

On Wind and Wings Proverbs 22:29-23:5

math books be just as honorable as teaching a class?
It's all in how we see it.

Please stand with me in honoring God by the reading of His Word. We begin in **Proverbs 22:29** and will read through **Proverbs 23:5**.

Our subject for today's message is that of work.

The person of work

The pursuit of work

The problem with work

The pause from work

I. THE PERSON OF WORK

Let me ask first of all how many of you currently work or would work but are unemployed.

How many of you are semi-retired?

How many of you are retired?

How many of you are just plain tired?

I want to begin by suggesting something to you that may be rather obvious. You all work. Let's put aside the notion that work is during a set period of time from which at the end of a week or two we get a check in order to pay bills or treat ourselves to ice cream or a new pair of shoes. Work includes but is not limited to a job we may hold or wish to get; mowing the lawn; doing dishes; grocery shopping; fixing the leaky faucet; changing the oil; dusting; vacuuming; ironing; laundry; homework; making the bed, homework and the list can go on and on. Whatever basket you put it in – work, hobby, or chores – it's all work of one kind or another.

Let's also put aside the notion that some work is more honorable than others or that because you hold a certain position or degree you should be treated with more respect or dignity. Can fixing a cheese sandwich for your son for his lunch be just as honorable as serving a gourmet dinner to a head of state? Can putting a steering column in a car be just as honorable as driving a limousine for some executive? Can working in a paper factory binding

Notice that in **verse 29** Solomon begins by asking his son a question. Maybe it's a question for self-assessment. Maybe Solomon's son had a tendency to be lazy. Maybe he wasn't lazy but he worked at a snail's pace. Maybe he just wanted to teach him the value of work or a good work ethic.

We don't have the luxury of knowing where Solomon and his son were that prompted this discussion. Maybe they were riding their chariot through the market place and the son was commenting on all the different venders. There may have been weavers making rugs or carpenters making stools. A potter may have been sitting at his wheel spinning clay into beautiful earthen jars. A jeweler could have been sitting at another booth making bracelets.

Perhaps they went down to the construction site of the temple to oversee the progress and wanting to make a memorable point to his son asked him to look around at all the guys working and describe what he saw. Solomon asked his son, **"Do you see a man skilled in his work?"**

The NLT puts it this way: **"Do you see any truly competent workers?"** The KJV uses the word **"diligent."** In the NIV it's **"skilled."** The intent of the word in relation to how they worked is quick or prompt, implying that they did their work swiftly but carefully and with skill. Perhaps the question was rhetorical, but notice again the question. It's an invitation for his son to make an observation that he hoped would have lasting implications. "Take a good look around son. Notice those who are working. Notice the skill and speed with which they pursue their trade." These workers, whoever they were, had been noticed by the king for their diligence in work. That's what the verse says – hard work by skilled hands will get noticed.

If you want to be noticed by the boss, if you want to serve those who have great authority, do your work to the best of your ability. Do it well.

So just who is the person of work? That would include each of us. In order to do that we need to go back to the beginning.

Genesis 1:1

We need to understand that work originated with God Himself. The creative act of God in bringing the universe into existence was by its very nature an act of work by God. When we read through the entire creation account we see that each day God worked and at the end of the day He saw that what He had done was GOOD. No matter what He did His work was good. I can hear some of you maybe say, “sure Pastor, it was good because He is God and He can’t do anything less than His best.” And right you are. Everything was good that He created and then we find on the final day of His work in creation that His work was VERY GOOD.

Notice a very important phrase in **verse 26**. **“Let us make man in Our image.”** It was not just a likeness in form or of character or intellect. It was also a likeness with the capacity to work. Part of being created in the image of God is that, like God, we too are workers. Being created in His image we have been made with the capacity to do our very best. Doing His very best is part of His character. That is part of our character as well.

I have in the margin of my study Bible a note I penned that says *“We were created with the capacity to work.”* I should perhaps rephrase that to say that *“we have been created with the capacity to do our very best at work.”* Our drive to work and to achieve comes from God. Even though our nature has been marred by sin we still bear the image and capacity to work that has been put there by our Creator. The very nature of how He works has been bred in us. We are people of work.

Even just a casual reading through Scripture one cannot help but notice the various types of work associated with the names of people.

Adam and Eve were gardeners.

Cain was a farmer.

Abel and David and Amos were shepherds.

Abraham was a herdsman as were his son and grandson.

Joseph was a slave turned statesman.

