

# The Fear of the Lord in Work

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[0:00] Well, this morning we're going to talk about the fear of the Lord and work. Next week, or not next week, the week after that is going to be our last lesson on this series, and I plan to do it on the fear of the Lord and worship. But today we're talking about the fear of the Lord and work. Just as a reminder, next week, Pastor, or not Pastor, he's not a pastor anymore, but Bob Self is going to be speaking to us in all three services in Sunday School here.

And then also, just as a reminder, we're going to kind of keep reminding you, but it's good for us to remind you that next week is the beginning, or the end of Daylight Savings time. Just to remind you of that. But this morning we're talking about the fear of the Lord and work. And so how should the fear of the Lord affect our work? What does fearing God in our work look like? And it seems like that in this topic, in this matter, there's two ditches that we want to avoid, or two ditches that the fear of the Lord keeps us from. And the first ditch on the one side is not working as hard as we ought. And then the second ditch on the other side is the opposite extreme. It's overworking.

So that's often the way it is. There's a narrow way in the middle with ditches on either side. And if you only see one ditch, if you're only on the lookout for one ditch, that very well could mean that you're already in the other ditch. If you've fallen into the ditch, even the road looks like trouble.

And that's often the way it is. And so the fear of the Lord, it keeps us on this narrow way of not, of working hard like we ought to, but then avoiding the opposite extreme of overworking, of becoming a workaholic, as they say. And so we're going to just talk about these two ditches and how the fear of the Lord keeps us out of those ditches and keeps us moving in the right direction of using our gifts and the graces and our jobs in the way that would please him. And so we're going to begin with just with that first ditch of not working like we should, not working hard like we ought to.

And so reverence, awe, respect, esteem of God, having this big God that we talked about, it should make us work. And it should make us work hard. It should make us work well.

[2:58] Because the fear of the Lord makes me appreciate and really appreciate in my heart and in my mind, where it's not just something I cognitively know, but where I feel it, it should make me appreciate the goodness of God's design for us. And what did God design us to do?

To work. He designed us to work. God designed us to, he made us workers. And he made us workers because he himself is a worker. Worker, being a worker, being a workman, a craftsman is not something that is below God. He does things, he creates, he manages, he builds, he plans. He sees the reward of his labor and is satisfied. So have you experienced that in your life where you work really hard and then you get that sense of satisfaction? That's what, that's what God experienced when he was creating each day of the week. He saw what he had done and he said it was good. So God made us in his image. He made us workers. And when we fear the Lord, when we have a big view of God, we embrace that.

We say, yes, that's how God has made me and that's what is good. And so he, he made us in his image. So Genesis says, then God said, let us make man in our image and our likeness. And this, this is the way that image is going to be displayed, how it's going to be exhibited. He says, let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground. And then a little bit later, it says, then God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to work it and take care of it, to guard it, to work it, to make it flourish, to make it grow. So Adam and Eve's original job, their job description was to take the garden of Eden and to fill the earth with it, to multiply both the garden and themselves. And so when we're thinking great thoughts of God, then he sets the agenda for our lives. And his agenda for us is not to waste our days. His agenda for us is not for us to sit around and do nothing. He tells us what to do and what did God make man to do, but to work, to rule, to manage, to work the garden. So to work is human and to work is divine. So I want you to think about the book of Proverbs now.

The book of Proverbs. And I'm going to ask you, what does the book of Proverbs teach about working, about work? What's sort of the general overall lesson? Or what are some of the major points that Proverbs teaches about work? To work like an ant. We're going to go to him in a minute. What else? Be diligent. What else? It's the way we provide.

[6:25] Yeah. It's the way we provide. Generally, sort of the overall picture of, the overall lesson of Proverbs is that we need to work.

We need to work hard. We need to work diligently. We need to keep at our work. We need to work energetically. We need to work with zeal. We need to work with self-motivation.

So turn in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 6. And I guess the important thing, while you're turning there, Proverbs chapter 6, we're going to look at verse 6. The important thing to realize is all of the Proverbs is a working out of the fear of the Lord. If wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and understanding, then everything that we see in Proverbs has a direct link to the fear of the Lord. This is all what the fear of the Lord looks like. This is how we do it. So Proverbs 6.6. And here it says, Go to the ant, you sluggard. Consider its ways and be wise.

