

**Sermon Series: Extraordinary Direction**  
**Sermon Title: Work - Curse, Commander or Calling**  
**Sermon Text: Selected verses in Proverbs**  
**Sermon Presenter: Pastor Larry**

## Introduction

When we think about our extraordinary God working in the lives of ordinary people we can't exclude the topic of work. Work is a huge part of life and professional work, which you receive a paycheck for, is not the only thing that qualifies as work! Retirees work. Homemakers work! And kids work at chores around the house and do homework for school! There's also volunteer work and sometimes that can be very hard work and time consuming! Today we're going to be talking about work overall, but specifically about work you do as a career. The principles can apply across the board, but especially to your paid vocation. So let me ask you a few questions. How many of you leave home to work? How many of you now do your work at home since covid? How many of you would consider yourselves to be a homemaker? Now I know that may be somewhat of a dated term, but it still has meaning. Notice I didn't say homebuilder, but homemaker. You see, someone has to do the work of turning a house into a home, and for years, that job fell predominantly to the ladies and so they were considered homemakers! You may not leave the house and drive to work, but a homemaker definitely has a job! I often tell my wife that she doesn't get paid enough for all she does at home! To be honest, that job should have always been a shared venture between the husband and wife, but even more so now that so many couples both have jobs outside the home. If you don't both share the domestic responsibilities then you will have troubles at some point. Besides, sharing the load will give you more time to spend together. It just makes sense. Okay, this sermon is not about marriage, I just thought I'd slip that in there because I deal with it in marriage counseling all the time. So now I have some other questions for you to consider.

Do you love your job? Do you hate your job? Do you tolerate your job?  
Do you feel you're doing what God has called you to do?

Here's some questions that will be answered in today's message...

Is work a curse due to the fall of man? Is the purpose of work just to earn a salary? Does our work matter to God? Is there anything of eternal importance with work not directly associated with a religious vocation? Does the answer to these questions have anything to do with God's extraordinary direction for our lives? Absolutely!! The answers to these questions are extremely important! They affect the reason or reasons you go to work. They affect young people as they dream about and prepare for a career or whether or not they even stay in school to prepare for a career. And the answers are even important for people who are retired! What? Yes, because when you retire from your career job, I promise you that God will have some other work for you to do in His kingdom! My Dad will turn 84 in a few weeks and my Mom is not too far behind him, but I won't go there. They may listen to the podcast this week. Anyway, they have been involved in their church as volunteers and ministry leaders and they still have their music ministry to

senior adults. In fact my dad routinely tells me he doesn't know how he ever had time to work a job! Why is the topic of work so important?

“The average person spends anywhere from forty to seventy-five percent of his or her life in work or work-related tasks.”

Several years ago, U.S. News and World Report devoted its cover story to this subject, saying:

...work dominates Americans' lives as never before, as workers pile on hours at a rate not seen since the Industrial Revolution. Many workers are left feeling insecure, unfulfilled, and under-appreciated...It's no wonder surveys of today's workers show a steady decline in job satisfaction...People are feeling crushed.”

The implications of how you view work are huge. If you are going to spend up to 75% of your life working then it stands to reason that how you view the work you do or will someday do really does matter. The wrong attitude on this subject can cause up to 75% of your life to be miserable, while the right attitude will help you find great satisfaction in your work. We need God's wisdom this morning as we consult our Soul Compass for extraordinary direction! What are some of the attitudes people have when it comes to their work? There are three main attitudes towards work...

It's my curse. It's my commander. It's my calling.

### **Attitude#1: It's my Curse!**

If you look at work as a curse then you will always struggle to find joy at something many of us have to do to provide for our families, work! If you see it as a curse you will despise work and may even become what Solomon calls a sluggard, a lazy, unmotivated individual. He says...

Prov 6:6 Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!

Prov 6:7 It has no commander, no overseer or ruler,

Prov 6:8 yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest.

Prov 6:9 How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep?

