

Matts-Ola Ishoel

WORK

The purpose
and blessing
of your daily
labor



Маттс-Ола Исхоел

Work. The purpose and blessing of your daily labor

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Аннотация

Man is created to admire, to love, to rest and to worship. But he is also created to work. What all of us who work have in common is that we are a part of God's order for this world. To work, to learn, to be creative, to complete a mission – are all part of what it is to be human. God did not create man to simply sit in a garden and smell flowers, he also made him to carry responsibility and be productive.

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Opening

It is 04.30 in the morning and I am sound asleep. The first alarm clock goes off and fills the room with an aggressive chiming. I am 16 years old and still in school, so it is before the age of smart phones that can be set with smooth melodies. Here there are no smooth sounds, only old-fashioned chiming bells. The ringing has, however, little effect on me. Hardly noticing the noise, I reach for the clock and turn it off. But when I set the alarm the evening before, I was smart enough to know that one clock wouldn't do it. One by one, there are others coming.

One could be hidden under the bed, another in my closet. And since I have to spend time not only turning the alarms off, but also searching for them, I slowly wake up and realize what I have to do. I need to get dressed and go down to the town center, to the newspaper office, and pick up a sack of today's edition. I will spend the following hours delivering newspapers, no matter the day of the week, the weather or how tired I am.

Everyone in the family is sleeping, and so are all my friends from school. But I can't rest until I have delivered every last paper. If I am lucky, I could get another 30 minutes of sleep before school begins, but many mornings I have to show up at the first lesson with a body longing to go back to bed.

There is of course a reward for this – once a month I will get a pay check. Not much, but enough for me to have more pocket

money than my friends.

What can seem a little odd about all this is that I am a Christian, and believe in a God who created the world in six days. He can do anything. He created both gold and silver, and if He can turn water into wine, He should also be able to turn a handful of earth into a Big Mac. So why do I need to go through this? Why these daily clashes with the alarm clocks? Why can't God let me find some money by the wayside on my way to school so I can sleep till 7 am like everyone else? Since I am the son of a Baptist pastor, that does not seem unreasonable.

But in fact, in God's eyes it is unreasonable. Man is indeed created to admire, to love, to rest and to worship. But he is also created to work. What all of us who work have in common is that we are a part of God's order for this world. To work, to learn, to be creative, to complete a mission – are all part of what it is to be human. God did not create man to simply sit in a garden and smell flowers, he also made him to carry responsibility and be productive.

Although work can be exhausting and sometimes even agonizing, as Christians we should have a fundamentally positive attitude regarding work. God is the ultimate provider of all things, and He wants to be your strength, joy and wisdom in whatever profession you have. There are biblical principles He wants you to discover, principles that will give meaning and bring blessing to your daily labor.

So even though my battles with the alarm clocks were

sometimes fierce, they were never in vain. And in this book I want to tell you why.

Chapter one

Created to Work

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.”
Genesis 2:15

Work is not punishment. From the very beginning of creation man was supposed to *do* something. He was not only to enjoy what God had created, he was also to care for and protect it. God delegated to man the tending and care of the garden of Eden. To bear God's image can mean a lot of things. One of the ways we do is in our creativity. God is *creative* – He makes things happen. I believe it is right to say that we human beings will never be satisfied with only rest and entertainment. We were made from the very beginning to also be productive, to achieve results and to know the joy of having fulfilled an assignment given to us.

It says in Genesis 1:31,

Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

After the creation was finished, the Bible says that God “... *saw everything He had made*”, and He saw that “... *indeed it was very good*”. Even though we cannot speak about God in human terms, this verse tells us that God must have somehow

appreciated that the work was finished, and that the result of creating was something beautiful. This satisfaction or feeling of fulfillment is a part of what it is to be a human being. When we do our duty, when we provide according to our responsibility and fulfill tasks that are given to us, there is a sense of joy and satisfaction that is divine in its nature.

We all know that some kinds of work can feel like a curse – exhausting and boring, forced upon us because of circumstances we do not control. God also says to Adam, as a part of the curse of sin: *"Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life."* (Gen. 3:17) This verse speaks about the hardship of living on the Earth as a result of sin. Many men and women have experienced the suffering of toil and hard days of labor that never seem to end. But this does not necessarily mean that work in itself is something evil. Since man had tasks and working orders before he fell into sin, and since God can "work", as He obviously did in creation, work must have a greater meaning than simply being a necessary means for survival. Work is an expression of our divine nature. To create, to construct, to care, and to bring in a harvest are not things we do only because the world fell into sin. We do these things because we are like God in our nature.