Now the ant has two lessons to teach the sluggard. The ant puts the sluggard to shame on two fronts.

First, the ant doesn't need a commander. The ant doesn't need a boss. It has no commander, no overseer or ruler. Now, what does the sluggard need?

[7:59] A kick in the pants. Yeah. The sluggard needs, you know, the sluggard needs prodded and cajoled and reminded, or he doesn't get to work. The sluggard waits for it. Have you ever noticed that? The sluggard waits to be told what to do. The sluggard waits for the get to work. And he's not going to do anything until someone tells him to. His constant refrain is, You didn't tell me. I didn't know.

It's not my job. But then the ant, so the ant doesn't need a boss telling him what to do every minute. But then the ant knows the time. The sluggard doesn't. Verse 8, Yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. Now to the sluggard, every day is the same.

Yesterday and today and tomorrow are going to be all the same. Summer is the same as harvest, and harvest is the same as summer. In the summer, he's not doing anything. And at harvest time, he's not doing anything. He thinks it will be all right. He thinks things are just going to work out. Tomorrow will be like today. But look at what he doesn't see. And there's this connection between verses 6, 7, and 8, and 9, 10, and 11. Look at what the sluggard doesn't see.

How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep? A little slumber? A little folding of the hands to rest? And poverty will come on you like a bandit, and scarcity like an armed man. So for the sluggard, what's right around the bend?

[9:46] What does tomorrow hold for the sluggard? Being in want. Poverty. Scarcity. Tomorrow isn't going to be like today.

Tomorrow's going to be worse. So today is the day to work. Tomorrow is the day to harvest. The ant knows that the sluggard doesn't. The fear of the Lord teaches us to see that that's how God made the world.

God made us to work. He made us to provide for ourselves through our work. Remember what Paul, he had to remind some of the Thessalonians of that very same thing.

And so we're going to turn there. 2 Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians chapter 3. And we're just going to read verses 6 through 13.

And you can follow along as I read this passage and you'll see the main thrust of it. And I want you to look for what is God's rule for work.

[10:46] In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you receive from us.

Now that's interesting. I just want to pause there. That's interesting. Think about everything that Paul had to tell the Thessalonians. All about the gospel and about who God is and God's laws and the gospel and how God saves us and all that truth.

And yet he didn't fail to teach them this lesson. This is part of what godliness looks like. So you know this is the teaching you receive from us.

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and

day laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

We did this not because we do not have the right right to such help but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you we gave you this rule.

[11:53] If a man will not work he shall not eat. We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy. They are busy bodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down, earn the bread they eat, and as for you brothers, never tired of doing what is right.

Never tired of going to work and earning your bread. That's the right thing. So, what's the rule? What is God's rule? What's God's economy?

What does this passage teach us? To not be lazy. You don't work, you don't eat. That's God's rule. Verse 12, God wants us to earn the bread we eat.

Paul himself says, we didn't eat anyone's food without paying for it. The fear of the Lord makes us appreciate just these truths that we've said. And I know that this isn't something new but it's good to be reminded.

This is what God has said. This is how God has set things up. And so, is this how God made me and made the world? Then I'm going to embrace that as good and wise.

[13:11] As what's best for me. So, we're talking about the fear of the Lord and how it teaches us to work hard. To work hard. And then, the fear of the Lord also teaches us along in this category of how to work hard is that we need to work when other people aren't even looking at us.

When the boss isn't there. Can you think of the passage that it teaches that? Will? That's good. Something to rule over them but still works hard. Yep. That's perfect. What's the other passage? Or what's another passage? Colossians 3.22.

Colossians 3.22. Would you turn there? It should be in 1 Thessalonians or 2nd. So, it's a few pages back. There we go. Colossians 3.22.

Colossians 3.22. And this passage is all about the fear of the Lord. You're going to see that. Slaves, Obey your earthly masters and everything and do it not only when their eye is on you to win their favor but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

[14:31] So, what should be filling our heart? Reverence. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord not for men since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.

It is the Lord Christ you are serving. So, the fear of the Lord teaches us to work for the Lord and not just for men. To work because God is watching me.

You remember weeks ago we asked where does the fear of the Lord come from? How does it get created and how does it grow in our hearts?

It grows under the realization that God is here. He is present and I live under His eye and so He is on the factory floor.

