

Productivity from God's Perspective (Go To Meeting)

Lindsay Stephens—March 15, 2024

Hello, brethren! Welcome to another Sabbath Day and it's an opportunity to learn from God's Word, because this is a day that is specifically where we are meant to be focused on God.

Mankind has been created by God with an instinct to work and to produce. When we think of work and productivity, we tend to think of it in goods and services and physical things.

In this message today, I want to bring out the subject of productivity from God's perspective.

- What does He want us to do in our lives?
- How does He want us to apply it?

We know that God has created mankind for a great purpose. When God renewed the face of the earth after the rebellion of Lucifer and a third of the angels, the creation was the central focus of His Great Plan.

Genesis 1:26: "And God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of heaven and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that crawls upon the earth.'"

In other words, "...after Our likeness..." with the potential of having the mind and character of Elohim. God virtually said, 'Let Us reproduce ourselves.'

Verse 27: "And God created man in His *own* image, in the image of God He created him. He created them male and female. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of heaven and over every living thing that moves upon the earth'" (vs 27-28).

This is now this is contrary to many of the 'woke' pressure groups and those on the bandwagon of evolution. Mankind was meant to have control over all these other living things. However, it did not mean to apply abuse and cruelty to all other forms of life.

Verse 29: "And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which *is* upon the face of all the earth, and every tree upon which *is* the fruit of a tree bearing seed—to you they shall be for food. And to every animal of the earth and to every fowl of heaven and to all the living creatures that crawl upon the earth, every green plant *is* given for

food.' And it was so" (vs 29-30).

God designed us to move and to be active, to exert energy, to employ skill and produce goods for the human flourishing.

Genesis 2:8: "And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed." *So God had it all laid out!*

Verse 15: "And the LORD God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it."

It also means to serve it and take great care of it. Other translations have it as 'to cultivate it and tend it.'

Immediately after he was created, Adam had a God given purpose with a job to do. God had created a world, which included work, needing to be done, and created man with a mission to do that work.

Now, logically, God didn't need to structure the world this way. He could have created a world that was fully self-sustaining. He could have made human beings to simply live in luxury and enjoy all of God's creation without ever having to contribute anything.

However, that was not God's design. Even before sin entered into the world, human beings were meant to work, to help to accomplish God's purpose that is built into us.

In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve would have received great blessings in their work, having had direct instruction from God regarding work and productivity.

However, the sin of Adam and Eve and of not obeying God's instructions to them, the nature of and response to work changed dramatically. After they had sinned and taken of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, God said:

Genesis 3:17: "And to Adam He said, 'Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree—of which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat *of* it!"—the ground *is* cursed for your sake. In sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life. It shall also bring forth thorns and thistles to you, and *thus* you shall eat the herbs of the field'" (vs 17-18).

Although this is referring to an agrarian society, we can think of much of the workforce in

the world today where there is misuse of employees by employers, lack of incentive and motivation, unions making workers go on strike or take other action, and high taxes by governments.

Verse 19: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you *are*, and to dust you shall return."

So, because of sin, mankind as a whole has had to eke out a living the hard way and struggle to make a living apart, apart from a minority of people being the elite and those who are in control. Is this the way God wants it to be? *We know God wants man to be productive!*

At this stage, I want to define what productivity is; how it's defined: It is simply *the state or quality of being productive!* In economic terms, it is a measure of economic performance that compares the amount of goods and services produced or output with the number of inputs used to produce those goods and services. It means *the quality, state or fact of being able to generate, create, enhance or bring forth goods and services.*

This is viewing productivity from a physical point of view, meaning *to produce something physical!*

Now, Yuval Noah Harari of the World Economic Forum has stated that if anyone does not produce anything, *they are consumers and of no value to society*, and he justifies this as a reason for humanity depopulation.

From God's perspective, the real meaning of productivity is very different. This is what is most important for us.

While the world looks at it physically, which is primarily short term, *with God it is spiritual and is very much long term.* There are a few points on productivity that I want to bring out in this message.

