

Work as an Act of Love

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[0 : 00] Our reading today is a selection from the book of Proverbs. A worker's appetite works for him, his mouth urges him on.

The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it. Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.

Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings. He will not stand before obscure men. Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him. A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight. The wicked accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice.

Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth or gives to the rich will only come to poverty.

[1 : 19] This is the word of God. Great. Thanks, Karen. Yeah. We're doing some Proverbs.

This is a topical series about faith and work. And yeah, I thought why not speak from Proverbs? Because Proverbs is this great practical book. Right? It's very down to earth. It's all over the place because that's the kind of book it is.

But I think it's useful because, you know, work is an important thing. It's great to have the youth here today. And work is what it's all about. Right? You're doing homework and you're studying hard. Why? Well, so you can get to uni. And why do you go to uni? Well, so you can work. That is, I think, what most of us think. Right? But then, okay, why is work so important? Why do we work?

And what work should I do? Right? You get uni advising and career advising. And many students here probably wonder, okay, what job should I apply to? And what should I do?

[2 : 16] And it's not just the students. Right? Young graduates. And you're in your job for a few years. Oh, should I move on? Or what should I do? Maybe you're in a midlife crisis and you wonder, am I really going to do this for another 20 years?

Or should I change my job? Right? But it's a big thing for us, our work. And so, well, let's learn from what the Bible says. And, yeah, today will be nice and practical, theory.

I want us to look at Proverbs and just look at three basic question words. Now, there's lots in Proverbs that I could look at. And the thing is, of course, you know, work is a big thing.

Right? Sorry, I forgot something. Yeah, work is a big thing here in Hong Kong, as we know.

Yeah, if you were wondering, the next slide was about the working hours here in Hong Kong, 50 hours a week on average, apparently. If you guys, that is what you're doing.

[3 : 17] And most of us know that, right? We spend so much time at work. I guess we want to do it right. Maybe if you want to work a bit less, why don't you move to Paris, where people work less than 31 hours a week.

Right? No, seriously. No. But work is not just about the hours we put in, right? I hope from today we can feel, okay, work is important.

And work is good. And work is how we serve God. But how do we serve God? Well, the book of Proverbs, of course, has a lot to say about work. There's lots of stuff that we could look at.

You know, lots of verses are applicable to everything. So, here's a nice verse. You know, a soft answer turns away rough, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Now, that's a great verse for social media, right?

It's also a great verse for your work team meeting. So, there's lots of stuff that we could talk about. But I want to talk about three simple question words. Why work? What work should we do? And how to work?

[4 : 15] Those three things. Okay? So, that's where we're going. So, why do we work? Well, in a way, it's very simple. Proverbs is very down to earth.

You know, provide money for yourself. Provide for yourself, right? So, Proverbs 15 to 16, 26. A worker's appetite works for him. His mouth urges him on. Why do you see people working hard in pretty hard jobs?

Well, they want food on the table. They need money. It's very simple. And it's not just you. It's your family. Proverbs 27. Know well the condition of your flocks.

And give attention to your herds. The lambs will provide your clothing. And the goats the price of a field. There will be enough goat's milk for your food. For the food of your household.

And maintenance for your girls. Right? Your household needs food and clothing. And so, you work. You're a good farmer looking after your goats and sheep. Right? Makes sense.

[5 : 12] You provide for your family. But it's more than that, right? Because at the same time, you also serve society. So, here's an interesting proverb. 11.26.

The people curse him who holds back grain. But a blessing is on the head of him who sells it. And what is the contrast here? What do people appreciate?

Someone who sells their grain. Rather than someone who hoards it. Now, it doesn't mean you have to give your grain away. This is, yeah. You have a village. And, you know, there's people there.

And one person, he has all the grain. And the problem is the other people need that. And so, how can you be a blessing? Well, you sell your grain. You contribute to the needs of others.

And so, you serve society. That is what we do. Because, yeah. Not everyone has that. And I think that's what work is like. I mean, why is society so much more developed now than in the past?

[6 : 10] Well, because people are specializing. Right? We all do different things. Why is the church? How does the church work well? Well, we all have different gifts. And we all contribute. And you must be really glad I'm not on the music team.

Right? And other people, well, they're not very good at production. Et cetera. Right? And that's the same in society. You know, we all have something to contribute. You know, I can't give myself a haircut.

But maybe you can. Those kind of things. We need each other. That is society. Imagine if you were the only person alive. What would your life be like?

Right? You have to grow your own food. Make your own clean water. Make your own clothes.

Generate your own electricity. To watch your own Marvel movies. You can't do that.

