THE WORK ETHIC IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: CLIMBING UP

References are from the New International Version of the Bible.

DISCIPLINE AND HARD WORK LEAD TO PROSPERITY

1:1  "The Proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: 2 for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; 3 for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;
12:1  Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.
12:11  He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment.
12:14  From the fruit of his lips a man is filled with good things as surely as the work of his hands rewards him.
12:24  Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labor.
14:23  All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.
16:26  The laborer's appetite works for him; his hunger drives him on.
18:9  One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.
25:28  Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.
28:19  He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty.

ACCEPT CORRECTION

15:12  A mocker resents correction; he will not consult the wise.
15:32  He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.
16:20  Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.
17:10  A rebuke impresses a man of discernment more than a hundred lashes a fool.
19:20  Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.
25:12  Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear.
26:12  Do you see a man wise in his own eyes?  There is more hope for a fool than for him.
29:1  A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy.

THE REWARDS OF GENEROSITY

3:9  Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; 10 then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.
11:24  One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.
11:25  A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.
* This is a universal law: we reap as we sow.
19:17  He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.
22:9  A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.
28:27  He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses.
THE BLESSINGS OF BEING RIGHT WITH GOD

3:33  The Lord's curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous
10:3  The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry but he thwarts the craving of the wicked.
10:9  The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.
15:6  The house of the righteous contains great treasure, but the income of the wicked brings them trouble.
17:20  A man of perverse heart does not prosper; he whose tongue is deceitful falls into trouble.
22:4  Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life.

THE PRIORITY OF GETTING KNOWLEDGE, WISDOM AND SKILL

4:7  Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. cf.. 23:12
8:10  Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, 11 for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. 12 I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion.
10:14  Wise men store up knowledge, but the mouth of a fool invites ruin.
16:16  How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!
17:16  Of what use is money in the hand of a fool, since he has no desire to get wisdom?
18:15  The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.
19:2  It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.
22:29  Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.
23:23  Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding.
24:5  A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength
24:14  Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.

AVOID WICKED PEOPLE FOR COMPANIONS

4:14  Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. 15 Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.
* I've talked with many prisoners who confess to running with the wrong crowd.
24:1  Do not envy wicked men, do not desire their company; 2 for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about making trouble.

AVOID SEXUAL IMPURITY

Avoid an adulteress 5:1-11  If not:
5:12  You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! 13 I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. 14 I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly.
5:23  He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly. (for adultery)
* There is not a work/private life dichotomy.
5:21  For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths.
* Life is one piece of cloth. So a NEW WINESKIN is needed. Conversion is crucial.
29:3  A man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.
LAZINESS LEADS TO POVERTY

1:32 For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them.
6:6 Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! 7 It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, 8 yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. 9 How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? 10 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—11 and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.
* Rationalizations: a "little" won’t hurt. An ant does not nap during the day. It is in gear. Interestingly, even without great organization, the ant gets the job done individually, or with others, without a manager. This is not to say that all napping is wrong, especially after little sleep.
10:4 Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth.
10:26 As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to those who send him.
19:24 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth!
10:16 The wages of the righteous bring them life, but the income of the wicked brings them punishment.
15:19 The way of the sluggard is blocked with thorns, but the path of the upright is a highway.
* a person who is lazy will encounter many difficulties, often through lack of resources.
19:15 Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry.
* Sleep may become a way to escape, together with TV.
20:4 A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.
20:13 Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare. cf. 23:21
21:25 The sluggard’s craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work. 26 All day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing.
22:13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion outside!" or, "I will be murdered in the streets!" * Wild excuses to avoid work.
24:30 I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; 31 thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. 32 I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: 33 A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—34 and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.
26:13 The sluggard says, "There is a lion in the road, a fierce lion roaming the streets!"
26:14 As a door turns on its hinges, so a sluggard turns on his bed.
26:15 The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.
26:16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer discreetly.