If God could be pleased about what He had accomplished, if He could rejoice over the world He had created, it means work can bring us joy as well. It is one of the ways we fulfill our purpose as His reflection in this world.

If your foundational attitude towards work is that it is something you just have to endure so that you can provide for yourself, you are missing something important. To produce and generate is part of our spiritual DNA; it is something we should embrace and be thankful for.

This is why you should relate to present and future work with a fundamentally positive attitude. You should thank God for the abilities He has given you, and accept work as a blessed part of what it is to be human.

God's main way of provision

Every person, family and church needs provision to survive. We need food, shelter and hundreds of things that cost money. The Bible encourages us to think about God as the provider of all things. Jesus said we should not worry about what to eat or what to wear, but to trust God for every single necessity of life (Matt. 6:33).

The big question is, *how* will God provide for us? What are His ways of supplying our needs? One way He can do it is through supernatural miracles. Two times in the New Testament Jesus multiplied bread and fish to feed thousands of people who had been listening to his preaching. There are also miraculous stories in the Old Testament about provision, like when ravens fed the prophet Elijah with bread and meat during a famine in Israel. (See 1 Kings 17:6 and 16.)

Stories like these can encourage us to believe God for miracles that will meet our needs in different situations, and many of us have witnessed how the Lord in wonderful ways has taken care of us when supplies ran out.

But it is very important to understand that miracles like these are the exception – this is not the main way God cares for His children. He will first of all care for you by blessing the daily work you do.

I remember what two of my friends in Norway did when we were young. They needed money, and they came up with what they thought was a good idea. They bought some newspapers and cut the paper in the approximate size of bills (Norwegian kroner). Then they put a pillow over them, and prayed the whole night that God would turn the paper into hundred kroner banknotes. When the sun rose and they removed the pillow, they realized that the paper was still paper, and like everyone else in town they would have to get a job to earn the money they needed!

The question is not whether God could have transformed the paper into bills – of course He could! God can do anything! And I am sure that miracles like this have happened somewhere, sometime. But I also believe that God wanted to teach my eager friends that this is not the way He planned to provide for them. Regarding work, there are no shortcuts for Christians. To provide for what we need, we, like anyone else, should find a job!

Bread from heaven

When the people of Israel wandered in the Sinai desert for 40 years, God fed them by performing some of the greatest miracles in the Old Testament. He let water gush forth from a rock in Kadesh (Num. 20:11) and sent innumerable amounts of quail to their camp to feed them with meat (Num. 11:31). But the most amazing miracle of the desert was the supernatural provision of manna that was used to bake bread. Every morning the ground around their camps was covered with a thin layer of this “heavenly bread”:

Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color like the color of bdellium. The people went about and gathered it, ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil. And when the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.

Exodus 11:7-9

For forty years this miracle repeated itself every morning. God knew the people had to eat, and He had promised to be their provider through this long journey.

But the miracle was not supposed to last forever. The book of Joshua tells about what happened when the people finally entered the promised land:

Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the

Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

Joshua 5:10-12

The manna was necessary as long as the people were in the desert – where they could neither sow nor reap. But as soon as they entered the land that God had given them and could till the ground, the manna ended, never to return again. From now on the Israelis were supposed to plow and sow, water and fertilize, and reap the food they needed for their families.

This story reveals something essential about work and God's miracles. God can do any miracle, anytime, especially when we are in need and for some reason cannot provide for ourselves. But this has never been God's "plan A" for our sustenance. As in the days of Joshua, so also today, God's main way to provide for His people is to give them land, hands to work with and then bless their daily labor.

Laziness

Faith in the supernatural can actually become a cloak for laziness. I have met people who seem unwilling to do their civil

and spiritual duty of an honest day's work, and instead claim that God will provide for them in some kind of miraculous way. I cannot say what God will or will not do for an individual. He can perform any miracle He wants for those who believe in Him. But I do believe with all my heart that it was never God's intention that we Christians work less than others, or that we should trust that God will let provision rain from heaven when others have to go to work in the morning. No, to work is a part of God's order for our life; not an exception, but the main way He bestows on us what we need.

Have you ever wondered why laziness is so strictly judged in the Bible? I have. Over and over again the lazy man is described as an abomination! Let us pick some examples of what the book of Proverbs says:

As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the lazy man to those who send him.

Proverbs 10:26

The way of the lazy man is like a hedge of thorns.

Proverbs 15:19

The desire of the lazy man kills him.

Proverbs 21:25

He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.

Proverbs 18:9

These are very strong words! Laziness is spoken about almost

in the same terms as idolatry or rebellion against God! At times, when reading these verses, I have almost felt a little pity for the lazy character. Is it really that bad? Is it really so wrong to lean towards idleness...?

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