1. God created us with the purpose of being productive (Gen. 1:28)

Being fruitful means bearing fruit. *For us to bear fruit spiritually, we must be connected to the vine who is Jesus Christ.*

John 15:1: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. He takes away every branch in Me *that* does not bear fruit; but He cleanses each one that bears fruit, in order that it may bear more fruit" (vs 1-2). *He cleanses us by revealing the sin within!*

Verse 3: "You are already clean through the word that I have spoken to you. Dwell in Me, and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, but

only if it remains in the vine, neither *can* you bear fruit unless you are dwelling in Me. I am the vine, and you *are* the branches. The one who is dwelling in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; **because apart from Me you can do nothing**" (vs 3-5).

We cannot be spiritually productive without dwelling in Christ and Christ in us. Then we can bear the fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

2. know that God requires a return on our lives. God has given us so much

We are responsible for what we do with it.

Let's go to the Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25:14: "For *the Kingdom of Heaven is* like a man leaving the country, who called his own servants and delivered to them his property."

What property has God given us? *The understanding of:*

- His Word, which is His Truth
- His Plan of Salvation by the Sabbath and Holy Days.
- His Spirit upon conversion, baptism and the laying on hands

Verse 15: "Now, to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another one; he *gave* to each one according to his own ability, and immediately left the country."

God has given us the spiritual goods of His Holy Spirit and His Word. What happens depends on what we do with it.

Verse 16: "Then the one who had received five talents went and traded with them, and made an additional five talents."

So, the way God works is not like a corporation or a government department. He expects us to take the initiative with what we do.

Verse 17: "In the same way also, the one who had *received* two *talents* also gained two others. But the one who had received the single *talent* went and dug in the earth, and hid his lord's money. Now, after a long time, the lord of those servants came to take account with them" (vs 16-19). *We will be judged on what we do with our calling.*

1-Peter 4:17: "For the time *has come* for judgment to begin with the Household of God..."

Matthew 25:20: "Then the one who had received five talents came to *him and* brought an additional five talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered five talents to me; see, I have gained five other

talents besides them.” And his lord said to him, ‘Well *done*, good and faithful servant! *Because* you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’ And the one who had received two talents also came to him *and* said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; see, I have gained two other talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well *done*, good and faithful servant! *Because* you were faithful over a few things, I will set you over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (vs 20-23).

God will choose the reward once we enter into ‘the joy of the Lord,’ ***it will be for all eternity!***

Verse 24: “Then the one who had received the single talent also came to *him and* said, ‘Lord, I knew that you are a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter. And *because* I was afraid, I went and hid your talent in the earth. *Now* look, you have your own” (vs 24-25).

Look, you have your own, and this shows an attitude of doubt, hesitation, procrastination and fear. Perhaps you could liken it to the Protestants. They have a certain amount of understanding from the Word of God, but they do a harsh God from the Old Testament, which they reject. They know they need their sins forgiven and only Jesus can do that. But they go no further with the talent they have been given.

Verse 25: “And *because* I was afraid, I went and hid your talent in the earth. *Now* look, you have your own.’ His lord answered *and* said to him, ‘*You* wicked and lazy servant! You knew that I reap where I did not sow, and gather what I did not scatter. *Because you knew* this, you were duty-bound to take my talent to the money exchangers, *so that* when I came, I could have received my own with interest” (vs 25-27). *That is at least doing the bare minimum.*

Verse 28: “Therefore, take the talent from him, and give *it* to the one who has ten talents.”

We cannot be judged by what we did not have in our lifetimes, but only by what we have and what we do with it. For example: we cannot let bad experiences of the past justify wrong choices that we make.

Verse 29: “For to everyone who has, *more* shall be given, and *he* shall have abundance; on the other hand, *as for* the one who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken from him.”

That goes against the trend with the way the world views equality and work practices. But God looks at the heart and the effort that is put into it.

Verse 30: “‘And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness.’ There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The very worst scenario for anyone called by God would be to be regarded as *worthless!* This has to be avoided at all costs, which leads to the next point.

3. **seek after living productively**

- Why? *Because this is important to God.*
- How do we do that? *We have the tools that God has made available for us!*
 - God's calling
 - His Word
 - His Truth
 - His Spirit to lead us
 - His grace and His love

However, we do have physical limitations!

Psalms 103:15: “As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes, for the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and its place shall know it no more” (vs 15-16).

It's a summary of our physical life. It is only temporary and compared to eternity, it is nothing. But it's not the end.

Verse 17: “But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him, and His righteousness is unto children's children.”