INTEGRITY IN BUSINESS

11:1 The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. cf. 20:23
11:3 The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.
15:27 A greedy man brings trouble to his family, but he who hates bribes will live.
16:13 Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth.
21:6 A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.
22:1 A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.
HOW TO RELATE TO YOUR EMPLOYER

3:3 Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. 4 Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.
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* An employer values an employee with an attitude of love and faithfulness. This is a spiritual formation issue, not something that can be trained. It is why a Christian has an advantage in business.

4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. 24 Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.

6:12 A scoundrel and villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth, 13 who winks with his eye, signals with his feet and motions with his fingers, 14 who plots evil with deceit in his heart—he always stirs up dissension. 15 Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy. cf. 16:30

* God sees the attitude, even if the boss doesn't. Our talk, our non-verbal behavior is seen, even deceit in the heart.

* Attitude in work is the key. Our heart needs to be right toward our authority figures and co-workers. A root of bitterness will become evident. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

10:8 The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

* Obeying, not resenting instructions.

12:16 A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult. cf.. 19:11
14:9 Fools mock at making amends for sin, but good will is found among the upright.

15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
17:28 Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.
18:13 He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame.
20:19 A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.
25:13 Like the coolness of snow at harvest time is a trustworthy messenger to those who send him; he refreshes the spirit of his masters. cf.. 25:19

26:20 Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.

27:2 Let another praise you, and not our own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.
27:18 He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who looks after his master will be honored.
28:13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

* Admit mistakes.

29:20 Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.
29:23 A man's pride brings him low, but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.
29:25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER EMPLOYEES

20:22 Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong! Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you. * This applies to the employee/employer relations, also.

27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. * Finding someone of similar spirit can enable you both to do better at work.

29:10 Bloodthirsty men hate a man of integrity and seek to kill the upright.
29:27 The righteous detest the dishonest; the wicked detest the upright.

30:10 Do not slander a servant to his master, or he will curse you, and you will pay for it. * Slander is a false accusation.
31: 8  Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. 9  Speak up and judge fairly; defend the right of the poor and needy.

DON'T TRY TO GET RICH
10: 2  Ill-gotten treasures are of no value, but righteousness delivers from death.
10: 22  The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it.
11: 28  Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.
23: 4  Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. 5  Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.
28: 20  A faithful man will be richly blessed, but one eager to get rich will not go unpunished.
28: 22  A stingy man is eager to get rich and is unaware that poverty awaits him.
28: 25  A greedy man stirs up dissension, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper.

PLANNING
12: 5  The plans of the righteous are just...
16: 3  Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.
20: 18a  Make plans by seeking advice...
21: 5  The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.
21: 30  There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.
24: 27  Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house.  * Prioritized planning

THE IMPORTANCE OF CAPITAL AND SAVINGS
14: 4  Where there are no oxen, the manger is empty, but from the strength of an ox comes an abundant harvest.
   * The modern equivalent is a tractor or tiller
27: 23  Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; 24 for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations. 25  When the hay is removed and new growth appears and the grass from the hills is gathered in, 26  the lambs will provide you with clothing, and the goats with the price of a field.  * Take care of assets, so they will take care of you. 27  You will have plenty of goats' milk to feed you and your family and to nourish your servant girls.
21: 20  In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has.
30: 24  Four things on earth are small, yet they are extremely wise: 25  Ants are creatures of little strength, yet they store up their food in the summer.  cf... 6: 8

THE IMPACT OF ALCOHOL
20: 1  Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise.  cf... 21: 17
21: 17  He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich.
23: 20  Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, 21  for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.
23: 29  Who has woe?  Who has sorrow?  Who has strife?  Who has needless bruises?  Who has bloodshot eyes? 30  Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.  cf...  vs. 31-35
AVOID CO-SIGNING

22:26 Do not be a man who strikes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts; 27 if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you.

BALANCE WORK WITH REST AND REFRESHMENT

27:8 Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home. cf.. Ecclesiastes. 4:5-8
30:7 "Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: 8 Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. 9 Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.

THE BLESSING OF A NOBLE WIFE

31:10 A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. 11 Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. 12 She brings him good, not harm, all the days of his life.
31:31 Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works praise her at the city gate.

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