

Text: Proverbs 6:6–11; 11:1–7, Colossians 3:23–24

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Wisdom in Work

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.”

That’s how the Apostle Paul puts it in our Gospel reading from Colossians today.

Work can often be associated with stress, burnout, or even injustice. It can be viewed as a necessary evil, or seen as a means to an end - how we put food on the table. Paul’s short sentence reminds us of something both ancient and radical: that work, done rightly, can be an act of worship.

Of course, our readings today aren’t only speaking about paid work. Whether the tasks we undertake are for an employer, as a volunteer, in our church, or as part of a household, when we think of our work as an act of worship, it changes how we do it.

Our readings from Proverbs today speak with a similar emphasis. That the way we work is a spiritual matter. Honest work and integrity are matters of wisdom, and that how we handle our labor reveals not just who we are, but who we believe God to be.

This morning, we consider the wisdom in work through three main truths from these texts:

1. The importance of Diligence Over Laziness
2. Honesty and Integrity in Business
3. Serving God in All We Do

Let’s begin with the ant. *“Go to the ant, you lazybones; consider its ways and be wise.”* Proverbs 6:6

The ant is proposed here as the epitome of diligence - hardworking, self-motivated, prepared for the season ahead. Now, it’s worth noting that Proverbs is not a scientific text. Modern biology can tell us all about hierarchies and queen ants and pheromones—but entomology isn’t the point here. The point is that the ant works diligently without needing constant oversight, and seems to have an exemplary internal motivation. Consider such ways and be wise, the sages advise. We have a God given responsibility to work responsibly.

How long will you lie there, O lazybones? When will you rise from your sleep?

10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,

11 and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want, like an armed warrior.

Proverbs doesn’t mince words. Laziness isn’t just a bad habit; it’s foolish and can result in dire circumstances. Again, Proverbs isn’t social science of economics and sociology - many people are poor for complex reasons beyond their control. And many people are rich through no work of their own. Remember, Proverbs is working in probabilities. And those who have the ability and opportunity to work ought not shirk the responsibility to do so.

In this ancient agrarian society, laziness during the harvest wasn't just a personal issue—it was a community threat. If food wasn't gathered, there was no corner store. No grocery delivery. The survival of the family and village depended on people showing up and doing their work—especially when the harvest was ready.

And isn't the work we do so often just as dependent on one another? Do we do our share - not more than our share, but do we participate diligently? Do we look to be served or look for ways to serve? Do we wait to be asked, or volunteer? Do we expect others to carry the load rather than pitching in? Many hands make light work - not a Biblical proverb, but our ancient sages would certainly agree.

Before we move on, a word needs to be said about rest. Proverbs isn't condemning all rest. After all, the God who commands us to work also commands Sabbath. But here's the point: if we abandon our responsibilities, if we disengage from our calling, we may find ourselves barred from the very rest we were created to enjoy. None of us is called to a life of only leisure, but neither are any of us called to a life of endless toil either. Wisdom isn't just knowing these verses about diligence, but applying them wisely to the situations in which a reminder of our responsibilities is warranted.

Our second section from Proverbs speaks about honesty and integrity in business. "The Lord detests dishonest scales, but accurate weights find favor with him." (Proverbs 11:1)

Honesty in business was a critical issue in the ancient world. Merchants could cheat buyers with dishonest weights, adding profit at the cost of justice.

An issue as contemporary as it is ancient. In January 2025 expose on grocers in Canada - 3 different chains including the weight of the packaging in the price. 4-11% more. CBC news article quoted Terri Lee, who worked as an inspector with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency for 24 years, says she consistently found that food retailers were selling underweighted meat and seafood. The reporter dug into the most recent infractions looking for the consequence? Each offense was corrected and no fines were issued. One consumer advocate noted that unless retailers face repercussions, the problem of misweighing meat is likely to continue. "What's the motivation for the store to do things properly if they're more profitable when they err to the detriment of the consumer?" (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/grocers-customers-meat-underweight-1.7405639>)

But Proverbs points us a different way. Rather than focusing on the punishment for getting caught, the sages remind us that God cares deeply about fairness. Integrity is not optional for the people of God—it is expected. As another proverb says, "Honesty guides good people; dishonesty destroys treacherous people."