1-Peter 1:24: “For all flesh *is* like grass, and all *the* glory of man *is* like *the* flower of *the* field; the grass has withered, and its flower has fallen away. But the Word of *the* Lord endures forever; and this is the message that was preached to you through the Gospel” (vs 24-25).

Psalms 90:12: “So, teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.”

When our time in this life is limited, what we do with it counts for eternity.

Paul admonishes to us; Ephesians 5:15: “So then, take heed that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as those who are wise.”

Consider the situation we are in with every circumstance we face. Redeeming the time because the days are evil. We know all too well that we live in evil days in this world today, the way it is and the direction it is heading and setting downhill.

We need to be very mindful of how we use our time and to make the most of every opportunity. The question must be asked: Whose time is it

without our calling, conversion and having God's Spirit?

We would see our time as our own and be used and to be used for our own ends. If we view this time as belonging to God, however, then focusing on productivity in a spiritual way, and also be used to love and serve our neighbor.

In the world, we live in a time where people want to escape from the realities and stresses of life, with excessive desires for leisure, entertainment, sports, TV, movies, parties and other things.

We can learn from the ant; Proverbs 6:6: "Go to the ant, sluggard; consider her ways and be wise, who having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provides her food in the summer *and* gathers her food in the harvest" (vs 6-8).

So, the wise thing to do is prepare for the hard times ahead; ***and there are hard times coming!***

The ant serves as a model of diligence and foresight. Notice that the ant doesn't need to be told what to do by anyone ruling it over them. We can learn from the ant's example by planning our actions ourselves and being proactive in our efforts. It requires self-discipline on our part.

4. recognize that doing good works is how God describes as being productive.

Let's look at how Paul describes this:

Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this *especially* is not of your own selves; *it is* the gift of God."

So, we do welcome to God by our own work, energy or what we do.

Verse 9: "Not of works, so that no one may boast." ***If we boast about anything, we are headed for a fall!***

Verse 10: "For we are His workmanship, being created in Christ Jesus unto *the* good works that God ordained beforehand in order that we might walk in them."

The good works are referring to *the keeping of God's Law*; commandment-keeping! When we are doing what God commands, it's not our own works. We need to have our thoughts projected in this way.

What does God and Jesus Christ want us to do?

Proverbs 16:2: "All the ways of a man are clean **in his own eyes**... [self-justification] ...but the LORD weighs the spirits."

Think of the politicians who in their own eyes have never done anything wrong. That is part of the *spirit in man, human nature!*

Verse 3: "Commit your works unto the LORD, and your thoughts shall be established."

That is the way we live. Our thoughts are to be more like God's thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9); more in tune with the mind of Christ!

Let's expand on this and look at what Paul says in:

Philippians 2:3: "*Let* nothing *be* done through contention or vainglory, but in humility, each esteeming the others above himself."

So we're not doing anything for what we can get out of it.

Verse 4: "Let each one look not *only* after his own things, but *let* each one also *consider* the things of others."

Our productivity is in process if we are praying for others. Whether it's to do with their health, family trials, or any other trial they may be going through. We all need to grow spiritually and to be in God's Kingdom.

Verse 5: "Let this mind be in you, which *was* also in Christ Jesus; Who, although He existed in *the* form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God" (vs 5-6)—***He was there in the very beginning*** (John 1:1-3).

Verse 7: "But emptied Himself, *and* was made in *the* likeness of men, *and* took the form of a servant."

Now what Jesus did, He became flesh (John 1:14). He did the reverse of what God is doing with us in order to make this possible.

Verse 8: "And being found in *the* manner of man, He humbled Himself, *and* became obedient unto death, even *the* death of *the* cross."

He became our Passover, sanctified for us and our Redeemer.

Verse 9: "Therefore, God has also highly exalted Him and bestowed upon Him a name, which *is* above every name."

He is a High Priest, Advocate, and your Intercessor!

Verse 10: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow took the form of a servant, of *beings* in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord to *the* glory of God *the* Father" (vs 10-11).

Every human being, past, present, and future will have to come to this point sooner or later. Our time for this is from the time we were called and is still with us now.

Verse 12: "So then, my beloved, even as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

We don't need anyone over us to tell us what to do. We need to plan how we are going to achieve it.