We can't live like that. No. Instead, we have the doctor. And the teacher. And the blacksmith. And, you know, the farmer. And the person transporting it. And the person selling it.

[7 : 07] And all that stuff. That is how society works. Right? And, yeah. That's how we serve each other. But if you put it all together. I think the big answer is.

Why do we work? We work out of love. Right? Why do you serve society out of love? You want to benefit others. And why do you provide for your family?

Well, that's love. Right? Love for your family. And even providing for yourself. The New Testament says that's love. You might think. Well, this is just my own paycheck. Yeah, but if you work for yourself.

Then you're not being a burden to others. Right? Because if you don't work. Someone else needs to pay for you. I'm not saying you can't be a student. Or a stay-at-home parent. Or a charity volunteer.

Or any of that. Right? Maybe you're unemployed. But, you know, yeah. The lazy person. Right?

They sleep late. And they watch TV. And they hang out with friends. While other people pay for them.

[8 : 02] That's selfish. The loving thing is to just go out there. And work and contribute. And so, we work out of love. After all, what's Jesus' great commandment?

Right? Love God and love your neighbor. Well, you work because you love society. You love your family. Yeah, you love. That's great, right?

I mean, what is love? Love is sacrificing for the good of others. Right? That's what you do. You get out of bed. You sacrifice your time. You sacrifice your energy for the good of others.

It's love. Work is love. Isn't that a wonderful thing? Right? Actually, you're loving there. And maybe you're in this job. And, you know, maybe it's a bit boring.

It's hard work. Remember, you are loving people. You're loving your family. You're loving society. Doesn't that motivate you? Doesn't that give you some encouragement? I'm here to love people. [9 : 01] Maybe you're here as a youth. Why are you doing homework? Why do you do all that? Well, when you grow up, then you can love people better. The more educated you are, the more skills and knowledge you have.

You can love people better. What a great motivation. That's, I think, what the Bible would say. It's just love. Of course, I know what you're all thinking, right? That is so unreal.

That is really not how the world works, right? I remember whenever I applied for a job, I've never seen a company saying, come here, work for us, then you can love people. Well, hold that thought. Because the next thing you then probably wonder, yeah, so what job should I do? All right? Well, what does Proverbs have to say about what job to do?

And I think the answer is nothing. There's very little. There's no verse somewhere that says you should be a lawyer or something like that, right? Don't know. If you think that's what the Bible, the Bible doesn't work like that.

[9 : 58] It has very little about jobs. It just, you know, it tells us to work, which means, in a way, you're free. You just need to apply the principles here. And what's the principle? Well, love.

How can you love people? You have certain skills. There's maybe things you enjoy doing. Well, how can I do what I enjoy doing to bless people, to love them?

It's a great thing to think about, right? As you're a student or when you're in school, how can I love people with the person I am and the skills I have? Love. Of course, you need to think about your income as well, right?

Maybe you can write poetry, and that's a really wonderful thing. It just doesn't earn very much, right, in the most expensive city in the world. So, in that case, yeah, you also have to provide for yourself and your family.

Maybe do that in your spare time. You don't know. I once had this kind of guy in my church, and he was in IT, and he was just really frustrated with his job.

[11 : 00] And he wanted to quit his job. And, you know, I want to create a video game. That's always been my dream. Yeah, but how about your rent? And how about your kids' tuition fees and all that stuff, right? So, yeah, I told him maybe stay in spare time, right?

Here's a great verse. Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty. Worthless doesn't mean it's dodgy.

He who chases fantasies will be full of poverty. So, sometimes you just need to do your job and provide for your family. But, in a way, it doesn't matter. You know, whatever benefits society.

But there's lots of people, right? The doctor, the teacher, the garbage collector, the street cleaner, they all benefit society. It doesn't help you very much.

But at the same time, it's kind of freeing. But at the same time, I know what you're all thinking, right? This is so unreal because why do you work?

[12 : 00] Well, I think modern people, we all think about, you know, self-fulfillment and job satisfaction and reaching my potential and reaching the top, right, of my profession.

And I want to be ambitious. And, right, I think many of us, we're professionals. This is the kind of things we're thinking, right? This is what we get told at school and at uni. And this is what companies advertising.

Hey, come and work for us. We have such a steep learning curve. We're having so many challenges for you so you can reach all your potential. What do we do with that? What do we do with modern professional work, right?

Is this something God wants us to do? He's given you gifts. Use them. Reach your potential. Well, I think we should realize some of this, we need to put it in perspective, right?

This kind of job is a modern luxury. Think about life 3,000 years ago. You didn't go to school. You didn't go to uni. You were just born on a farm.

