

Proverbs for Work Integrity

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Day One

As we dive into integrity, I have been thinking about Proverbs and how they relate to work. They are filled with wisdom, and a good roadmap for working with integrity! I thought it would be helpful to define this book of the Bible that is a home for practical wisdom as a faithful believer in Jesus Christ. In fact, if you take time to read through this book of the Bible, you might be surprised at how much people quote and paraphrase from God's good book of wisdom!

First, some facts. The word proverb is defined as "a short pithy saying in general use, stating a general truth or piece of advice." (Oxford Language Dictionary) While Proverbs is a book of the Bible, there are common secular proverbs like curiosity killed the cat or a watched pot never boils that you may have heard. I am sure you could quip a few more. The biblical proverbs are also short, pithy sayings in general use, and this use in our case is as a guide to living a life pleasing to God. Not to be confused with a commandment or a prophesy, these proverbs are good advice to help keep us on the straight and narrow path and far from sin. We can find proverbs for just about every aspect of life ranging from family and friendship to sex and money! And, yes, we can find many proverbs which can help guide our work.

Although Proverbs is made up of 31 chapters, not all 31 have proverbs. In fact, the first 10 chapters and the last two chapters are poems that help frame our views on wisdom and the fear of the Lord. Proverbs 1:7a gives us a big hint about the sum of all 31 chapters: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge....* Basically, if you want to be wise, trust God; this will lead to life. If you are a fool, you won't trust God, and this will lead to death. Proverbs compares and contrasts actions that lead to a life that thrives in wisdom and a life that leads to death.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23). Proverbs helps guide us in the path of life, away from sin. As believers in Jesus Christ, we know our works will not earn us this eternal life, but we also know we still will fall short and sin. Proverbs provides us with wise reminders of how we can lead lives that point others towards Jesus and not away from him. With a posture of fear, in the sense of reverence and awe towards God, we can seek wisdom in the book of Proverbs that helps us at work!

Day Two

Are you doing what God hates at work? Let's keep in mind that the book of Proverbs is not only instructing us what to do but also what not to do. The following verses in Proverbs six are not actually proverbs as we previously defined but are part of the poems in the first nine chapters of Proverbs. While not "proverbs" in a defined sense, these verses can help us consider things we should not do since God hates them. They can help us with our integrity at work.

There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Consider the weight of verse 16 that uses the words *hate* and *abomination* for how God feels about the actions listed. An abomination is a thing that causes disgust or hatred. If the goal of the book of Proverbs is to keep us closer to God with pleasing actions, this list should certainly matter to us. Salvation makes me grieve this greatly. I surely do not want God to be disgusted with my actions, or to hate what I am doing!

Haughty eyes. Are you coming across as arrogant or superior in an off-putting way? In pride, are you looking down at others at work. Do you brag about a project you have done, a promotion you have achieved? Does your body language speak to others in a way that makes them feel less than? Have you ever smirked or quietly chuckled at someone else's expense? God hates this!

Proverbs 16:18 tell us what happens with this pride and haughtiness: *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.* Destruction and a fall.

But there is wisdom. Verse 19 continues: *It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

Wisdom says, "be lowly in spirit." As our example, in Matthew 11:29 Jesus tells us he is lowly in heart.

We just scratched the surface about one thing that God hates! And the list in the verses includes seven things! When we take time to look at the proverbs in chapters 10-29 of this book, we will find practical wisdom to keep us from doing these things God hates.

Day Three

We are looking at seven things that are an abomination to God, and now we will focus on our mouth. More specifically: a lying tongue, a false witness that breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. Three of the seven things on the list God hates have to do with how we choose to use our mouth. And all three of these things that God hates us to do with our mouth can show up at work. Clearly if we use our words to lie, we lack integrity.

What about a lying tongue? *Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is for a moment* (Proverbs 12:19).

God wants you to be honest in *all* ways. This includes those little lies you may call "white lies". Did you say you sent an email when you didn't? Were you late for work, but said that you were on time? God still grieves this. The Word tell us a lying tongue is for a moment, and truthful lips endure forever. Eventually truth comes to light. In the context of work, depending on what you have lied about, it could have implications on how long your employment "endures".

One of the ways we can lie is by being a false witness. If you don't know, don't comment! And don't assume! Providing untrue information about someone or something at work can have implications far beyond your passing comment. This includes speculating about someone's motives in a situation. If you don't have direct and honest information, it is best to say nothing at all.

