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**Proverbs: Words of Wisdom**  
**III. Commit Your Work to the Lord**  
**Gen. 2:15-17, 3:17-19; Proverbs 16:1-3**

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Over the last two Sundays, Proverbs has been teaching us about that one best way to live, called Wisdom and found only by seeking it from God. This morning we ask of Proverbs a very specific question about this Wisdom way of living. Namely, how do we live out this Wisdom way of life in our daily labors? How does Wisdom inform both the way we think about our work, as well as how we actually do our work? The answer Proverbs gives, the Wisdom way to work, is this: *“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”* Simple, right? No. To really get to the heart of what Proverbs is here telling us about the Wisdom way to work, we’re first going to have to go back to the very beginning of the Bible – to Genesis, chapters two and three. Now, one clarification before we do so: when the Bible talks about work, it means whatever labor human beings perform for the maintenance and enrichment of life – not just paid labor. In other words, all of us are included in what the Bible says about work, because all of us, each day, perform labors related to the maintenance and enrichment of life.

All right. We go back to Genesis 2 to hear the very first word the Bible speaks about our daily labors – and that is that our daily labors are part of our place in God’s good plan for His very good Creation, and have been so since the very beginning: *“The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”* In other words, the first word spoken about our daily labor tells us that our work is rooted in God’s good purpose for human flourishing in His Creation. Work is assigned to us by God – but not as a burden, as a blessing! The blessing of having something purposeful with which to fill up our days; the blessing of being able to employ meaningfully the skills and strength and intelligence with which our Creator has endowed us; the blessing of being able to participate with God – even to become partners with God – in His ongoing work of sustaining life on this planet and in keeping His Creation good. Our daily work, says Genesis 2, is first and foremost a blessing God has granted us in His love and care for us.

And when our daily work is going well – when we are doing work which we find meaningful – then, indeed, we do experience our daily work as a blessing. We do experience this blessing of working with and for God, whether we are changing a diaper or changing students’ minds, whether we are making dinner or making a deal, whether we are building a house or building a home. One woman offers her personal testimony to work as a blessing:

❖ *Work is my gift to the world. It is my social fruitfulness. It ties me to my neighbor and binds me to the future . . .*

- ❖ *Work is the way that I am saved from total self-centeredness. It gives me a reason to exist that is larger than myself . . . It gives me hope.*
- ❖ *Work gives me a place in salvation. It helps me redeem the world from sin . . . It brings us all one step closer to what the Kingdom is meant to be . . .*
- ❖ *Work leads to self-fulfillment. It uses the gifts and talents we know we have and it calls on gifts in us of which we are unaware.<sup>1</sup>*

Work, says the Bible, is first and foremost a gracious gift of God given to us as a blessing. Our daily working is an essential part of God's own good and ongoing work of Creation.

But if we sometimes experience daily work as just this sort of blessing, we must also acknowledge that just as often, perhaps even more so, we experience our daily work as drudgery – or, worse than drudgery, as a downright curse. A curse that degrades us, wears us out without reward, alienates us with mindless repetition and boredom, thwarts our larger dreams and ambitions, exploits us, and does not do justice to the skills and strengths and intelligence we possess. Work as a daily grind. Work as a curse, not a blessing.

And the Bible speaks also to this aspect and experience of our daily labors. For scarcely have we finished reading about work as a blessing in Genesis 2 than we run into the explanation of what has gone wrong with God's blessing of work in Genesis 3. In Genesis 3, remember, we find the story of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God. And what we learn is that the effect of that Sin is so far-reaching that nothing escapes the corruption let loose by that Sin – including God's blessing of daily labor. Because of our sin, says the Bible, the blessing of our daily work is now distorted and damaged. Because of our sin, what God gave us as a blessing does indeed often feel more like a curse:

*And to Adam [God] said,  
 "Because you have . . . eaten of the tree  
 of which I commanded you,  
 'You shall not eat of it,'  
 cursed is the ground because of you;  
 in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you . . .  
 By the sweat of your face  
 you shall eat bread . . ."*

Because of sin, what was meant to bring us fulfillment now just as often brings us frustration. Because of sin, what was meant to be a source of joy has become a source of anxiety. Because of sin, says the Bible, the blessing of work has become the curse of work. So, Genesis 2 and 3 together tell us the full truth about our experience of our daily labors. Work is a blessing, but work is also a curse. Some days our work is fulfilling and good, some days it is soul-numbing and miserable. Most of the time, I suppose, it is just somewhere in-between. But that then raises the question: is this blessing/curse experience of work just the way it is and always shall be? Is

this the Bible's final word on the subject, meaning we're just going to have to make peace with our work the way that it is?