Moses was a statesman turned shepherd.

Jesus was a carpenter.

Peter, James and John were fisherman.

Matthew was a tax collector.

Martha was a homemaker.

Lydia was a seller of purple.

Paul was a tent maker.

You get my point. We were made to work.

A boss asked an employee how long he had been working there. The employee said ever since he heard him coming down the hall.

One day a father told his son that he should go out and get a job. The son asked why. The father said so that he could earn some money. The son asked why. The father said so that he could put some money in a bank account and earn interest. Again the son asked why. The father said so that when he was old he could use the money in the bank account, retire, and never have to work again. The son said “I’m not working now.”

Some people don’t understand that being in the image of God means we were created to work and to work our best.

“Do you see a man ... in his work?”

Genesis 2:15

There are some who argue that work is a part of the curse. Notice as the creation account continues that God’s instruction to man to work came before the fall and not after. The fall doesn’t come until the next chapter at which time God said that our work

would involve great toil and hardship. I'm reminded of the curse every time I go out and weed the gardens.

God not only ordained work with His creative act, He also ordered it for man to continue. Work isn't just to sustain life by earning a living, it is to reveal the image of God in us and to glorify Him. Keep in mind that when God formed you in the womb it not only meant that He made you the shape and look and size and personality you are, but that He also created you with unique abilities and aptitudes suited just for you. **"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10**

Those good works are not just Christian service in duty for the King of kings. It encompasses everything we do and we must remember that there is a sovereign purpose and plan for which God has created us just the way we are.

As children of God born in His image work is a part of our nature. What we will see as we discover later on is that God did not just create us to work, He created us to work so that our work, whether it's doing the laundry or fixing cars or designing the next greatest electronic gizmo would glorify Him. It is not the thing itself that brings Him glory, but how we do our work. Our work is an act of service to others and to God Himself and through it we glorify Him.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Matthew 5:16

Are you created in the image of God? (YES)

"Do you see a man skilled, diligent, competent, prompt in His work?" God made you to work. **So how are you doing?** You are a person of work.

II. THE PURSUIT OF WORK

From **22:29** we have already noted that the word skilled can also mean diligent or prompt. I guess the question to ask right off is this: **If you have been given an assignment to accomplish, do you tend to procrastinate and delay, come up with excuses about not doing it, or do you look for someone else you can find to do the work for you? Do you give it your best?**

It doesn't matter if it's a job your boss wants done by the end of the day or week or if your parents ask you to do a chore at home or if your spouse asks you to stop for a gallon of milk or if you have some task you need to do yourself at home or even if you have some responsibility to do for a ministry team here at church.

Just why do we pursue work? Sometimes people pursue work as a means of finding significance. **What's the one question we always ask someone we meet? Where do you work or what do you do?** We have come to believe that significance is not in who we are but in what we do. Significance becomes tied with accomplishments or career.

Early in this presidential campaign Ann Romney was harshly criticized for having never worked but chose instead to be a stay at home Mom. Four years ago Sarah Palin was criticized for choosing to run as VP instead of staying home to care for her infant son who has downs syndrome.

Don't pursue significance through what you do or you may end up like the executive who had finally made it to the top of the corporate ladder where he earned really big money only to confess that once he reached the top he found that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall. Their significance comes through the accolades and promotions in their work. But they realize too late the losses along the way. It may have been the loss of relationships with a spouse or a child, or the loss of integrity or values in order to get to that position. **What is the motivation for pursuing what we do?**

Right smack in the middle of our passage, but at the beginning of chapter 23 there is a strange warning. From our initial observation we can state unequivocally that it is a warning about being a glutton. Notice, though, where the person has been invited. He has worked hard and it's paid off and has been asked to dine with the boss. What an honor. It assumes that his hard work or overwork has paid off and he's hit the mother lode. Yet a closer look is a warning against trying to impress a boss. The message is that regardless of how we may act elsewhere, when in the presence of dignitaries, who could also mean our boss, we need to be careful how we conduct ourselves. It may very well be a test of character to see how we handle ourselves in social situations that might be an indicator of how we will act when we are on the job in some new position. *I have talked with managers who attend mandatory business trips that last several days and how appalled they are at how others from their company act in social settings.*

We must understand that all our work must come under the Lordship of Christ whether it's peeling potatoes for dinner or filling out a customer order. *What's the motivation behind our pursuing that task?*

Solomon will write that pursuing wealth is like chasing after the wind. You'll never find significance that lasts or brings inner peace.