In Proverbs 12:17 the Word tells us: *An honest witness tells the truth, but a false witness tells lies.* It is easy to *think* we know things when we really don't at all. Sometimes at work, you will be called upon as a witness. It is important to only state facts and not assumptions about what you are asked, and not to comment if you truly don't know anything.

Sowing discord. *The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing* (Proverbs 12:18). Think about what happens when you quickly comment about something at work. Being rash means proceeding without a lack of careful consideration of the possible consequences and

in this case, of the words being used. Do you blurt things out? Comment in meetings at an inappropriate time? Complain about company policies or other colleagues? Do your inside feelings of dissatisfaction come out? All of this can sow discord and God hates this.

How can you bring healing instead? Sometimes, saying nothing is the best thing you can choose.

Day Four

The final three things that are listed in Proverbs six are what God hates will likely have you saying, no way! Not me. I surely do not do any of these things. Not at work. Not at all.

Devising wicked plans, shedding innocent blood, and running to evil. All of these remind me of an old AC/DC song with the refrain; "I'm on a highway to hell." Words like wicked, blood, and evil should not ever belong at work or in our life. And they remind us the wicked surely do not display integrity!

Devising wicked plans. Another way to think of this is scheming. Proverbs 24:8: *Whoever plots evil will be known as a schemer.* Have you ever been part of a conversation about getting someone fired or removed from a department when it wasn't your job to do so? This is an example of colleagues scheming about another. Maybe this person has impacted you in some way, but scheming is not how to address the situation. Most companies will have a process for appropriately addressing concerns. Perhaps choosing to address the person directly about your concerns would be the kindest thing to do. God hates when we scheme. Be up front and honest when addressing the issue.

You may be thinking you don't shed innocent blood, but do you? If you are working in supply chain and manufacturing, there is a movement to look at how every part of the process is impacting human flourishing. From fair treatment of workers in the form of wages and conditions to preventing human trafficking. Companies and laws are taking a deeper look at how our goods reaching consumers are impacting people. Are you aligned with a company that cares for people in a way that honors God's requirements of you? While you may not be making the decisions that are impacting these larger issues, it is important that you ask questions as you consider where you are working.

What about running to evil? As a follower of Jesus, we can assume any sin is evil. Are you quick to walk in ways contrary to your new life in Christ? Do you look different or the same as all your colleagues? If you don't walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fulling pleasing him and bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God, what are you running to (Colossians 1:10)?

Day Five

One who waters will himself be watered. Walking in a manner worthy of the Lord is what the Proverbs are all about! Shifting our focus from what God hates in Proverbs six to Proverbs 11:25b which can be summarized by a secular proverb, "what goes around comes around." I like the biblical version much better, *one who waters will himself be watered.* This is a beautiful thought to carry with you to work each day as we think about others around us. Watering is not to be left to managers and leaders in the workplace. And, after all, this proverb benefits both the waterer and the watered.

Let's think about the results of watering for a moment. Whether rain falls from the sky or we are using another method to water something like a houseplant, the result is growth, and in some cases new life. Plants can bear beauty in flowers, or vegetables and fruits for us to eat. I also think about when it rains in the desert. Not only do plants sprout up, but wadies (or dried up riverbeds) come to life with animals and even aquatic life like frogs that have been dormant waiting for the rain.

Who or what needs watering at work? Sometimes we don't even realize things need water! I have had two different conversations with fellow Christian working women this year where I suggested they water what otherwise seemed dead. More specifically, one woman wanted more affirmation from her

manager. She knew she was trusted by the work that was given to her but never received feedback. When I asked if she thought her manager received affirmation, the answer was probably not. I suggested that she “water” her manager with some positive feedback. You see, some people aren’t in the practice of watering until they are watered themselves! She stated this watering had very positive results!

The other woman felt the same about receiving no feedback. So, she decided to write notes of gratitude to all her colleagues. She watered an entire department! While too soon to know if she will be watered in return, the initial responses were very positive.

Who can you water at work with kind words or an act of service? God promises you will be watered in return.

The Proverbs can help remind us that God wants us to walk with integrity at work. Clearly there are things he doesn’t want us to do. But there are things we can do to increase our integrity at work each day!