And the answer to that question is a very firm No! For the Bible has yet one more word to say about our daily labors. And that Word, of course, is Jesus Christ our Lord and our Savior. In just a few weeks, we will once again be celebrating His coming into this world to save us from our sins. But we also celebrate that He came not just to save us from the guilt of our sin and the punishment for our sin, but that He came also to save us from the damage, the curse, our sin has let loose upon this world and upon our lives. He came to make life for us, even now, more like what God always intended for our lives to be. And that includes our work lives. Jesus Christ has come to redeem, among so many other things, the curse our work has become, that our work might indeed become more and more like the blessing God always intended for it to be. The great Christmas carol, Joy to the World, verse three – remember how Genesis 3 said the ground was now cursed because of our sin, *“thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you”*? Verse three of that great hymn: *“No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; he comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found.”* In Jesus Christ, even our work, our daily labors and our experience of them – can now be, are even now being, redeemed, as far as the curse is found!

And that is the invitation offered to us in Proverbs 16, the Wisdom way of working: *“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”* Established not in the sense of how the world falsely measures success – money, power, and position. But rather established once again in the Genesis 2 sense of the word – established once again as the blessing of God. Commit your work to the Lord, and to His saving and redeeming and world-altering, life-changing power – and we will begin to discover in our daily labors more and more of the purpose and usefulness and satisfaction and even joy that God always intended for our work to possess. Commit your work to the Lord, and to His saving and redeeming and world-altering, life-changing power – and increasingly what we do each day will be reconnected to God's own working in this world. Such that even the repetitious tasks, even the most boring and unappreciated labors, can begin to find a higher purpose and a larger value and a deeper satisfaction than we have imagined possible. In fact, by Christ's saving and redeeming and world-altering, life-changing power, not only can our daily labors become a blessing again to us, but also can be used by God to make our work a blessing to others and to this Garden He still charges us to till and to keep. *“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”* This is nothing less than God's invitation to us to let Jesus Christ redeem our daily labors – that, once again, our work shall be for us a blessing.

*“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”* In practical terms, then, what does this look like when we commit our work to the Lord? It means, first of all, simply to realize and to acknowledge that God is present to us and with us in our Monday work, not just in our Sunday worship. It is for us to remember the presence of God in our working, to attend to the presence of God through our labors, to ask for the help and guidance of God in the midst of all our daily efforts. And not just in the big, important jobs, but even in the smallest details of the most ordinary of tasks. For example, it is my job to make the morning coffee in our household. That's actually the Biblically sanctioned role of the husband in the household, to make the coffee – because it says so right there in the Book of “He-brews.”<sup>2</sup> So I make the coffee, and gladly so. But Anne has framed for me a beautiful morning litany for the making of the morning coffee which

I found in a devotional book – and it hangs right above the coffee maker, so that I can read it, and pray it, every morning during this small act of daily working. It connects my daily making of the coffee to the real and daily presence of God. The litany reads:

*Meet me, O Christ,  
in this stillness of morning.  
Move me, O Spirit,  
to quiet my heart.  
Mend me, O Father,  
from yesterday's harms.*

*From the discords of yesterday,  
resurrect my peace.  
From the discouragements of yesterday,  
resurrect my hope.  
From the weariness of yesterday,  
resurrect my strength.  
From the doubts of yesterday,  
resurrect my faith.  
From the wounds of yesterday,  
resurrect my love.*

*Let me enter this new day,  
aware of my need  
and awake to your grace, O Lord.  
Amen.<sup>3</sup>*

So I make the coffee, and I pray that prayer – and I find God present already in that most humble of chores. To commit our work to the redeeming power of our Lord is, first of all, simply to invite Him into our daily working – or, rather, simply to recognize that He is already there, always there throughout the day, in all of our daily labors, waiting for us to notice and acknowledge Him, that He might draw even nearer to us.

And then, “*Commit your work to the Lord*” means also that we allow God to show us, to reconnect us, to the way our daily labors serve others. To help us see the connections between what we do each day and His commandment that we should love one another. For, truly, in ways great and small, obvious and hidden, directly or indirectly, what we do each day can and does bring blessing to others – those near and dear, and even those we shall never meet. That same devotional book where I found my coffee-making prayer, also offers this prayer for someone just starting their day in a workplace:

*Let me work and serve in this position  
with mindfulness, creativity, and kindness,  
loving you well by loving  
all whom I encounter here.<sup>4</sup>*

But maybe even better is Tony Campolo's story of the Ph.D. mailman. A promising young professor at a large state university walked into the dean's office one day and quit. The dean warned him that if he really quit, he would never get another teaching position anywhere. The young professor said, *"That's okay,"* and walked out. A few weeks later, his mother called Campolo and asked him to visit her son and see if he could bring him to his senses. After all, she said, what else is he going to do with a Ph.D. in English lit?