[13 : 02] And you learned farming from your parents. And you spent the rest of your life farming. That's life. Right? Same job. No career. Just farming. And that's pretty normal.

No wonder Proverbs doesn't talk about what job to do. Because most people, right? This is where you were born and this is what you do. It's a modern thing, right?

It's only recently, you know, the past 150 years or something that people can really choose. And only kind of now that things are so developed and there's so much security for food and everything

that, yeah, people can do kind of whatever they want if you're in some cases.

And even then, look at the modern society. You know, we think of, yeah, a fulfilling career. Look around you at all the people in Hong Kong. Do all the people in Hong Kong have a fulfilling career? Look at the guards and the domestic helpers and the delivery drivers and the shop assistants and the waiters. You know, it's, not many people can have this.

[14:05] Here's this book about work, Daniel Doriani. It's been great for thinking about these things. I mean, who is this kind of work for? A fulfilling career.

He says it's just a myth that that's for everyone. This myth applies at best to those who have native intelligence, a network of supportive adults, a strong work ethic, and access to an elite education by world standards.

Those in the lower socioeconomic classes rarely have such opportunities. Most people will not have a fulfilling career, right? 99% of Christians don't have a fulfilling career in history and in the world.

Remember that. You know, next time you're kind of complaining about your boring job. Well, look at the guard. Look at the street cleaner. That's the thing. And so, in a way, what that already shows, a fulfilling career can't be super important, right?

If 99% of Christians don't have one, it can't be that important. But at the same time, you know, we are a church with loads of professionals. So how should we think about it, right?

[15:11] I mean, is a career a good thing? I mean, here's about the only verse I could think of. 22, 29. Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings.

He will not stand before obscure men. All right, if you're really good, you know you're going to make it. You're going to probably be very successful, right? You're going to do well. But, of course, that just happens.

Do you need to seek it? Well, here's a few things that I thought of that I think are useful to think about. First of all, it is just really good to pursue love.

Right? That's what we thought about. We should love. But actually, love can mean all those things. Love can mean ambition. Love can mean reaching the top and everything, right? If you want to go into politics and you want to bless people, well, the higher up, the more people you affect.

So, you know, go as high as you can, right? Because you can love more people. That's a good thing. How about, you know, reaching your potential? Imagine someone, and they have the gifts and the intelligence to cure cancer.

[16:19] But they are being a barista at Starbucks so that they have more time to watch Netflix. What do you think? Now, you can serve God at Starbucks.

You know, Hong Kongers need coffee, definitely. But, you know, is that really the most loving thing you can do? If you can cure cancer, you know, actually love would demand that you fulfill your potential, right?

That you go for it and that you use what you can do. That's a great thing. Or a salary, right? So often we want a job because of more money. That can be a good thing.

You know, maybe in a few years you want to start a family and one of you will become a stay-at-home parent. And you have kids which are expensive. Well, we need more money. So maybe I should go for that promotion just so I can, you know, we have enough money as a family. That's a loving thing. But again, all of this is love, right? That's not usually what we do. Usually, well, my fulfillment and my status and my salary and those kind of things, right?

[17:22] Then again, it's okay to enjoy yourself, right? I think we can all say that. It's okay to enjoy yourself. You know, the Bible says, hey, it's great to enjoy your job.

If you have a job that you enjoy, wonderful. You know, so if you can choose between two jobs and one is boring and the other is fulfilling, why not choose a fulfilling job? Why not change?

It's a great thing. I did that. You know, I remember I was in a certain job and then there was a reorganization and it became so boring. I was a project manager and I had to get other people to work and I couldn't do anything myself and I was just bored.

And so after eight months, I had enough and I looked for other jobs and I found one that was just so much more fitting with who I was. So, hey, I moved. Nothing about love, just me wanting something that I enjoyed.

And that's fine, right? It's okay to enjoy yourself. So it can be good. It can be neutral. Well, then again, some of this, you know, work is a huge cultural idol, right?

[18 : 26] For so many of us, work is just an idol, right? It's what people do for their fulfillment and for their status, right? And I need this job because I need fulfillment and I need all these things.

Actually, is that the reason you want it? Let me tell you, you're going to be disappointed. Idol is always disappointed, right? If you think your job is going to satisfy you, well, first of all, it's a created thing, right?

It won't satisfy you. And second, you're in a broken world. You're going to be so frustrated if you're going to depend on your job to fully fulfill you. Now, we were made for God, right?

For Jesus. No wonder people in Hong Kong idolize work because they don't have Jesus. Jesus, but we do. If you're a Christian, you have, you know, you have the all-satisfying darling of heaven in Jesus.