As I was contemplating this section about dishonest scales, there were obvious connections to cheating, stealing, greed. But it also occurred to me that just as great a temptation are the weights, or importance, we use when evaluating or caring for our neighbour. Many of us have the weight of privilege and don't see or acknowledge it. We don't take it into account when we see someone struggling.

Some questions that pushed me further in my reflection this week:

1. When I walk into a room, am I able to assume that most people will respect me or take me seriously without needing to prove myself? How much credibility and authority is because of the weight of my social, racial, gender, and class-based privilege?
2. Have I ever been afraid for my safety simply because of my identity of race, gender, sexuality, religion? And Do I see people who look like me widely represented in positions of power, media, and history books in a positive light?
3. Can I generally trust that institutions like police, schools, healthcare systems will will not be unfair or disrespectful?
4. Do I have the option to ignore social issues that don't directly affect me without it negatively impacting my life?
 - defunding covid vaccine - pay for it, or will it cost you the ability to pay rent?
 - Skyrocketing rent when you own your own home
 - Minimum wage not covering minimum requirements.
 - Ignore the cut to funding for children with special needs
 - Be against bike lanes and public transit because I have a car?

These questions aren't meant to induce guilt but to foster awareness of the imbalance of scales we ought not to ignore.

The last emphasis about wisdom in work comes from reflection on our short passage from Colossians: *Whatever task you must do, work as if your soul depends on it, as for the Lord and not for humans, 24 since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ.*

Paul is writing into a household code, where both slaves and masters are addressed. It's significant that Paul sees slaves as equal participants in Christ's inheritance. In Roman law, a slave could not inherit property. They were considered, as one scholar put it, "a living tool." But Paul says: You are co-heirs with Christ.

This changes the motivation for work. It's not food, money, or praise—but the inheritance of Christ. Our worth is not determined by how productive we are, or what title we hold, or how much we earn. We work for Christ.

Heartfelt work reflects God's nature. From the beginning, God worked—He created, ordered, cultivated. And He called it good. We reflect His image not only in worship and prayer, but in our labor—especially when it is done with diligence, joy, and love.

This means even the most unnoticed tasks are sacred if done in obedience and love. Cleaning a room, serving a difficult customer, or writing a report can be an act of worship. Brother Lawrence (born Nicolas Herman, c. 1614–1691) was a humble Carmelite lay brother in France. He spent most of his life working in the monastery's kitchen—cooking meals, washing pots, and doing manual chores. Yet through his deep spiritual insight, he became known not for theological writings or sermons, but for his constant communion with God in the midst of ordinary life.

His teachings are collected in the book *"The Practice of the Presence of God"*, which remains a spiritual classic. Brother Lawrence believed that every moment, no matter how small, was an opportunity to be with God. He wrote: *"The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer."* Instead of seeing his kitchen work as a burden, Brother Lawrence found peace in it because he saw Christ in the

work. This mindset helped him stay content, humble, and joyful—reminding us that we don't need to escape our duties to find God; we meet God right there in them.

His life challenges us to stop dividing the “spiritual” and “ordinary.” Instead, like him, we can learn to wash dishes or write emails with the same reverence as we say prayers—if we do it for God, in God, and with God. That includes sweeping floors. Fixing cars. Teaching children. Managing a company. Volunteering. Parenting. Caring for aging parents. Submitting reports. Filing taxes. Waiting tables. Studying. Planting. Harvesting.

This passage, and the whole of Scripture, challenges us to resist the patterns of our culture. As N.T. Wright puts it, “Allow scripture to challenge us at places where our culture is doing its best to squeeze us into a different pattern.”

The culture says: Work for success. Scripture says: Work for Christ.

The culture says: Your value is in what you earn. Scripture says: Your value is in Christ alone.

The culture says: Get away with as little as possible. Scripture says: Be honourable in all things.

The culture says: Rest is laziness. Scripture says: Sabbath is sacred.

The culture says: Business is about profit. Scripture says: It's about justice.

So let us remember the ant—diligent, prepared, willing. Let us be honest in all our dealings, refusing to cut corners. Let us be working not for applause, but for the Kingdom of God. Amen.