

## **The Wise Worker is Diligent**

*From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Proverbs*

In an agrarian economy, the connection between hard work and well-being is easy to see. As long as they have access to land to cultivate, hard-working farmers do much better than lazy ones. The proverbs are clear that a lazy worker will lose out in the end.

Modern economies (at least in the developed world) may mask this effect in the short term. In good times, when virtually everyone can find work, the lazy worker may have a job and appear to do nearly as well as the diligent worker. Likewise, in economic downturns (and at all times in many emerging economies), a hard-working person may have no more success than a lazy one in finding a job. And at all times, rewards for hard work may be blunted by discrimination, seniority rules, union contracts, bosses' favoritism, nepotism, golden parachutes, flawed performance metrics, ignorance by managers and many other factors.

Does this make the proverbs about hard-working diligence obsolete? No, it does not, for two reasons. First, even in modern economies, diligence is usually rewarded over the course of a working life. When jobs are scarce, it is the diligent workers who are most likely to keep their jobs or find new ones faster. Second, the chief motivation for diligence is not personal prosperity, but the fear of the Lord, as we have seen with the other virtues in the proverbs. We are diligent because the Lord calls us to our tasks, and our awe of him motivates us to diligence in our work.