Some people pursue work for significance. Others pursue work as an escape. They may be in a bad relationship, so to avoid confrontation they stay at work longer. They use it as a diversion to avoid something like other responsibilities.

Some use work to escape the pain at losing a loved one. They pour themselves into work to get away from the emotional hurt. Work is fine to a degree to help ease the pain of loss, but when it becomes overwork then we significantly hinder ourselves from being able to properly heal.

Still others pursue work because of the rewards that they think are at the end of the rainbow. If I work extra hard I can get this. If I work more I can get this. *I have visited with people who talked about the years of working 7 days a week 10 hours a day pulling in big pay checks only to state with regret that in the end they spent it all and had nothing of value to show for it.* Our passage states that it is like chasing an eagle – it all swiftly vanishes. Significance should not be in work, how hard we work or what we can buy or own from our work.

God created us for a purpose to pursue work not for our glory as so many do, but for His glory.

I Corinthians 10:31 “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Is that our pursuit? Is all that we do for God's glory? He has uniquely made us to do what we do for His glory.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. has been quoted as saying that “If a man has been called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or as Beethoven composed music. He should sweep streets so well that all the host of heaven and earth will pause and say, ‘here lived a great sweeper who did his job well.’”

What God did in His act of work brought glory to Himself as **Psalms 19:1** so clearly states **“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”**

And then again from **Matthew 5:16** what we do brings glory to God.

But there is a problem with work. We note that in **verses 4-5.**

III. THE PROBLEM WITH WORK – v. 4-5

Please don't misunderstand me when I say there is a problem with work and if there is a problem then I might as well not participate in something that may create a greater problem. The Bible is clear that if a man doesn't work he shouldn't eat.

What does our passage say? “Do not weary yourself to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. 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.”

During WWII my Grandma had to go to work to help make ends meet and because many of the men were going off to war. The problem as my Dad saw it was once the war was over she and Grandpa liked what the extra money could do for them so she kept working.

I'm not suggesting here that women shouldn't work or that no one should work hard. Our verse tells us not to weary ourselves out trying to get rich. In essence Solomon is suggesting that we balance work with everything else we have going on. Most try to accomplish getting rich with extra work, overtime or getting a second job. The word weary or labor means to work to exhaustion. The verse is literally telling us to stop wearying ourselves with trying to get rich by overworking. Overwork is a problem.

20 years ago the average work week was 34 hours. Today the average American worker puts in 47 hours per week.

Today 70% of white collar workers are unhappy in their jobs but are still spending more time at work. Today 70% of American workers experience stress related illnesses.

The L.A. Times reports a 33% increase in heart attacks on Monday morning.

The Center for Disease Control tells us that more people die at 9:00 Monday morning, than any other time or any other day of the week.

Male suicides are highest on Sunday night.

And it's not just the stress of employment. There is the stress of work at home as well or work from school. It seem like there is always a mountain of laundry or dishes in the sink or the daily chore of figuring out what to have for dinner besides Mac and cheese or hot dogs. Our lives are dominated by work and we are stressed out.

I think the problem is this: our focus is on self and not on God. We have adapted to the world's view of work rather than God's view. The problem with work is that we have allowed it to become an idol. Someone has rightly said that “we worship work, work at play and play at worship.” Things have gotten all out of perspective. We have forgotten that God has created us in His image to have His perspective on work and that we ultimately work for Him. He's our real boss.

Here's what it looks like though. There are materialists and doxologists. The materialists are those who look at work from a purely secular or worldly perspective. They are what Chuck Bentley, CEO of Crown Financial calls “ME Trees.” Work is about them and for them. It has a temporal mindset, the accumulation of things for the here and now with no thought of an eternal investment. Through things they seek to gratify themselves.

Luke 12:13-21

Now consider some things from this passage. Here is this guy who is obviously rich and he becomes richer yet through an abundant harvest. Notice in a discussion with himself and with no one else, he has a problem. He's perplexed about what to do with an overabundance from the harvest. What to do? Notice in the end of **verse 17** his perspective on what he has. He says **“I have no place to store MY (emphasis is mine) crops.”** He is quite selfish. He doesn't even acknowledge that they come from God. It's mine. I worked for it. It's my cash cow. It belongs to me. Then he came up with a plan. I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones to put it all in.

Then I can sit back and live as I please until I grow old. I can take it easy. But the Lord had other plans for him. That night he died. Notice **verse 21 “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”**

He was a materialist concerned only about his own temporal values. He was out to gratify only himself.