He will satisfy you. You don't need a fulfilling job, right? You want status. Well, you're a child of God. You're going to sit next to Jesus judging angels. Who cares about being a senior manager rather than an assistant manager, right?

[19 : 35] Maybe you want to fulfill your potential. One of my former pastors, he told a group of young adults, you have way too much potential for this life, which is true, right?

You know, you're an immortal being in the image of God. Forty years and a job is not going to exhaust all your gifts and all your skills and all your potential. No, you've got an eternity.

An eternity to develop everything you can to explore the universe, to try every job and to fully become the person God wants you to be.

Who cares about now, right? So, yeah, it's a good thing. It's a nice thing. Actually, you don't need it. And lastly, you've got higher priorities, right, as well.

I mean, if this is an optional thing, right, it's a good thing, but you don't need it. Well, actually, you have other things that Jesus also wants you to do. Now, I think when I, for many of us, the Christian life is really a lot like these spinning plates.

[20 : 38] Do you ever feel like that? You know, I've got my job and I've got my spouse and I've got my kids and my church and my friends. And I need to reach out to non-Christians and I need to balance all these things with my time.

And how am I going to do that? Well, it's good to know that a fulfilling career is optional, right? It's not the most important thing, which means that actually I can say no to that if I need to.

How about family? Jesus says you should love your spouse and raise your kids well and those kind of things. So if I, okay, here's a promotion, but it means a lot less time at home.

Maybe I should say no, because Jesus says I should do these things and he doesn't command me to have a fulfilling career. That's a good thing to think. I sometimes see, especially Asian families, they just, work is so important that they just, the kids, they speak Tagalog more than Chinese, right?

That's not good. Right? Maybe some of you need to think about that. After all, right? That is what, yeah, this is what matters more.

[21 : 49] Or think about church. Right? For many people sometimes, you know, church, yeah, it's good, but they're not that involved because they're too busy with their career.

Too busy working for that promotion. Oh, yeah, CG. Oh, yeah, that'd be great if you have time for it, but I'm too busy working for this promotion. I mean, we have the great commission.

We have a commandment. And there's no command for a fulfilling career. Wouldn't it be great if it was the other way around? Oh, promotion. Oh, yeah, it's nice if you have time for it.

I'm just too busy with church. Wouldn't that be great? I think, because, well, that's the thing, right?

You're going to stand before Jesus, and he's not going to ask about your CV. He's not going to ask about your job title or your salary.

He is going to ask about your family. He is going to ask about that commission he gave us. And that's what we need to keep in mind. So, hey, get a job you like, but there you have higher priorities.

[22 : 49] And so, putting all that together, what should we do? Well, I think here is, I think, the best verse on choosing a job. One Corinthians, seven.

If you're doing a reading plan, like 61% of you, you're going to be reading this on Wednesday. A chapter on marriage and singleness. And, you know, the single people want to be married, and the married people want to be single.

And Paul says, hey, it doesn't matter. You can serve God wherever you are. And he gives an illustration about work. And so, this is what he says. All right. Were you a slave when called?

Do not be concerned about it. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord.

And likewise, he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. All right. So, hey, if you're a slave, don't worry about it. You can serve God as a slave. If you just remember the gospel.

[23 : 48] But if you can become free, do it. And what does that mean? I guess, yeah, these two things, right? First, if you're stuck, you know, be content in Christ. Maybe your job isn't great.

Maybe you want to move on, but you can't. Maybe family limits, what you can do. Hey, be content. It's okay. You don't need it. And you have Christ, right?

You have everything. The slave is a freedman in Christ. You have everything already. And if you're free, if you can make a choice, well, use it under Christ. Make a good decision what would be what you like to do, what would be good for you.

Just make a good decision, but do it under Christ. Remember, here's priorities what he wants. And by the way, that's not an easy decision. You know, some people, wow, should I stay or should I go? And, you know, is it good to show commitment by staying?

Or is it good to show ambition by leaving? No idea. Right? These are things you need to pray through and talk through with wise Christians.

[24 : 51] Right? You know, some things in the Bible are easy. No adultery. That's very, it's right and wrong. But should you move on if you're free? No idea. Right? Talk to people. There's no easy answer.

Okay? Great. But basically, go back to, that's, I think, what it says. Now, in the end, it's not about what job you do.

It's not about what job you do. You can serve God in any job. What then does matter? Well, back to Proverbs. It's how you work. How should you work?

