

# PROVERBS

What's it like to work in a great place? If you've worked in a good work environment, you know how great it is when the team pulls together, people cooperate, collegiality, and people pull their weight. The atmosphere is one where it is a joy to work. Sure, work has its difficulties, it has its hardships, but the load feels lighter, the problems not so bad, and the desire to work feels just right.

What's it like to work in a toxic environment? Probably more of us have experienced an environment where people avoid doing anything except what's asked of them. The talk is negative. Little murmurs go on, with winks, nods, and comments that are undercutting of others in low whispers. People complain, and you can hardly wait to get off. You live for the weekend, and you'll do whatever it takes to isolate the toxicity.

Creating a work climate that is positive and where there is unity is very challenging. You have to share ideals, philosophy, goals, and outcomes. You have to foster humility, and the slightest bit of pride or arrogance or overconfidence can ruin a work environment in no time.

Proverbs 6 actually speaks to the challenges of our work and the way that we live in the midst of our work. While vv. 1-19 have four sections that seem to be disconnected, these verses are skillfully woven together to cause us to think long and hard about the work environment that each one of us can create and how we can make a positive impact so that the good life is one that includes our day to day work environment. So what are the skills we need to help cultivate a positive, can do work environment? Proverbs 6 gives us two things to consider:

## **Avoid Laziness and Learn to Work Hard (vv. 1-11)**

The first two sections are intimately linked – they both give the command to go (6:3; 6); they both give examples from nature (6:5, 6), they both speak about sleep (6:4, 10). So there are several clues here that suggest that these two sections should be read together teaching us one principle. Let's explore what they are teaching to see why we should avoid laziness and learn to work hard.

### **Learn Financial Skills (vv. 1-5)**

The first warning in this section is that of financial wisdom. The father tells his son not to put up security for a neighbour or a stranger. The first thing I want us to notice is that the word stranger in v. 1 should remind us of the stranger in 5:10 – that as much as Proverbs warns against the strange woman, it also warns against the strange man. Dangers abound in the world, and men and women can lead you astray from the path of wisdom.

The general principle laid out is this: don't go and co-sign a loan, don't secure someone's debt if you don't know them. If you're in that situation, plead to remove yourself from the burden –

## **Living the Good Life: Working for Oneness - Proverbs 6:1-19**

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literally v. 3 says to go humble yourself, and learn from a gazelle who runs from the hunter or a bird who flees from the hand of the fowler.

It makes sense that you wouldn't want to put your money up for a stranger when you might lose it all. And yet it happens. Families are often torn apart because someone fails to follow through on a loan and the other family member has to go good on the payments.

But the question is why would someone ever want to put up security for a stranger? Why would you be so foolish to do such a thing? We can immediately see the folly of signing a loan for someone you don't know. So why would a father include that in his instructions?

There may be two reasons. The first reason is that Proverbs commends the practice of helping the poor and needy (cf. Prov. 19:17). Being generous to those who have a legitimate need is evidence of the glory of God because God is a generous God.

But more likely, as one commentator pointed out, there was probably some lucrative deal struck so that a percentage would be cut for the lender. In other words, this warning points out the danger of speculative dealings in order to make a quick buck. If you think you can make fast money by taking responsibility for someone else's finances, you are fooling yourself. The best way to manage money is to work hard and learn the value of a dollar.

### **Learn a Good Work Ethic (vv. 6-1!)**

The second warning against laziness comes from the person who doesn't look at nature and see how an ant can work hard without having a boss demanding that they go. They prepare for winter. Instead, this person says, "I'll just rest my hands" instead of working with their hands. "I'll just sleep in today, it's no big deal," and suddenly they find that they've slept the day away. The result is that poverty will come upon them like a thief.

Instead, this son is commended to look at nature and see how hard work pays off. Being diligent, working hard, planning ahead – these are all gifts from God. Laziness will result in poverty.

But I want us to hear one important qualification about poverty here. Poverty is not necessarily the result of laziness. But laziness will result in poverty. The two are not exactly linked equally. You can be hard working and be poor because of societal and social structures that prevent you from success. This is one reason that Proverbs commends the practice of generosity to the poor.

