

THE WORK ETHIC IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: CLIMBING UP

1:1 "The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: ² for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; ³ for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;" [References are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.]

PLAN

12:5 The plans of the righteous are just...
 16:3 Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.
 20:18a Make plans by seeking advice. . .
 21:5 The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.
 21:30 There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.
 24:27 Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house.
 * Prioritized planning

HAVE INTEGRITY IN YOUR WORK

11:1 The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. cf.. 20:23
 11:3 The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.
 15:27 A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live.
 16:13 Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth.
 21:6 A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.
 22:1 A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

HOW TO RELATE TO YOUR EMPLOYER

3:3 Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.
 * An employer values an employee with an attitude of love and faithfulness. This is a spiritual formation issue, not something that can be trained. It is why a Christian has an advantage in business.
 10:8 The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin. * Obeying, not resenting instructions.
 12:16 A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult. cf.. 19:11
 14:9 Fools mock at making amends for sin, but good will is found among the upright. *Restitution may be needed
 27:18 He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who looks after his master will be honored.
 28:13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.
 * Admit mistakes.
 29:23 A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.
 29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.

THE IMPORTANCE OF CAPITAL--SAVE

14:4 Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest.
 27:23 Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; ²⁴ for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations. ²⁵ When the hay is removed and new growth appears, and the grass from the hills is gathered in, ²⁶ the lambs will provide you with

clothing, and the goats with the price of a field.

* Take care of assets, so they will take care of you, especially in old age. Evaluate investments.

²⁷ You will have plenty of goats' milk to feed you and your family and to nourish your servant girls.

21:20 In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has.

*Even breaking even is foolish.

30: 24 Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise: ²⁵ Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer. cf.. 6:8

THE BLESSINGS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

3:33 The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous

10:3 The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.

10:9 The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.

15:6 The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked brings them trouble. *Money is spent in self-destructive ways.

17:20 A man of perverse heart does not prosper; he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble.

22:4 Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.

ACCEPT CORRECTION

15:12 A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise.

15:32 He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.

16:20 Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.

17:10 A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool.

19:20 Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.

25:12 Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear.

26:12 Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

*A "wise-guy" cannot be corrected.

29:1 A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy.

THE PRIORITY OF GETTING KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM AND SKILL

4:7 Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. cf.. 23:12

*Gaining knowledge and wisdom is expensive. Pick trainings and school courses carefully.

8:10 Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, ¹¹ for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. ¹² I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion.

10:14 Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin.

16:16 How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!

17:16 Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?

*Many sports stars have gone broke.

18:15 The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.

19:2 It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.

22:29 Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men. *Tradesmen, engineers, craftsmen, masters of trades, command respect.

23:23 Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding.

24:5 A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength

24:14 Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.

HOW TO RELATE TO OTHER EMPLOYEES

- 20:22 Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong! Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you. * This applies to the employee/employer relations, also.
- 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. * Finding someone of similar spirit can enable you both to do better at work.
- 29:10 Bloodthirsty men hate a man of integrity and seek to kill the upright.
- 29:27 The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright.
- 30:10 Do not slander a servant to his master, or he will curse you, and you will pay for it. * Slander is a false accusation.
- 31: 8 Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. ⁹ Speak up and judge fairly; defend the right of the poor and needy.

DISCIPLINE AND HARD WORK (not dreaming) LEAD TO PROSPERITY

- 12:1 Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.
- 12:11 He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment.
*Some people are always planning big things, but don't execute on any of them.
- 12:14 From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things as surely as the work of his hands rewards him. * Many earn a living with their words, including pastors, teachers, commentators.
- 12:24 Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.
- 14:23 All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.
- 16:26 The laborer's appetite works for him; his hunger drives him on. *The need for food can have a good effect.
- 18:9 One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.
- 25:28 Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.
- 28:19 He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty.

SLOTHFULNESS LEADS TO POVERTY

- 1:32 For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them.
- 6:6 Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! ⁷ It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, ⁸ yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. ⁹ How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? ¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest--¹¹ and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man. * Rationalizations: a "little" won't hurt. An ant does not nap during the day. It is in gear. Interestingly, even without great organization, the ant gets the job done individually, or with others, without a manager. This is not to say that all napping is wrong, especially after little sleep.
- 10:4 Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.
- 10:26 As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to those who send him.
- 19:24 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth!
- 10:16 The wages of the righteous bring them life, but the income of the wicked brings them punishment.
- 15:19 The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway. * A person who is lazy will encounter many difficulties, often through lack of resources.
- 19:15 Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry.
* Sleep may become a way to escape, together with TV.
- 20:4 A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.
- 20:13 Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare. cf.. 23:21
- 21:25 The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work. ²⁶ All day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing.
- 22:13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside!" or, "I will be murdered in the streets!"