From the perspective of **I John 2:15-16** we see that this rich man had no love for the Father but worked to consume things from this world for himself.

He had a **“lust of the flesh”** which in effect says what he wanted was the most important.

He had a **“lust of the eyes”** which says what he saw was most important.

He had a **“pride of life”** which says what he owned was most important. Work perpetuates a problem for the materialist.

On the other side is the doxologist. He is the one who looks at work from God’s perspective. It is entirely opposite point of view because it has an other world, eternal view that is opposed to the materialist.

Matthew 20:26-28

Luke 9:23

Philippians 2:3-4

This is a Biblical view of work. From this perspective he views work as a means of serving both God and others. He has learned that while treasures on earth are necessary to provide, sustain and care for the needs of himself and others, he is more interested in storing his real treasure in heaven where his heart is.

The doxologist who sees work from God’s perspective, looks at all he does as being eternal in nature, God-honoring in action, obedient to the divine designer who created him to work and to be selfless in nature thinking about his work as being acts of service to others and to God.

There is a problem with the world’s view of work, but it is remedied through the redemptive nature of God who through His act of grace and mercy has made us new creatures through Christ. Through our becoming a new creation by the work of the Holy Spirit in us we have once again become reminded of our purpose for living, not to work or live for ourselves, but to work and live for God and others, always seeking to bring God glory through doing our very best at whatever we do whether it will bring a pay check or not, whether it will bring a promotion or not, whether it will bring a grade or not, whether anyone will see it or not. Let me again remind you of the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. who said that we should endeavor to be the best street sweeper there is. When we remember who it is we really work for we will never consider any work beneath our ability or dignity.

Kent Hughes has written in his book *Disciplines of a Godly Man* these compelling words: “The way we work will reveal how much we have allowed the image of God to develop in us...Each of us has an eternally designed work assignment which includes the task, the ability, and a place to serve. Whatever the task to which He has called you, you will be equipped for it as surely as a bird is made for flight.”

Colossians 3:17, 23-24 “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him...Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for man, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

Christ is the answer to this problem of allowing work to consume us or working with the wrong motivation or complaining about work. Work as unto the Lord.

I leave you with one final thought.

IV. THE PAUSE FROM WORK – v. 4

Once again I refer to Solomon's warning that we are not to wear ourselves out going after riches, pursuing them with all we have, working hard, burning the candle at both ends. **"Show some restraint."** Pause at times. Get some rest.

My brother is a hard worker. Always has been. As a teacher in a Christian school for many years he didn't make a lot of money so he coached baseball and basketball to make to help pay bills. During the summer he would also work at his church as a janitor and then some years he did that through the school year as well. He never had a lot of free time. He recounted to me once that on a Saturday evening with the rest of the family gone in different directions he decided to take himself to see a movie. He told me he had his coat on, keys in one hand and the doorknob in the other when he convinced himself that he had too much to do so he stayed home.

Even Jesus told His disciples to come aside and rest. While serving at another church I fell into conversation with an engineer who worked in the auto industry. Somehow we got to talking about the automation process and he said that even machines weren't made to run 24/7. They need a break or they will break. We need a break or we will break.

Lee Iacoca once wrote "I'm constantly amazed by the number of people who can't seem to control their own schedules. Over the years, I've had many executives come to me and say with pride: 'Boy, last year I worked so hard that I didn't take any vacation.' It's nothing to be proud of. I always feel like responding: 'You dummy. You mean to tell me that you can take responsibility for an \$80 million project and you can't plan two weeks out of the year to go off with your family and have some fun?'"

As Jesus hung on the cross to do the work of redemption because that was the work He was

assigned to do and no one else could do it He said "it is finished." And then He rested.

After His creative acts were completed, God took a day to rest. In that He was saying that it's okay for us to pause and rest from work as well. If we pursue after the things of this world only to please and satisfy ourselves, we will find that they will be hard to grab hold of and like the swiftness of an eagle they will always be out of our grasp no matter how hard we pursue after it.

If on the other hand we have God at the center of our lives and we see that everything we do is an act of service to God and to others is the wheel, and we see that everything else that comprises our life are the spokes there will be balance.

Do everything for the glory of God. Begin your day by asking the Lord to help you see that everything you do is an act of service to the Lord and out of that service we worship Him. Then at the end of the day look back and ask if what you did brought Him glory. No matter how menial or insignificant it may seem to you, if done for His glory it has great value.