Campolo visited the former professor's attic apartment in Trenton, New Jersey. It was furnished with a lot of books and a beanbag chair. The young man invited Campolo to have a seat, so Campolo sat in the beanbag chair, which he said then swallowed him up like an overgrown amoeba. And the young man then explained, *"I quit. That's all there is to it. I couldn't stand it anymore. Every time I walked into that classroom, I died a little bit."* Campolo then asked him what he was doing now and, with great enthusiasm, the young man answered that he was a mailman. Campolo writes:

*"A Ph.D. mailman. Now that's something!" I responded.  
He laughed and said, "There really aren't too many of us out there."*

*Being raised on the Protestant ethic, I then said what you would expect me to say: "Well, if you're going to be a mailman, be the best mailman you can possibly be!"*

*"I'm a lousy mailman," he answered with a laugh. "Everybody else in my post office gets the mail delivered by two-thirty in the afternoon, or three at the latest. I never get it delivered until about five!"*

*"What takes you so long?" I inquired.*

*"I visit," he said. "You can't imagine how many people on my route never got visited until I became the mailman. There are interesting people on my route who are interested in literature. There are hurting people who need the comfort that comes from the great poets. There are people who read and want to share what they've learned. I can't go to sleep at night!" And when I asked him why, he said, "It's hard to go to sleep after you've drunk twenty cups of coffee."*

*I wasn't surprised when I found out the following year that the people of his mail route had gotten together and thrown a surprise birthday party for him at the local American Legion hall. He was special to them, and they were special to him. His mail route had become a mission field.*

*Work should be a way of living out our commitments and our love for people. So far as it is possible, we should settle for nothing less. Work should be a means for spiritual fulfillment.<sup>5</sup>*

And committing our work to the Lord means that it can again become precisely like that – service to God, but also a form of servant love freely given to others.

And then, last, to commit our work to the Lord, to His saving and redeeming and world-altering, life-changing power, means simply that we begin to see that what we do each day is of great worth to God, is of genuine use to God as He renews, rebuilds, and restores all things in Christ. So much of what we do each day may seem unnoticed, unappreciated – especially if it is done for love rather than for a paycheck. But God sees it, and God is grateful for all our working when it is committed to Him. To commit our work to the Lord is to see that, in Jesus, we again have been made partners with God in that holy work of tilling and keeping His Creation. In ways both great and small, in works both hidden and known, we work with God, for God, and to His glory and gladness. Our daily working is part of, and deeply connected to, His greater working in all Creation.

The nineteenth-century English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote some beautiful words about just this promise:

*It is not only prayer that gives God glory but work. Smiting on an anvil, sawing a beam, whitewashing a wall, driving horses, sweeping, scouring, everything gives God some glory if being in his grace you do it as your duty . . . To lift up the hands in prayer gives God glory, but a man with a dungfork in his hand, a woman with a slop pail, gives him glory too. He is so great that all things give him glory if you mean they should.<sup>6</sup>*

And the great Reformer, Martin Luther, said something much the same a few centuries earlier: *“If you ask an insignificant maid-servant why she scours a dish or milks the cow, she can say: I know that the thing I do pleases God, for I have God’s Word and commandment . . . God does not look at the insignificance of the acts but at the heart that serves Him in such little things.”<sup>7</sup>*

At the heart that serves Him in all things. In other words, *“Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Chittister, “Work: Participation in Creation,” *Weavings*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (January/February 1993), pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> Such Preacher jokes are even better than Dad jokes for their ability to elicit a groan and an eye-roll.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Kaine McKelvey, “A Liturgy for the Ritual of Morning Coffee,” in *Every Moment Holy* (Nashville: Rabbit Room Press, 2017), p.135. I highly recommend this excellence resource! Here is a link to the book: [Every Moment Holy, Vol. 1 Hardcover – The Rabbit Room Store](#); and to the print hanging over my coffee-maker: [Liturgy Prints: Every Moment Holy – The Rabbit Room Store](#).

<sup>4</sup> McKelvey, from “A Liturgy for One Who Is Employed,” p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), pp. 170-171.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in “Insights on Work,” *Plough Quarterly*, No. 22 (Autumn, 2019), p. 61. The *Plough Quarterly* is also a resource I dearly love and strongly recommend: [Subscribe to Plough Quarterly magazine](#).

<sup>7</sup> Source unknown.