Prov 6:10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest--

Prov 6:11 and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

The ant serves as an example of the importance of hard work! Work is a natural thing even to ants and they do it well! Our soul compass, the Bible, indicates work is a good thing when properly understood and practiced, but some folks believe that work is a part of the punishment of humankind due to the bad decisions Adam and Eve made in the garden. Certainly it made work harder.

Genesis 3:17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

Genesis 3:18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

Genesis 3:19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

So the fall of humankind had a negative impact on our work and with serious consequences, but God gave Adam work to do before the fall, so work itself is not the curse. Sorry if I've taken away your favorite excuse for hating work! We read this in the very first chapter of the Bible...

Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Gen 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Gen 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

This Scripture tells us several things. First of all, God was a worker. He created things! He made things! He worked! For six days He worked and then He rested. It also tells us that He gave Adam and Eve work to do. They were not only to have and raise children, they were to "rule" over creation and eat produce from the land. I guess farming was the first occupation. Kudos to the farmers. Once again, there's multiple problems with thinking of work as a curse. If you feel this way you'll have no motivation, other than survival, to go to work. This will cause work to be a huge burden, a seeming waste of time. It becomes something you try to avoid if at all possible, and something to eliminate if you can. And Solomon actually records these words later in the Proverbs...

Proverbs 18:9 One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.

Laziness is actually destructive. It's not good for you and it's really not fun or fulfilling. Now having a lazy day every once in a while is called resting and that's not a bad thing! But let me ask you a question: What if all of a sudden you were independently wealthy and could just quit work? What if you could live in a world where you just sit on the beach and sip lemonade? Would you really be happy? Maybe for a week or two, then you would get bored. Some of you younger folks may not believe this but we used to get 3 whole months off for summer vacation. Some of the kids who hated school and homework and longed for the summer break found themselves bored out of their mind after a couple of weeks and didn't know what to do! Some of them ended up getting into trouble. My grandmother used to say, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop!"

God created us with a purpose and for a purpose and part of that purpose is meaningful work. I personally knew a man who did lawn care. He was one of the most down to earth guys you'd ever meet. He actually enjoyed his work. He loved working with his equipment. Doing a great job for his customers. He was doing his part to make the world a more beautiful place to live. He cut the grass at the church I pastored in Nashville, TN. He was one of the happiest people I knew. Then one day he won a several million dollar lotto. The dream of many. People began to hound him for money. It was no longer safe for him to do lawn care. He turned the business over to his son in law. He bought a house in a gated community. I went out one day to talk to his son in law. I asked how his father in law was doing. He replied: "Well, he's kind of miserable. He really misses his work. It's not been the blessing most people think it would be to win so much money. He misses his old life a lot."

Now what about retirement? You'll be glad to know I'm not against it! However, according to a national study published in a past issue of the Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, published by the American Psychological Association they found that...

"Retirees stay healthier if they continue working at a temporary or part-time job than if they stop working all together. The study found that those who transition from full-time work to part time or temporary jobs get fewer major diseases and are able to function better day-to-day than those who stop working cold-turkey."

We've got a guy in our church who many of you know. His name is Earnie Walder. He used to own a transmission shop here in town. He's retired! But if you talk to his wife, Jackie, she might question that assessment. Why? Because not only is Earnie gifted at fixing things automotively he also loves helping people, so he just about has to go out of town to get a break! And I'm a guilty party to his unretirement! Earnie came over to help me on my old truck this past week. I had ordered a new brake system and it came in. No instructions, and lots of parts! For Earnie, no problem, he just started picking up the pieces and putting them where they needed to go! God has gifted him with that talent. And you should see him rebuild a transmission. Pieces and parts galore and he just knows. Earnie will tell you doesn't still work on cars because he loves working on cars, but because he has a gift, and because he loves using his gift to help people. So Jackie, the good news is...

"Retirees stay healthier if they continue working at a temporary or part-time job than if they stop working all together."

