
- Apart from the financial aspects, how can work be beneficial to us?

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