Right? It's not, it doesn't matter what you do, but how do you work? And, of course, Proverbs has lots of wisdom, lots of common sense. Meet your deadlines. Ask for advice. I know, plan, think before you act.

It's all in Proverbs. But I think the big thing is, you know, some moral stuff. So, for example, big thing, be diligent. Yeah? Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the slugger to those who send him.

[25 : 53] Right? It's terrible if you have an employee who is just lazy. Right? They show up late. They're on their phone, and they don't do their job, and they're unreliable. That's terrible.

So, be diligent. Work wholeheartedly for the Lord. Right? Do your best. Also, in school, do your best. Don't just do the minimum you can get away with.

That's what it would say. You know, be honest. A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight. Right?

No cheating. Christians should be known for complete integrity. Which, of course, is sometimes not easy. I found it easy. Yeah.

So often in work, people want to cheat because it's better. Right? We promise something to a client, but we don't actually mean it and just want to get them to sign the contract. And you want to say no because you're a Christian and, you know, you want to be honest.

[26 : 51] You want to be just and fair. Right? Right? The wicked accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice. Bribery is a huge thing in many countries. Maybe less here, but it's there.

Right? It's so easy to give favors to people because of what they give to you. No, we shouldn't be like that. Be compassionate. Right? Whoever oppresses the poor to increase his own wealth or gives to the rich will only come to poverty.

It's so easy. Yeah? Because people need you and you can abuse that. Right? The poor need money. It's good to lend them money. But, yeah, then you charge so much interest that you're just exploiting.

And for so many companies, basically what you do is exploit people. And as Christians, we want to stay away from that. But then again, what is this all?

I mean, there's more I could say. It's love. Right? If you work hard, you're loving. If you are just and compassionate, you're loving. If you're not cheating, you're loving. Basically, how do you work?

[27 : 52] Love. You love your clients. You love your colleagues. You love your managers. It's all love. After all, right, we serve the God of love.

We imitate the God of love. We represent the God of love. How do we do that? By loving. Isn't it always easy? You know, you're a lawyer. What does it look like to love justice and to love my client and to love the person I'm going up against?

Sometimes it's very hard. But ultimately, that's the principle, right? Love. And that speaks to people. You know, it's not about your position.

It's not about what you do. It's about how you do it. I mean, someone asked me, hey, how can I glorify God when I'm in the lowest position in my office? Right? I'm the corporate slave.

How can I glorify God? Well, the Bible would say, through your love. You know, Paul never writes to CEOs and governors.

[28 : 50] He writes to the slaves and says, hey, you can serve God and you can make an impression through your love. So, like Titus, slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything.

They are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Right?

All of that is love, right? Working wholeheartedly and not stealing and not arguing, just being a loving slave. And you show the gospel.

You're adorning. Isn't that a wonderful vision? Just love. Because, after all, isn't that what Jesus is like? I mean, Jesus is the king of the universe.

But what is the thing that really attracts us to him? Is it the fact that he had this really high status? Well, no. It's the gospel, isn't it? You know, Jesus, he didn't stay in this high position.

[29 : 47] He came down and he became a human. He became a rabbi. A carpenter. And then, well, he became a criminal. And he did the hardest work.

He died on a cross for you. That's what he did. And he sacrificed himself. He didn't go to the cross for his own self-fulfillment.

He didn't go there because he enjoyed it so much. No, his joy was in serving others. In meeting our greatest needs. By paying for our sin. And isn't that the thing that attracts us to him?

It's not his status. It's not his power. They are beautiful, but it's his love ultimately, right? And if you love, you are representing him. And he's called you.

He's loved you. He's made you his own. Giving you the spirit of love to empower you to love. And that is what he wants us to do now. To go out there in Hong Kong.

[30 : 46] Well, like we say, right? Christ in his community being renewed by the gospel. Loving Hong Kong. Well, that's the vision we have, right? When we work, we are like Christ.

And so we love. Why don't we think about that? Let's go into Hong Kong this week loving. So I'll probably give you one minute just to reflect.

Or should we just go straight to? Yeah, just think about it. And then I'll close us in prayer in a minute's time. Thank you.

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we are amazed at your love. That you showed on the cross. And we want to be inspired by that. We are so thankful that you paid for us.

[32 : 36] That you loved us. And it's such a beautiful thing that we can bring you to others. Through the way we live. Through what we say. When we love others. Would we be a community of love?

Would we go into Hong Kong with love? That you would be glorified in us. And you through us.

Lord, this is such a great vision. We know we have so many mixed motives and so many idols.

That was to put them away. And make you our God. Make you the one who rules our lives. And that your spirit would fill us with love. In your name we pray. Amen.