I'm doing my part to help with that! Back when we built out our building on Carey Street, and then at the old Outlet Mall on Old Spanish Trail, and then this building, we had a number of retirees volunteering time at our building. Some came from different parts of the country, just to help build out our church. They are some of the happiest, most pleasant people I've ever met. They don't see work as a curse, but as a blessing. We have some folks who are retired and do a lot of ministry at our church even today. So we should not view work as a curse. It is not, nor should it be. But neither should we make our work our everything. Some have made the mistake of allowing work to become something it was never meant to be...

## **Attitude #2: It's my Commander (Idol)**

When work becomes your commander, your lord, your idol, then your priorities become extremely out of whack! You may let work become your commander because it's where you find your total meaning and purpose in life. It could be your commander because of your incessant desire for wealth. It may be an idol because you are seeking to use it to stroke your ego with success, promotions, and power over others. And if these things are your primary motivation then your temptation to succeed at any cost, any price, even hurting others may become the rule of the day. Solomon understood those temptations and had this wisdom to share...

Proverbs 15:16 Better a little with the fear of the LORD than great wealth with turmoil.  
Proverbs 15:17 Better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fattened calf with hatred.  
Proverbs 15:27 The greedy bring ruin to their households, but the one who hates bribes will live.  
Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.  
Proverbs 16:19 Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.

Doug Sherman and William Hendricks talk about the dangers of allowing work to become the commander of your life in their book, "Your Work Matters to God." They call it careerism! Here's what they say...

"By careerism I mean the idolatry of career, such that it establishes one's self-worth, and becomes the controlling center of one's life...For to the careerist, duty to self is the greatest of the commandments...Of all human endeavors, work holds the greatest potential for honoring and incarnating one's self... Consequently, the career becomes untouchable. Marriage, children, friendships, even morals if necessary, must accommodate themselves to career demands or else be left behind...The old rules said, 'Deny yourself.' The new rule says 'Fulfill yourself.' The old rules said, 'Love the Lord your God.' The new rules say, 'Love the lord thy self.'"

Solomon has some ancient, yet profound wisdom on this...

Proverbs 19:22 What a person desires is unfailing love; better to be poor than a liar.

Proverbs 20:17 Food gained by fraud tastes sweet, but one ends up with a mouth full of gravel.

Proverbs 21:6 A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.

Proverbs 23:4 Do not wear yourself out to get rich; do not trust your own cleverness.

Proverbs 23:5 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.

Proverbs 28:6 Better the poor whose walk is blameless than the rich whose ways are perverse.

Jesus had an amazing word for us on this topic...

Mark 8:36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

Mark 8:37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

However, many today dismiss the words of Jesus. Popular culture tells us to live like there is no heaven, no tomorrow, no future. You only go around once, go for the gusto! Or like the bumper sticker I once saw on a fancy car: The one who dies with the most toys wins!

Boy are they in for a rude awakening! This kind of thinking leads to twisted logic. Listen to this...

“One man said he feared dying mainly because it would mean the end of his career!” (Sherman and Hendricks pg 27, Your Work Matters to God)

And does the world have a philosophy to make this kind of idolatry okay? Yes it does. Once again Sherman and Hendricks hit the nail on the head when describing the world’s view...

“What is good is what one finds rewarding. If one’s preferences change, so does the nature of the good. Even the deepest ethical virtues are justified as matters of personal preference. Indeed, the ultimate ethical rule is simply that individuals should be able to pursue whatever they find rewarding, constrained only by the requirement that they not interfere with the ‘value systems’ of others.” (pg 31, your work matters to God)

What’s the problem with this? You cannot exalt self like this without affecting the value systems of others. When you pursue only what you think is good for you, your family, and your co-workers will be quickly sacrificed on the altar of “personal gain.” A person who has made work an idol will sacrifice anything that gets in the way of his or her career.

Paul also had something to say about this to young Timothy...