Verse 13: "For it is God Who works in you both to will and to do according to *His* good pleasure."

God provides us with the tools, but we have a part to play and we have to choose to do it.

5. make loving God and loving others a motivating factor in all that we do in our spiritual productivity

Matthew 22:37: "And Jesus said to him, 'You shall love *the* Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'"

That's with all our notions, with everything that we have, all our determination will.

Verse 38: "This is *the* first and greatest commandment."

It's the first four commandments to do with loving God.

Verse 39: "And *the* second one is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (vs 39-40).

So **the second one** referring to ***the last six commandments!***

God does everything based on love, and this is emphasized in both the Old and New Testaments.

Matthew 6:33: "But *as for* you, seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

So, don't let the physical things prevent us from seeking spiritual goals and God's will. Seeking God's Kingdom and Righteousness as a major priority goes a long way to shaping our productivity in the right direction.

It also reaches out to others as an example to them. If not in this life, then certainly in the next.

Matthew 5:14: "You are the light of the

world. A city that is set on a mountain cannot be hid."

What comes out from us bears the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Our Light is whatever comes out by God's Spirit.

Verse 15: "Neither do they light a lamp and put it under a bushel basket, but on the lampstand; and it shines for all who *are* in the house."

Whoever is in the household, whether they are converted or not.

Verse 16: "In the same way also, you are to let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works, and may glorify your Father Who *is* in heaven."

Our good works invariably glorify God the Father and Jesus Christ.

6. seek a deeper understanding of God's grace to us in Christ, because it cultivates productivity

Titus 3:4: "But when the graciousness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness, which we practiced, but according to His mercy **He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit**" (vs 4-5). *That is baptism!*

Verse 6: "Which He richly poured out upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior; so that, having been justified by His grace, we would become heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life" (vs 6-7). *That is put in the right standing!*

Verse 8: "This *is* a faithful saying, and I desire you to strongly affirm *all* these things, so that those who have believed God may apply themselves to doing good works. These things are good and profitable for men."

Because we're only physical, we make mistakes. But that doesn't mean to give up. We need to always look to what the future holds for us, providing we remain faithful to our calling. And a well-known Scripture to us all is in:

Romans 12:1: "I exhort you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, Holy *and* well-pleasing to God, which is your spiritual service." ***We have to yield or surrender to God!***

Verse 2: "Do not conform yourselves to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind in order that you may prove what *is* well-pleasing and good, and the perfect will of God."

People want to be accepted and recognized ***by the world***—people of all walks of life—***which has rejected God and has the wrong standard!***

We have to be changed from this world's standards. God wants to know what choices we will make in every situation and circumstance we encounter.

I want us to briefly look at the example of Joseph. After being sold into slavery by his brothers, he found himself in Egypt with no way of escape. But God did not forget him and put him in the care of Potifer, a high-ranking official of Pharaoh.

Genesis 39:2: "And the LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master the Egyptian." *So, as a slave he was very productive!*

Verse 3: "And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hands."

God blessed Joseph because he had God in his thoughts and he did things from God's perspective.

Verse 4: "And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him. And he made him overseer over his house, and he put him in charge of all he had."

I won't go any further with this and all that happened to Joseph, but we know that God blessed him, and he became governor of Egypt to save them and many people in the surrounding districts from famine.

He is mentioned in the faith chapter (Heb. 11). But we can use Joseph's example to lead to the

7. **Work your hardest in all that you do for God's glory; you will be well rewarded:**

1-Corinthians 10:31: "Therefore, whether you eat, or you drink, or you do anything, do all things to the glory of God."

Since God is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe ***all things are for His glory!*** Those who are skilled in their work will receive honor. This is speaking spiritually.

Proverbs 22:29: "Do you see a man diligent in his work? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before obscure *men*."

The King of kings and God the Father and receive honor. Connected with this is ***bearing spiritual fruit*** (Gal. 5:22-23).

John 15:1: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. He takes away every

branch in Me *that* does not bear fruit; but He cleanses each one that bears fruit, in order that it may bear more fruit.... [the spirit within] ...You are already clean through the word that I have spoken to you. Dwell in Me, and I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit of itself, but only if it remains in the vine, neither *can* you *bear fruit* unless you are dwelling in Me" (vs 1-4).