He is at school. He is at home. He is in your office. He is in your truck. He is there watching you and He is watching you to reward you.

[15:39] Reward is hanging over your head and He is watching to give it to you. Paul says, you know you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. And so the question is how good do you think God is?

How faithful do you think He is? How big and powerful is He? How great is He? We are answering those questions every day at work. We are answering those questions every day at work.

If I think God is good and wise then I am going to embrace that my work and what He has for me to do is good and wise.

If I think God is faithful to this promise then I am going to work hard knowing that He is going to reward me. So every day I am answering the question is God faithful by how I work?

If I think God is powerful and strong then I will work hard. Then I will do hard things.

[16:38] I won't shrink back from my work in fear because He is powerful. He is strong. He is with me. And so I don't have to be consumed by my own doubts about my own abilities, my fears about it's just me and I don't think I can do this.

Now obviously we need to have an honest reckoning of ourselves but my point is we at the same time when we are looking at the challenges of our work we need to realize that our God is strong and He is there for us.

And so He can help me and make me bold and adventurous at my work. And if I think God is great then I am going to attempt great things for Him.

If I don't think God is great then I am not going to bother offering Him my work as my sacrifice. So every day we are answering these questions of is God good? Is He faithful? Is He powerful? Is He great? We are either living out of the fear of the Lord or we are not. And we show how we what we are living out of by how we do our work.

[17 : 55] So the fear of the Lord it keeps us out of this one ditch of not working hard like we should. It keeps us on that straight and narrow it keeps us moving forward and the fear of the Lord should help us to be good workers.

It should help us excel and it will help us excel at our work. It will help us to be the best kind of workers. Now on the other hand it keeps us out of the ditch of overworking. Overworking. Now the book of Proverbs definitely puts more of the emphasis on working hard. But there is this other side of going too far. And I think our culture is particularly susceptible to this aspect.

To this side of things. And so as we start talking about this side of things I want to say that each of us has three dimensions has three domains where God has called us to live.

[19 : 14] So God has called us to have relationships. spouse marriage relationships parent child relationships friendships he's called us to relationships.

God also calls us to work. We've looked at that he calls us to work. Then he's also called us to spiritual duties duties.

To church. To devotions. To service. To spiritual duties. So God has called us to those three areas. And pretty much everything falls under that.

We're either doing relationships, we're doing work, we're doing these spiritual duties. God calls us to all three. And it's not so much a list of things that are more important or least important. It's three overlapping intersecting domains. This is what godly living looks like. Godly living is living in relationships, living at work, living with our spiritual duties.

[20 : 21] God has called us to each of those three things. Yet here's the dilemma. We only have a limited amount of time. We only have a limited amount of time.

have 24 hours a day. We have seven days a week. We have 30 or 31 days a month. We have 365 days a year. That's as much time as we have.

And there's no way that we can make that time grow. And so if one of those areas expands it's necessarily going to mean the other areas are going to contract.

So if I spend a lot of time on my relationships that means there's going to be less time for other things. If I'm spending a lot of time at work on my work it's going to mean less time for the other areas.

Now the problem becomes when my work life expands. My work life expands to the place where it starts making these other areas so small that I start disobeying God in them.

[21 : 35] That's what I mean by overwork. When my work life has grown so big that now there's no time for family there's no time for relationships I'm not developing I'm not growing I'm not doing the things that God has called me in those areas I'm just not obeying in those areas and then also on my spiritual duties if I spend more time at work it's just going to mean less time for those other areas now we can't obviously just divide our lives up into thirds this is a dynamic thing isn't it and it's changing and there are periods of our life when work is really busy and other things are we have to put other things on the back burner so to speak for at least a while and then there's other times where we need to work on relationships and we need to draw back on our work life I understand the difference I'm saying the danger is when work has become the big thing in my whole life and it overshadows everything and it becomes a real it's the number one priority and all the other priorities aren't there so the question is has your work expanded to the point where now you're disobeying

God in other areas where you're not doing what you ought to in other areas where you're not giving relationships or God his due and if it is happening why is it happening is it idolatry have you forgotten who you are maybe it's idolatry maybe it's your identity of I am my work and I forgotten who I am in Christ have you forgotten who God is for you over working generally comes from three idols now there's probably others but I'm just these three idols the first is this idol of achievement or success success now there's nothing wrong with achievement or success but the problem is when it becomes idolatrous when it becomes my identity when I start to say

I am what I have accomplished I am what I have accomplished and that can mean I mean it's easy for successful people to say I am what I have accomplished and so they start listing all their accomplishments!