1 Tim 6:9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

1 Tim 6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Many people are pursuing fulfillment and happiness in success. The problem with success is that the fulfillment from that success doesn’t last very long. James Dobson, renowned Christian psychologist, said that he got a call one day from the janitor of the high school he attended. The janitor had been told to remove the old trophies from the trophy case to make way for new ones. The first place tennis team trophy that Dobson helped win had been thrown in the trash. He wanted to know if Dobson wanted the trophy. Listen to this...

Tennis champion Hana Mandlikova who won four Grand Slam singles titles: the 1980 Australian Open, 1981 French Open, 1985 US Open, and the 1987 Australian Open was once asked how she felt about defeating great players like Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert Lloyd. She replied, "Any big win means that all the suffering, practicing, and traveling are worth it. I feel like I own the world." When asked how long that feeling lasts, she replied, "About two minutes."

Nothing wrong with winning championships and trophies, but if work and winning takes command of your life you will sacrifice more than the job or the job titles are worth. I've known folks who were willing to sacrifice anything for promotions and achievement at work. Sometimes people will uproot their family for a promotion that doesn't really improve their family's lot in life! Looking ahead for the family and seeking a better life is not just about finances and position in the world! It's way more than that!!

So we should not see work as a curse, nor should we allow work to become our commander or idol. So what should be our attitude when it comes to work?

### **Attitude #3: It's my Calling!**

God has a purpose for each of us and has gifted us with talents and abilities to do meaningful work. Whether your work is the manual labor of building a bridge or the engineer who sits at a drafting board designing the bridge so that it is safe and can withstand a hurricane. Whether your job is growing the food, distributing it, or bagging the groceries, these are all important and when we work hard at what we are good at and gifted at, and we do it to the best of our abilities, it will bring glory to God and comes with His blessings. So our work really does matter to God! Solomon said this...

Proverbs 12:11 Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense.

Proverbs 12:12 The wicked desire the stronghold of evildoers, but the root of the righteous endures.

Proverbs 12:13 Evildoers are trapped by their sinful talk, and so the innocent escape trouble.

Proverbs 12:14 From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things, and the work of their hands brings them reward.

Okay, let me say a word about verse 11 first.

Proverbs 12:11 Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense.

Sometimes people chase the fantasies the world dangles before their eyes that promise to bring happiness and especially with a career. But Solomon is on to something here: those who simply concentrate on doing their work well, will have abundant food. However, if we are pursuing the wrong things for the wrong reasons, and it becomes all about self promotion, we lose sight of what matters most, which is bringing honor and glory to God by the way we do our job! Our work

should be our calling, not just a job! It's not wrong to want a promotion, a raise, respect, and greater responsibility, but motives come to play here in a big way! Especially if we want God's will in our lives! Especially if we want our extraordinary God to accomplish extraordinary things through our lives that have eternal value! Solomon says this...

Proverbs 12:12 The wicked desire the stronghold of evildoers, but the root of the righteous endures

So the root of a righteous person endures. The root is our heart's motivation and inspiration! If it's a righteous motivation, then it will endure! Solomon then says this...

Proverbs 12:13 Evildoers are trapped by their sinful talk, and so the innocent escape trouble.  
Proverbs 12:14 From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things, and the work of their hands brings them reward.

You see, if the root is righteous, if the motivation is good, then what comes out of your mouth and the work of your hands is positive and brings the blessing of God!

We read this verse last week but it bears repeating. Paul the Apostle said...

Col 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,  
Col 3:24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Regardless of who your boss is, good or bad, Jesus is your ultimate boss, work for him! If you are doing your work to glorify Jesus and make a difference in this old world, then your attitude will reflect that. Respect your earthly boss but remember Jesus is the main boss! Paul says whatever you do, so you don't have to be a preacher or a missionary in order for your work to have eternal significance! Just because you're not in vocational ministry doesn't mean your work is not important to God?

