

Proverbs 25:4-8 Get a new job 14.02.10

Well, the last of our New Year's Resolutions that we are going to look at is that of "getting a new job". A new year often makes us assess where we are what we're doing and are we happy, satisfied or reaching our full potential.

As January the first arrives many people ask themselves, "Am I really fulfilled in my job? Could I not be doing more somewhere else? Would I not be more appreciated and more valued if I moved to pastures new?" Now sometimes that might be true, but perhaps for many of us, rather than looking outwardly for a new job, we need to look at ourselves and ask, "Do I need to become a renewed employee; someone who has rediscovered what it means to be doing what I have been called to do?" – before we change our wage, do we need to change our ways?

And before those of you who are retired or are self-employed, or full time mums switch off, think about the jobs you do; looking after children, being secretary of a society, a member of the PCC, there is bound to be some area of your life that these principles from Proverbs apply to.

You see, fundamentally, I wonder whether when we are at work we are always giving our best, to our bosses, our colleagues or to our customers. Let's take a look.

First of all, how about the people we work with. So first of all, ask yourself, "Am I a good colleague? Am I someone who is good and trustworthy to work with?" In chapter 3 of Proverbs we read this; "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act. Do not say to your neighbour, Come back later; I'll give it tomorrow— when you now have it with you. Do not plot harm against your neighbour, who lives trustfully near you. Do not accuse a man for no reason— when he has done you no harm."

Are you so determined to look good yourself that you are prepared to see others look bad; your neighbour at the next work-station, your rival in the horticultural society or even your husband or wife? Of course, you don't deliberately harm them, but maybe you don't forward something on straight away; an email, a phone message, a memo. It's not life threatening, but it makes their life harder.

Maybe though you have resorted to dirty tactics – you want to look good in your place of work, so you slowly start to assassinate their character – and that is just as possible in the home if that is your workplace; when Liz and I got married, Phil Moon, a friend and colleague who preached at our service gave us the important reminder never to criticise each other the other to third parties.

If there is a problem where you work then try your best to sort it out between the two of you, but certainly, “Do not accuse a man for no reason— when he has done you no harm.”

You see, you might gain the respect of others (although that is doubtful), but you certainly won't please God; Proverbs Chapter 6:16-19 “There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”

By the way, the phrase “six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him” is not the writer of this proverb being indecisive, it's a bit like us saying, “there are three or four things that God hates” it's not an exhaustive list, but it gives you a general idea of what God strongly disapproves of and someone who stirs up trouble is high on that list.

It makes sense any way doesn't it? Proverbs 30 verse 10 puts it succinctly; "Do not slander a servant to his master, or he will curse you, and you will pay for it." Yes you have a duty to report certain inappropriate behaviour, but if you just slander your colleague to your boss, then he won't appreciate it and he certainly won't forget it.

Well, so much for getting our relationships with our colleagues back on track, but what are you like with your customers? Are you honest with them? We all want to achieve, we all want to make a profit or impress the boss, but are we ripping off those we are serving in the process? God has some strong words to us if we are; Chapter 11, verse 1; "The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight." And again in chapter 20, "Differing weights and differing measures—the LORD detests them both."

So how do customers feel when they come to you? Do you give them a fair price if they are buying from you, or selling to you? Well, you should, listen to how the ungodly man behaves in chapter 20: "It's no good, it's no good! says the buyer; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase."

He's ripped you off, but God has harsh words for that man, "Food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man, but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel." (20:17) Of course, when do you end up with a mouthful of gravel? In the grave – again, the wages of sin is death.

So let me ask you, are you cheating someone when you are at work? It may not be who you think; almost every night a child's father would bring home office work. Finally his young son asked why. Daddy explained that he had so much work to do that he couldn't finish it all during the day. The boy thought for a moment, "Then why don't they put you in a slower group?" He asked.

Good point! Is your work, be it what you are paid to do or your hobby cheating your family out of time which should be spent with them? Are you using dishonest scales to weigh up your priorities? Chapter 22:1 gives us the right perspective, “A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.”

Well, we’ve looked at our relationships with our colleagues and our customers, but how does your boss see you? Are you the sort of person Proverbs condemns? “As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is a sluggard to those who send him.” (10:26)

But perhaps instead of searching for a new job, we need to rediscover our zeal and passion and be the person who gets noticed for the right reasons, Proverbs 22:29 says, “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.” And in chapter 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.”

Are our masters refreshed by our presence? Are they impressed by our skilled work? Or are we invisible, plodding along? Well, all this is not to send you scurrying into work on Monday firing off emails to your boss about how you deserve a pay rise because of your new commitment or to pin a notice to the fridge with your verse for the year magnet telling everyone how under appreciated you are because as chapter 25 goes on to say, “Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among great men; it is better for him to say to you, Come up here, than for him to humiliate you before a nobleman.”

No, we are simply to work hard and humbly, not expecting reward for what we are called to do any way.

And all this reflects on our Christian life too, because, of course you could well be short changing God with your time. In our Gospel reading we heard how Jesus sent out his disciples to preach the message that the kingdom of heaven is near, something he redoes at the Great Commission. At the beginning of a new year when we think about changing our job, perhaps the new employer we should be looking to is God, seeking to serve him with renewed passion and commitment as we who are Jesus' disciples take out that message ourselves.

Do we have a Passion for life? Are we fired up to tell our friends and neighbours about Jesus? We know the good news of salvation for ourselves, but are we taking that message out too?

You see, our hope is that in our everyday work, we will be productive, work hard, make a difference and it would be nice if we were appreciated – all that is possible if you serve Jesus. What greater difference can you make than to play a part in someone's eternal salvation?

The great preacher D. L. Moody said; "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me: 'Moody, save all you can.'" William Booth said, "My studies were...sadly interrupted by the more practical business of saving souls." And John Wesley challenged us; "The church has nothing to do but to save souls; therefore spend and be spent in this work."

The Bible promises us that God knows how or whether we do his work and with what sort of enthusiasm and passion. If we are fired up to do his will then God will recognise it, how wonderful to kneel before the throne of grace and hear God say to us "Well done good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!" (Matt 25:21).

So are you still scouring the jobs pages, because there is always a situation vacant in the service of God, but when we work for him we must apply these lessons from proverbs too; work in partnership with our new colleagues, be honest with those we reach out to and always seek to please our Lord; doing his will and glorifying his name then we will be able to share in our master's happiness and be fulfilled in our work. Amen.