But just on the other side idolatry works to bless us so to speak when we can say oh I lived up to it up to my idol and idolatry also works to curse us when we haven't lived up to it and so this idol achievement and success can also look like I haven't achieved!

anything I failed in this and I failed in that and I failed in that either way it's this idol of achievement and so this is particularly dangerous because my achievements seem to be saying something about who I am it seems to be saying about something about what I'm able to do and when it gets to that point where my heart has gone over to it then success becomes my personal savior success becomes the thing that makes me feel secure success makes me feel alive failure kills me success makes me feel alive it makes me feel secure it gives me meaning and so when we feel that way when we're giving ourselves to that where we're saying I have to achieve in my work it's going to be practically impossible impossible it's going to be practically impossible for us to keep work in line it's going to be practically impossible for us to not let work grow over into our other areas and so it's the shade of work just is all over my relationships and my church life

[25:57] I'm going to start I'm going to always be looking for more I'm going to be always looking to the next mountain I'm going to always be sacrificing whatever it takes in order to achieve and so time energy relationships God they all get put on the altar to my success to my achievement because I have to have it then basically what happens is my relationship with God dries up I lose my taste buds for heaven's joys and the only taste buds that feel anything that experience anything is success and so my joy dies my relationship with God and others withers away the only thing that will quench my thirst is my achievement and the only thing that will quench my thirst is the thing that makes me thirstier you know soda companies they're not stupid look on a soda can look how much salt they're putting in there why are they doing that the more you drink the thirstier you get and that's how idols work the more you partake the more you need the more thirsty you get that's how achievement and success work and only the awe of God can deliver us then only God storming into our life and rearranging things and becoming big to us that our idols get put in their place now that's the first idol the second is power and control and this is where I say

I am in control therefore I am this is who I am I'm the one in charge I'm the one that can manage every situation I need to be there they need me there if I'm not there things are going to fall apart I need to be on top of everything and when I'm not there I'm plagued by doubts about oh no what's going to happen if I'm not there are they going to be okay is it going to get done so what does the fear of the Lord say about all that about power and control well it says that he's sovereign every night we get that lesson of I have to go to sleep and my sleep proves that I don't have to be on duty because God's on duty the third idol that leads to overwork is when I find my identity my security my salvation in a pile of stuff that I've accumulated the money

I have things that I have and this is where a lot of people attach that's what they attach their lives to this is where their identity is and their salvation their security my goodness and so your joy and your things are going to make you spend all your hours seeking to gain those things and spend those things and manage those things and use them and enjoy them and keep them because your life becomes all about your stuff comes all about your money and then you're going to have to work you're going to have to keep working you're always going to have to work more and more to get more and more stuff and so those three idols lead to overwork success control stuff but the fear of the Lord saves me from all those things because the things that those idols promise when I am trusting in God

I see that I already have them do I need a big pile of money to be secure no I already have security do I need to have success and achievement in order to be someone special I've already been adopted as a child of God do I need to have control no my God is in control the fear of the Lord keeps me from giving my heart to these idols because simply I don't need them I don't have to have them because I already have something better the fear of the Lord keeps me in that middle road it keeps me out of the ditches it keeps my life balanced now how does it do that well a number of ways the fear of the Lord makes me feel makes me realize makes me remember that my gifts my gifts that God has given me and you could put the gifts that you have at your work the ability to do your job they come from God and so if they come from

God so think about your job and the gifts that it takes the gifts that you have that no one else does and we have all sorts of different jobs here isn't that wonderful and I'm not like you you're not like me you have strengths in areas that I don't have strength and vice versa but if I realize that those gifts come from God they're his personal gift to me then I realize that work can't ultimately be about me it ultimately can't be about me getting success and achievement and control and all the rest my gifts are not about me using our work is not about me using my gifts to achieve the life I've always wanted God God is the giver of all good gifts and he gave me the gifts I need to work in a certain area and when I use those gifts