The division of life into the two separate compartments of secular and religious is not only wrong, it is dangerous, crippling, and devastating to God's plan for our lives! Itm

This kind of thinking leads to "spiritual schizophrenia!" God becomes only a weekend gig and that only on Sundays. This kind of thinking renders Him irrelevant the other six days. When we compartmentalize God and set Him aside in order to do our work we are setting aside His principles and values. And when we lose Godly principles and values in our work life, it will not turn out good, I can promise you that. You might have temporary success but that kind of success will cost you your joy and may cost you your very soul.

I was talking with a very successful businessman who said, "God wants us to succeed! He wants us to work hard and do well!" This man serves our Lord and has used his success to show others how faithful God is when you put Him first place! Okay, but what makes success

different from one person to the other? What makes this man's success different from the next guy?

When work is your calling then these things matter...

Purpose, priorities, practices, principles!!!

### **Purpose Matters**

What is your motive for work? Is it just to earn a paycheck? Nothing wrong with wanting to provide for your family. It's not a bad motive to want to eat. However, if our main motive has to do with the fact that we are working for the Lord and seeking to do His will, He will see to it that we are taken care of! You might be tempted to say, but I'm not a preacher! Again, Paul said, "Whatever you do!" If you're a truck driver, ultimately you're driving for the Lord! If you're a teacher, you're influencing the next generation for the Lord! Your staff is going through a book called "Spiritual Leadership!" Listen to these words from this book...

"...the next generation of great leaders is already developing, but today's adults may be too preoccupied to notice."

If you're a public school teacher you know that some of your lessons have to be taught without words, and those lessons may be the ones most remembered by your students! How you live your life! Being a spiritual leader is about who you are and that affects the way you live your life and that influences people! If you're a boss, you're managing the lives of God's children. What a responsibility. If you're an owner of a company, you're managing God's resources. What a privilege.

### **Practices Matter**

2 Th 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you,

2 Th 3:8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

2 Th 3:9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.

Use your God-given talents to bring God glory by doing your absolute best. By doing what you were gifted to do. Exalting God in all you do and not yourself. Use what you're good at and it will meet your needs, the needs of your family, the needs of the company, and will be used to further God's kingdom..You will be a witness of God's love for others. You have the opportunity to reach people, I'll never meet. You have been strategically placed where you are for a reason. If you think God may want you to change places. Simply pray and ask Him to reveal His will to you. He will do this. But don't dismiss the effect you are having for the Gospel where you are!

## **Priorities Matter**

A man or woman who is seeking God's best, will never let his or her career take priority over God, family or doing what is right, just and fair. God's Word will always serve as a moral compass for every decision made in the workplace.

I had a professor in seminary who flew to Florida once a week to have a Bible study with Jack Eckerd, founder of Eckerd drug stores. Here's what Mr. Eckerd said:

"I was 69 years old before I realized that the Bible is the most practical work ever written. It is impossible to say how it would have influenced me had I applied its truths earlier in my career, but I know the difference it makes in my life today."

This man had been extremely successful in his career and had all the trappings of that success. However, he decided later in life that the best use of his money was to buy a plane ticket every week for a man of God to help him discover the true riches in life. Jack Eckerd yearned for the success in life that can only come from having a God given purpose in life.

## **Principles Matter**

A few minutes ago I read the verses about how some have pursued the wrong priorities in life and pierced themselves with many griefs? Those verses are surrounded with Paul's wisdom to Timothy on proper priorities...

1 Tim 6:6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

1 Tim 6:7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

1 Tim 6:8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.

And then in verse 11...

1 Tim 6:11 ...pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

Paul is echoing the words of the writer of Proverbs. Listen...

Prov 10:2 Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death.

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

I want to end with the words of a man of God who lived with Godly priorities and who ultimately gave his life for those priorities...

"We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. He will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions. It is part of the discipline of humility that we must not spare our hand where it can perform a service and

that we do not assume that our schedule is our own to manage, but allow it to be arranged by God.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer