

Biblical perspective of work

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Over a 50-year span, the average American spends about 100,000 hours working. A major part of adults' lives is involved in work, but often with the job comes some degree of dissatisfaction. Perhaps no statistic demonstrates dissatisfaction more than job-hopping tendencies. A recent survey discovered that the average American man changes jobs every four and one-half years, the average woman every three years.

To find satisfaction in our work and to be placed in a position where God can prosper our work, we first need to understand what Scripture teaches about work in general, as well as the responsibilities of both employer and employee.

General biblical principles

From the beginning, God instituted work. “Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). The very first thing the Lord did with Adam was to put him to work for his own benefit. It was not a curse.

However, after the fall of Adam, work was included in the curse and was made more difficult.

Work is so important to our daily lives that God commanded us to, “work six days” (Exodus 34:21).

In the New Testament, Paul was even more direct concerning work: “If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). God's Word implies that there is dignity in all types of work. It does not elevate one honest profession above another.

Jobs are not merely tasks whereby workers can earn money; they are also a means by which workers can use their talents and abilities to develop character—godly character.

God's part

The Word of God reveals three specific responsibilities that God has in connection with work.

1. God gives talents and skills. “Every skillful person in whom the Lord has put a skill and understanding to know how to perform all the work” (Exodus 36:1). God has given each worker unique skills and abilities.

It is not a matter of one person being better than another; it is simply a matter of having received different abilities.

2. God gives success. “The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man” (Genesis 39:2). Although we all have different talents and responsibilities, God is the one who is ultimately responsible for our success.
3. God controls promotion. “God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another” (Psalm 75:7). Your boss is not the one who controls whether you will be promoted. God controls promotions based not only on workers' abilities but also on workers' faithfulness to the tasks and responsibilities given to them and whether they were good stewards of the responsibilities God had given them.

“You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things” (Matthew 25:23). One of the major reasons people experience stress and frustration in their jobs is because they do not understand God's part in work.

Employers' responsibilities

Godly employers usually need to perform a balancing act. Employers are to love, serve, and encourage their employees, but they also are responsible to lead their employees and hold them accountable for the completion of their assigned tasks. According to God's Word, employers have five primary responsibilities.

1. Serve employees. The basis for biblical leadership is servanthood. “Whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant”(Matthew 20:26). Employers need to balance efforts to make a profit with an unselfish concern for their employees and treat their employees fairly and with dignity.
2. Communicate. “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them” (Genesis 11:6). When employer and employees are committed to accomplishing a particular task and there is good communication between them, nothing—within the will of God—will be impossible.

Communication is a two-way street. Employers not only need to speak to their employees, they also need to listen to their employees with sensitive and understanding ears.

3. Hold employees accountable. Employers are responsible for the employees knowing what's expected on the job.

Employers regularly need to evaluate employees' performance and communicate this to employees.

4. Pay a fair wage. “[The Lord will judge] those who oppress the wage earner in his wages” (Malachi 3:5). “You shall not oppress a hired servant....You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets” (Deuteronomy 24:14-15). Employers must pay fair wages promptly when they are due.

5. Pray to have godly employees. This is not a command; it is a principle. However, employers would be wise to pray that God would send them employees of like faith and belief.

Although employers are forbidden to discriminate based on religious belief, employees with like faith eliminate a lot of potential problems that might arise.

Employees' responsibilities

The life of Daniel as recorded in the biblical book of Daniel illustrates eight characteristics that made him a good and godly employee. The following are those eight characteristics.

1. Work as if working for the Lord. We actually are serving the Lord in our work; we are not serving people. In essence, we work for the Lord. If employees know and believe this, slothfulness can be greatly diminished.
2. Work hard. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10). In Scripture, hard work and diligence are encouraged; laziness is condemned. "He also who is slack in his work is brother to him who destroys" (Proverbs 18:9).

However, hard work must be balanced by other primary priorities of life: relationship with Christ, spouse, and family. If work interferes with any of these three relationships, you are working too much.

3. Be honest. Employees should not give cause for their employers ever to question or doubt their honesty.
4. Be faithful. Godly employees need to establish goals of being faithful and excellent in their work and work habits. Then they work hard to attain those goals.
5. Be a person of prayer. Godly employees are people of prayer. If employees do not pray daily regarding their work, the work will suffer.
6. Honor employer. Godly employees always honor their employers and those who have been placed in authority over them (1 Peter 2:18).
7. Honor fellow employees. Wherever there are employees there will inevitably be office politics. However, a godly employee will avoid backbiting and slanderous talk about other employees.
8. Verbalize his or her faith. Daniel verbalized his faith in God to those around him. Even so, godly employees will openly declare their faith on their own time and live their lives according to what is pleasing to the Lord and according to the principles of His Word.

Conclusion

The most important question people can ask every day is, "For whom do I work?" If the answer is anything or anyone other than the Lord, the biblical principles of work are not being applied. God's Word has given some very direct principles concerning work that all Christians should know and observe.