

Proverbs Week #87 (10:2-5)

“Ill-gotten gains do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death. The LORD will not allow the righteous to hunger, but He will reject the craving of the wicked. Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich. He who gathers in summer is a son who acts wisely, but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who acts shamefully.” Proverb 10:2-5

These verses are filled with comparisons. They compare profit and death, satisfied hunger and rejected cravings, hands that make rich and hands that make poor, and finally, a son who acts wisely not shamefully. These verses are presenting us with a proper, wise, and biblical work ethic. They begin with considering the virtues of what we do, acknowledging that the LORD is the ultimate judge of righteousness and wickedness, and end by having us consider the work of our hands. They encourage us to be wise as we consider the proper times that work should be done.

Learn: Having a healthy work ethic is something we can learn. This character quality can be approached within the study of wisdom. This skill can be improved upon, reinforced, and trained as part of a family vision or goal. I would also like to suggest that it is part of what makes our community strong. Our willingness to serve others and work with them, even in simple things, will help us more faithfully fulfill the expectations of our King.

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Messiah whom you serve. Colossians 3:23,24

Discern: How can we tell the difference in our own lives? It is not always easy to have a healthy view of ourselves. Sometimes we might be too hard on ourselves and other times we are too easy. The focus of these verses causes us to look to God and outside of ourselves. What is the work to be done and can we do it? I do not think that the harvest that these verses mention is some figurative harvest. It primarily speaks to the things that are in “your own backyard.” What God given abilities do you have? No one here is living on a deserted island. Who around you could you help? What can you do to serve your Messiah by serving others? Ask yourself, are you a taker or a giver? Learn to discern the difference between someone who is a taker only (someone who expects others to do everything for them) and someone who is willing to give (serve and consider the needs of others).

Receive: If you will receive the wisdom of these verses the LORD will not allow you to hunger. You will find deliverance from death (those things that would kill you). Do these verses promise too much? “Do you work heartily” and know that any profit or increase you will receive will come from the LORD.

Impart: As I mentioned earlier, this virtue can be learned. We can learn the value of honest work and service to others (in God’s service). It’s value is best seen as we live out the truths of these proverbs. Each one of us needs to do our part. Proverbs 1:4 states, *“to impart shrewdness to the morally naïve, and a discerning plan to the young person.”* (NET) Is this already a part of your plans in life? Is faithfully working at whatever service God would enable you to do included in what you teach your children?

For those who are looking at these lessons as tools or gems to be treasured, I want to suggest how to classify these verses. As a tool, no toolbox should be without this one. We can build things with this tool. Now, we do not have any guarantees that a hurricane might not wipe out the things we build. Nevertheless, this tool can be used to rebuild even those things that God has allowed to be destroyed. This tool does not have to be the prettiest of tools. Most of the favorite tools are ones that show the signs of the wear and tear of use. The tools in our lives that have repeatedly proven to be useful are treasured. A good work ethic can be just such a tool.

In earlier lessons, I gave out a challenge to our young people. I asked them to learn what it means to serve by asking a simple question. I encouraged them to ask, “Is there anything I can do to help?” I want to suggest this question anew. Asking this question may provide you the opportunity to learn the value of working with a diligent hand. It may take some practice. Make this a part of your learning to be wise and keep asking and helping where you can.