

What is the most basic motivator to work? (16:26)

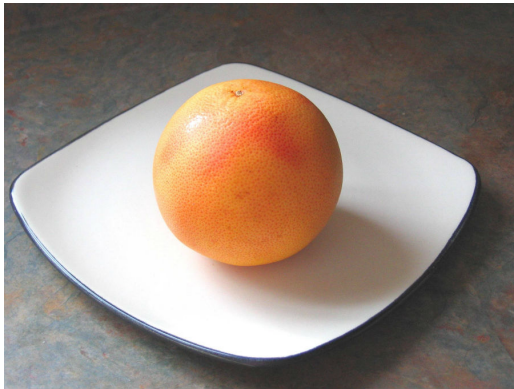
A worker's appetite works for him, for his hunger urges him on.

THE TEXT (NASB)

A worker's appetite works for him, for his hunger urges him on.

He that laboureth laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him. Classic KJV - Proverbs 16:26

INTRODUCTION



Hunger, though troubling, gets us working and keeps us at it. It's good for our financial health.

If people can work, but won't work, just wait until they get hungry. It's amazing how quickly people can find work, once the subsidies cease and their refrigerators are empty.

Self-preservation works for us.



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COMMENTARY

This proverb is more descriptive than prescriptive. The NASB and KJV translations of the first phrase may differ, but the message is the same: We're motivated by felt needs, the most basic being hunger. This text deals with needs-based motivation. It's not addressing workaholics, who can't stop working, but the lazy, who won't start working. It's harder to start a ship than steer it, and the problems with excessive, compulsive work are addressed by other texts, like Proverbs 16:3.

Translation: *Worker*



The Hebrew word for “worker” here, עַמֵּל ('ā•mēl, pronounced “ah-mel”), is derived from Hebrew verb (עָמַל, 'ā•māl, pronounced “ah-mahl”), “to labour” or “to toil.” It stands in contrast to two other Hebrew verbs for work, as it expresses the drudgery of toil rather than the nobility of labour. It appears seven times in the Old Testament, first in Judges 5:26, where it refers to a workman’s hammer.

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT) explains:



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The root of 'ā•mēl relates to the dark side of labour, the grievous and unfulfilling aspect of work. A biblical view of labour based on this word alone would be defective. Moses uses this word to describe the frustration and struggle of the worker in this ephemeral, transitory world. It is also used by Solomon in Ecclesiastes as he details the frustration, profitlessness and transitory benefits of day-by-day labor... when that labor is not seen as service (even worship) to God, but simply as work done 'under the sun.'

Pay for Performance



In the case of “thought” work, physical hunger may be a real distraction, causing the worker to lose his concentration. However, the text implies that self-interest is a strong motivator. Regardless of the type of work (manual, intellectual, or blended), the worker works because he expects to be paid. Workers deserve to be paid promptly and fairly. Pay for performance is a biblical principle alive in the marketplace: “The labourer deserves his wages,” Luke 10:7 ESV. A worker exchanges his services, expecting compensation. But sometimes the performance is lacking.

General Motors, the largest automaker on the world, suffered an \$8.6 billion dollar loss in 2005, so in February 2006, GM announced that it would halve the dividend payout and slash the salary of its senior executive. GM’s chairman and CEO took a fifty percent pay cut: Poor performance, less pay.

Timing of Compensation

The proverb implies that, if we’re given rewards without making any effort, we won’t develop good work habits. So we shouldn’t be rewarded before we’ve finished our assignments. Our own workers should be rewarded after completing their tasks. Further, gluttony fosters laziness. Blood in the digestion is unavailable for other effort. We shouldn’t overeat, nor eat at the wrong



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time. For the most part, we can feed ourselves in relation to the work we've done. Lazy workers can't be picky eaters—not if they're buying their own food. If someone else picks up the tab, at no cost to the eater, it's amazing how much food is wasted, and how picky the eater becomes. Hunger works.

Other Motivators to Work

- The desire for more—houses, vacations, boats, luxuries—easily becoming greed;
- The desire for status and prestige—easily leading to vulgar display;
- The need to provide for others, especially family members;
- The need to serve others from love and gratitude, like serving God.

Not all motivations are equally helpful. My former insurance sales manager once said, “People have either a greed button or a need button. Find the button that works and push it.” But there's a problem with this advice. Need buttons are good to satisfy, but pushing greed buttons will hurt the client, and sooner or later, the agent as well. Stated simply, greeds are sinful, needs are not.

OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus said, “Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” Matthew 11:28. He also called himself the “bread of life,” John 6:48. Herein lies a rare combination—rest from work, plus bread for life.

This seems to violate the work-for-food principle found in this text.

Jesus promises us a freebie—a gift! (Romans 6:23)

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite translation and think about it often.
- Give a hungry man an opportunity to work—a hand up, not a hand-out.
- Rise from the table before you are full and you will be more productive.
- Keep food away from your work area, especially while you are working. Sip water.

Which one of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.



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KEY WORDS

appetite, compensation, gluttony, hunger, more assets (quantity), motivation, greed, self-control, work, employees, self-indulgence, bf serving others

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Prudent Pauline?



Prudent Pauline is a planner. She looks before she leaps, she thinks before she speaks. Her favourite mottos are: "Haste makes waste," "brains over brawn," and "don't jump to conclusions."

When Pauline first heard that famous maxim: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step," she said NO! It begins with a good map. The map must be studied and the best route plotted. Consider road conditions, terrain, rest stops, refuelling, hostile territory, expected weather, travelling companions, clothing, supplies, and many more factors, including (if necessary) a guide.

She has studied the wisdom of Solomon and even helped teach him a thing or two. Solomon wrote these words about 3,000 years ago in honour of Prudent Pauline. "Whatever your hand finds to do (no matter what you are doing) do it with all your might (give it your full ability and energy) for there is no activity or planning or wisdom after you die—it will be too late." Pauline says, "First comes wisdom, then comes planning (her favourite activity), and then comes activity."

Pauline makes the time to do tax planning. She does a work plan every day. She uses a day



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timer or planner to assign priorities to her activities. She and Diligent Daniel are an incredible pair. Pauline does all her homework before she starts an activity.