[32:03] I can glorify him so how can you glorify God Martin Luther said you know the cobbler should be the best cobbler he can be the best shoemaker he can be so put whatever job you have do you want to glorify God take the gifts he's given you and use them use them well for him remember Eric Little from chariots of fire God made me for China but he also made me fast and when I run I feel his pleasure you should that that should resonate in your life when I turn a wrench I feel his pleasure when I do what God has called me to do and I use his gifts and I make it about him

I glorify him and he's pleased with me second the fear of the Lord teaches me that my time belongs to God my time belongs to God so we talked about those three intersecting domains that God has called us to relationships and work and spiritual activities devotions and church and those things my time belongs to God my times are in his hands so God well everything that God has called me to do he's called me to do in those in a certain amount of time and so!

if he's given me the time and he's given me and he's called me to these areas then I need to make sure that I'm attending to all those areas and using my time like he wants me to use it so what does God want me to do God wants me to work God wants me to have relationships he wants me to work on those relationships God calls me to spiritual duties to church and to service and devotion to him and just a sense that God owns my time he's my master I'm his slave that should keep me from falling into the ditch on either side of wasting my time or using my time selfishly third God has called me to live for something bigger than myself so the fear of the Lord teaches me that God has called me into something bigger than just me and we can be so self!

centered can't we? Our world can shrink just down to us and my thoughts as if no one exists apart from their relationship to me have you ever thought about that?

Sometimes we can start thinking that the only life Scott Ladek has is the life that he has with me as if he doesn't have other things as if God isn't the center of his life we can start thinking that everyone is just rotating about me and thinking about me but God in his grace has connected us to something that's not us he's connected us to Jesus Christ he's connected us to his kingdom to something huge and eternal he's brought us into the kingdom of his son that he loves and so work ultimately can't be about me yes it's how I provide for myself and my family and my own but ultimately it's not about me getting control it's not about me exercising my power it's not about me providing my eternal security it's not about me getting success because

[36:06] God has connected me to something bigger I'm living in light of him he's done something for me and so my heart instead of being closed up and just thinking about myself the fear of the Lord opens up our heart so now we're living with God and for God now fourth and here's where we're going to end the fear of the Lord teaches me that God is too wise too loving to ever call me to one area of responsibility that will necessitate me being irresponsible in another let me repeat that God is too wise and too loving ever to call me to one area of responsibility that will necessitate that will mean that I have to be irresponsible in the other areas a couple of weeks ago Pastor John and I were talking about my sermon the luncheon sermon on sleep and he told me the story of

Hal Harris that he had just read and Harris was a friend of George Whitefield he was a very big important person in the Welsh Methodist movement and so we're talking 1730 1740 and Hal took over a part of the ministry that George Whitefield had George Whitefield had a lot to do and he gave a section of his ministerial work to Hal Harris and Hal Harris was so certain that he needed to keep working that he in his words his idea was to put to shame those people who were idle in the vineyard okay so he wanted to be the man that never rested that never quit working and so he wanted to put the lazy people to shame he kept working and working and traveling and preaching and he became so consumed with that that he began to neglect the other things that God called him to do he neglected rest he neglected sleep he neglected time off with his wife and after a year of this schedule after starting his work guess what began to happen well his body began to break down and then his mind began to break down one day he would be praising a man

to the moon saying how good he is and what a solid godly man he is the next day he would be tearing down the very next day he would be tearing down that same man scorning him and telling about how bad he is he started using really erotic language about god he started saying that the father died on the cross he took a woman into his home it wasn't sexual or anything but he did think that she was sort of like another apostle that she had spiritual gifts of prophesying and of our ladies his wife was just thrilled you know and of course his friends are just looking at him like what is going on what happened to this guy where is he at and he grew paranoid and it was just a real mess and eventually people had to confront him and he was taken out of the ministry and he was really put in the closet for a long time now here's the point of that just that story that

God is too wise and too loving to ever call us to do something that requires that we just abandon everything else that we're he's too loving and too kind to mean that God is going to say you do this and you can be irresponsible in all these other areas there's enough time to do everything God has called us to do okay there is enough time for us to do to cover our relationships our work and our God takes real wisdom to say no to things takes real wisdom to see what God wants us to do in those moments but again the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom isn't it God is wise he is loving he's not going to call me to destroy myself he's not going to call me to destroy my family he's not going to call me to destroy my church he's not going to call me to something that he can't help me to do and so just to end this

God has called us to work and God has promised us grace to do! that his glory without neglecting everything else well we are done we're dismissed