But the lazy person just doesn't want to work. Proverbs 22:13 tells us that a sluggard makes up imaginary circumstances to avoid work: "There's a lion outside! I'll be slain in the streets!" The lazy person doesn't want to work. And we need to understand that the way of love is to work hard with your hands. Laziness wants other people to do the hard work for you. Love says I will

do the hard work for the benefit of others. Laziness says “carry me, I’m burdened!” Love says, “Carry each other’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Laziness says, “I need others to take care of me,” but love says, “Each one should carry his own load” (Gal. 6:5).

What we have here in the first 11 verses is a call – work hard. Don’t avoid responsibility to work hard, and take on the right kinds of responsibility. When you do, you will learn the value of ruling well, doing what Adam was to do in the garden. Work is a gift from God, not a chore to be avoided.

## **Avoid Division and Learn to Love Unity (vv. 12-19)**

The third and fourth sections of warning of folly are also connected, and they are linked with how you use your mouth, eyes, hands, feet, and heart to cause division.

In the first section (vv. 12-15), this person is a malicious person. They want to cause someone else harm. They want to destroy someone, and the motive of their heart is to find a way to ruin them. This is hatred in its truest sense. It is sneaky – they wink with their eyes, they give the nudge with the foot. Their whole body practices evil, and they aim to sow discord (v. 14b).

But their end, the father says, is that the calamity they seek will seek them out. The destruction they seek to bring will destroy them. “You reap what you sow,” would be the equivalent principle here.

And then the father gives this numerical list – six things the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him. These number lists will show up again in chapter 30, but what we need to know about how they work is simply this: that the last item in the list is the thing that is the abomination of focus.

Why does the Lord hate discord so vehemently? Because the mouth, eyes, hands, feet, and heart have all been working in a way to undermine what is good and beautiful. The Lord our God is One. Because he is One, we ought to reflect that oneness. This was the point of Psalm 133 that Devon read as our call to worship – unity refreshes the soul like dew on the mountain, like oil in the beard. Dissension is the result of pride, lies, and evil. The devil is the author of division. He has been seeking since the very beginning to bring about discord and dissension.

What the Lord loves is when his people work to maintain the unity that reflects his heart. “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One,” the people were to pray (Deut. 6:4). Because when we see that the Lord is one, we recognize that division among us is an evidence that something is out of step with the Spirit of God. Because the good life of hard work and unity are intended to point us to...

## **See the Wisdom of Christ**

When Jesus came, just hours before he was to die on the cross, he prayed for his disciples in John 17. As he prayed, he told his Father that he had finished the work that he had been given (Jn. 17:4), and the result of that work was to bring unity to his disciples – that they may be one just as he was one with the Father (Jn. 17:11).

And here is the beauty of what Christ has come to do: he has come to change us from the inside out. He takes us from being dead in transgressions and sins and makes us alive in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:1-4). He has come to give us new desires so that we might walk in these ways, preparing good works that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10). He doesn't save us because of our good works, but he saves us for good works. And one of those good works that he saves us for is to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1ff). What Christ came to do, he calls us to do. But what Christ calls us to do, he prepares us to do it. He doesn't ask us to do something that he hasn't already done for us. He doesn't give us a work that we cannot do. He gives us a work that is already done for us so that we can walk in it.

And this is what is good news. Hard work is not some punishment from God, but a gift to be enjoyed so that you might serve others in love. It's intended to bring people together. Its purpose is to love your neighbour as you love yourself. When we get this vision of the work that the Father has for us, then the daily tasks, the menial chores, the temptation to stay in bed can be confronted with love: God has given me something beautiful to do to be a blessing and to bless others. Because Christ came to earth, lived and died, did his Father's work, so that you and I might be brought together with Christ and with one another. And as we work to maintain this unity of the Spirit, we show the world that work is a good gift that can be used to love God and neighbour, all for his glory and our good.

So let's work hard to love!