We must be connected to the Father and to the Son spiritually to be spiritually productive. We can't get out on our own and do our own thing. Spiritual productivity results in bearing the fruits of the Spirit. It doesn't mean having an agenda for recognition or anything like that.

Let's have a look at Matt. 3 where we read about John the Baptist and his role of baptizing in the wilderness.

Matthew 3:7: "But after seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who has forewarned you to flee from the coming wrath?'"

This was an official delegation coming to spy on him.

Verse 8: "Therefore, produce fruits worthy of repentance."

- How productive were their works of law steeped in the traditions of men, of Judaism and the code of Jewish law?
- Did they produce fruits worthy of repentance?

Verse 9: "And do not think to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham *for our* father'; for I tell you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."

Children from Abraham. It doesn't matter. It's not who we are that's important, but how we repent.

Verse 10: "But already the axe is striking at the roots of the trees; therefore, every tree that is not producing good fruit is cut down and thrown into *the* fire."

Jesus was most productive on the Sabbath Day. When He healed on the Sabbath, He was confronted by the authorities over healing on the Sabbath contrary to ***their works of law***, of Judaism.

John 5:17: "But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I work.'"

The most productive spiritual work is on the Sabbath with prayer, study and fellowship. How productive are we in this? As we approach Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, ***we are to be***

productive in preparing for this both physically and spiritually!

Productivity in today's physical world is becoming more unstable as time goes on.

- we have wars and rumors of wars
- we're threatening blockades of ships
- we have the threat of A.I. taking over much of current employment, which would render massive redundancies
 - Will it be like this in God's Kingdom?
 - Will there be an end to productivity?

Isaiah 9:7: "Of the increase of *His* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and over His Kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with righteousness from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."

And this is an absolute guarantee. Now, I'll just divert a little bit here. The second law of thermodynamics is the observation of physical cosmology that galaxies are moving further away from the Earth at speeds proportional to their distance.

This means the further they are, the faster they are moving away from the Earth. This, of course, contradicts the 'Big Bang' theory, where some massive explosion just happened by chance and has been slowing down ever since.

When we think of what lies ahead for us, the Millennium, the Great White Throne Judgment period, the New Heavens, the New Earth and beyond, we can be certain of these things regarding productivity in God's Kingdom.

There will be none of these things. No sackings or retrenchments, no KPIs or job performance reviews, no threats of commotion, no sick leave or long service leave, no inoculation mandates, no hierarchy corruption. ***There will be no persecution of any kind!***

This is eternal life we're talking about here! (John 17:3). It is based fully on love, for God is love.

Revelation 21:26: "And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it."

We will be doing productive things for the duration of all eternity.

Revelations 22:12: "And behold, I am coming quickly; and My reward is with Me, to render to each one according as his work shall be."

So brethren, what we do with our calling now is very important to our future and what we will be assigned to do. May we all be about our Father's business. May we all receive the same response as in:

Matthew 25:23: "His lord said to him, '**Well done, good and faithful servant!**....'"

Scriptural References:

- 1) Genesis 1:26-30
- 2) Genesis 2:8, 15
- 3) Genesis 3:17-19
- 4) John 15:1-9
- 5) Matthew 25:14-19
- 6) 1-Peter 4:17
- 7) Matthew 25:20-30
- 8) Psalm 103:15
- 9) 1-Peter 1:24-25
- 10) Psalm 90:12
- 11) Ephesians 5:15
- 12) Proverbs 6:6-8
- 13) Ephesians 2:8-10
- 14) Proverbs 16:2-3
- 15) Philippians 2:3-13
- 16) Matthew 22:37-40
- 17) Matthew 6:33
- 18) Matthew 5:14-16
- 19) Titus 3:4-8
- 20) Romans 12:1-2
- 21) Genesis 39:2-4
- 22) 1-Corinthians 10:31
- 23) Proverbs 22:29
- 24) John 15:1-4
- 25) Matthew 3:7-10
- 26) John 5:17
- 27) Isaiah 9:7
- 28) Revelation 21:26
- 29) Revelations 22:12
- 30) Matthew 25:23

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Hebrews 11
- Galatians 5:22-23
- Isaiah 55:8-9
- John 1:1-3: q4
- Hebrews 11
- John 17:3

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