* Wild excuses, and many excuses, to avoid work.

24:30 I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; ³¹ thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. ³² I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: ³³ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest--³⁴ and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

26:13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!"

*Work is too dangerous (or difficult)—a lazy person tries to give plausible reasons for laziness.

26:14 As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed.

26:15 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.

26:16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer discreetly.

*This is self-deception—pride in spite of all evidence of failure!

THE IMPACT OF ALCOHOL

20:1 Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise. cf.. 21:17

21:17 He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich.

23:20 Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, ²¹ for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.

23:29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? ³⁰ Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. cf.. vs. 31-35

AVOID SURETY (Co-signing)

22:26 Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts; ²⁷ if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you. *Avoid cash advance companies and loans.

OUR TONGUE

15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

17:28 Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.

18:13 He who answers before listening--that is his folly and his shame.

20:19 A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.

25:13 Like the coolness of snow at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the spirit of his masters. cf.. 25:19

26:20 Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.

27:2 Let another praise you, and not our own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.

29:20 Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

CONTROL ANGER

10:12 Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

10:18 He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.

12:16 A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.

14:17 A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated.

16:32 Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.

19:19 A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.

22:24 Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, ²⁵ or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.

29:8 Mockers stir up a city, but wise men turn away anger.

29:11 A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.

*Many have lost their job for telling off their boss.

29:22 An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.

30:32 "If you have played the fool and exalted yourself, or if you have planned evil, clap your hand over your mouth! ³³ For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife."

AVOID WICKED PEOPLE FOR COMPANIONS

4:14 Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. ¹⁵ Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.

* I've talked with many prisoners who confess to running with the wrong crowd.

24:1 Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company; ² for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble. *Don't desire this kind of "friend," even if wealthy, influential, attractive, or possessing great cars and clothes.

AVOID SEXUAL IMPURITY

Avoid an adulteress 5:1-11 If not:

5:12 You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! ¹³ I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. ¹⁴ I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly. *Men have lost good jobs due to a spiteful girlfriend or baby's mamma.

5:23 He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly [for adultery].

* There is not a work/private life split. If we are not moral in our private life, only outside pressure will keep us moral in our public life.

5:21 For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths.

*People often use the fact that God knows their heart as their justification for their lifestyle. Our heart is actually the problem (Jeremiah 17:9).

29:3 A man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth. *Sexual sin is a "heaven" that leads to "hell." God provided marriage as the best solution to meet sexual desires.

FIND A NOBLE WIFE

31:10 A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. ¹¹ Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. ¹² She brings him good, not harm, all the days of his life.

31:31 Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works praise her at the city gate.

*This can be God's greatest gift, apart from eternal salvation. Don't slide into marriage due to fornication. Honor a woman with a marriage ring before sexual relations. She will then help you to exceed in every area of your life. If she earns money, let her enjoy its benefits.

LIVE A BALANCED LIFE

27:8 Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home. cf.. Ecclesiastes. 4:5-8

30:7 "Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: ⁸ Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. ⁹ Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

*Working 2-3 jobs while ruining family relationships and health is foolish.

THE REWARDS OF GENEROSITY

- 3:9 Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; ¹⁰ then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.
- 11:24 One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.
- 11:25 A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.
* This is a universal law: we reap as we sow.
- 19:17 He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.
- 22:9 A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.
- 28:27 He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses.

DON'T TRY TO GET RICH!

- 10:2 Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death.
- 10:22 The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it.
- 11:28 Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.
- 23:4 Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. ⁵ Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.
- 28:20 A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.
- 28:22 A stingy man is eager to get rich and is unaware that poverty awaits him.
- 28:25 A greedy man stirs up dissension, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper. *See also 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

GUARD YOUR HEART

- 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. ²⁴ Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.
- 6:12 A scoundrel and villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth, ¹³ who winks with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers, ¹⁴ who plots evil with deceit in his heart--he always stirs up dissension. ¹⁵ Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy. cf. 16:30
* God sees the attitude, even if the boss doesn't. Our talk, our non-verbal behavior is seen, even deceit in the heart.
* Attitude in work is the key. Our heart needs to be right toward our authority figures and co-workers. A root of bitterness will become evident. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.