

The Workaholic

Os Hillman • Balancing Family & Work

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There are several problems with your current situation. First, the fact that you are working 65-70 hours says more about what you believe about God than anything else. People work long hours for many reasons. Let me suggest a few.

One of reasons is that people often think they must work longer hours to keep up with their workload. This is often the surface reason people give to the question of working long hours. Working long hours leads to becoming a workaholic. Like any compulsive behaviour, there is usually something underneath the behaviour. As a former workaholic myself, I can tell you the root of overworking is often 1) a fear of loss, and 2) a need for self-acceptance created by performance.

The fear of loss issue can be a fear of what will happen if we don't work long hours. A fear that there may not be enough money if I don't work long hours can drive us to overwork. Often an inaccurate view of what is enough makes us drive ourselves to greater levels of achievement, believing a financial reward will insure us against potential financial disaster. This is usually at a subconscious level. When one operates at this level you often find those around them will feel shamed if they do not work at the same level and can be intimidated by the unspoken or spoken directive that long hours are required. This leads to a whole new set of problems.

The second reason people will work long hours is their need to gain self-acceptance and esteem from their jobs. It is rewarding to see something come from our efforts. However, when we begin to be driven to work, it becomes an unhealthy condition. We are looking to gain self-esteem needs from our performance instead of being secure in our position in Christ. We can also fear reprisals from our superiors if we do not "prove" ourselves through greater investments in our work.

Both of these conditions reveal a belief that is demonstrated by our actions. The scriptures tell us that "My God shall supply all my needs according to his riches in glory (Philippians 4:19). There are legitimate times when we must work longer than normal hours. However, if this becomes a pattern that impacts our health, fellow relationships, the family and our relationship with God, then we have allowed that job to become an idol. It has replaced our devotion to Christ with an idol. We have become a slave to our work. We're saying through our actions, "God, I must work these hours in order to make the necessary money I need to be successful in my work." This is an affront to God. For God has said that we are to love the Lord our God with our whole heart. We are saying in our actions that God cannot meet my needs in forty hours.

Romans tells us that we are not to yield to such fear. "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship (Romans 8:15). This same verse tells us that those who are lead by the Spirit are sons of God. We cannot be lead by the Spirit and fear at the same time.

The Old Testament reveals God's view of our work. "You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is

today. If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God (Deut. 8:18-20).

When we take on the responsibility to produce the fruit from our work, we have entered a slavery concept of work. Work should be done in obedience to Christ as worship to Him. Work and worship come from the same Hebrew word "avodah." God says our work should be worship. The fruit from our work is based upon obedience, not sweat and performance.

So, in order to avoid work becoming an idol and a compulsive behaviour, we must maintain a balance that provides time to spend quality time with the Lord, our families and fellow believers. Sometimes the greatest exercise of faith is to work only forty hours a week. This insures that the outcome of our work is dependent upon God, nor our self-effort.