

Work Life Balance in Balance

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Song of Songs

The Song of Songs, also known as the Song of Solomon, is love poetry. Yet it is also a profound depiction of the meaning, value, and beauty of work.

In the ancient world all poetry was sung, and Song of Songs is, in fact, the lyrics to a song collection. It sings of lovers who court, then marry, and then work together. The text is frankly sexual, and Christian preachers have tended to avoid it for this reason. But sex is intimately connected to work. Upon their marriage, the lovers create a household, the primary unit of economic activity in the ancient world. Without sex, it could not be populated with workers (i.e. children). Moreover, intimacy between spouses serves as a glue that holds the household together through the stresses of life and work.

In Song of Songs, the whole of life is integrated. Imagery in the love poetry is drawn from Israel's agricultural work. The woman's body is a garden. The man's cheeks are like beds of spices. Together they chase away foxes that would spoil their harvest. The Song expresses our hope — and God's design — that work be woven into the tapestry of our relationships.

Many workplaces provide childcare, time away for family needs, and medical insurance for workers' families. But these considerations are not available everywhere, and many programs have been cut by employers. It

remains to be seen whether the recent trend towards working from home will improve or complicate matters for families.

Families could not function without the unpaid work of maintaining the household, raising children, caring for aged and incapacitated family members, and sustaining social relationships. And yet, when the work of supporting the family occurs outside the home, money sometimes becomes the measure of work's worth, rather than overall contribution to the household. Song of Songs should increase our appreciation for all types of work: paid and unpaid.

The Song gives us an ideal picture of balance for which we can strive.

Work should be an act of love. Work is an essential element of family life.

Yet work must always serve — and never crowd out — the most fundamental element of a marriage: love.