

A Lesson Over Vienna Sausages

By: David E. Prince, PhD

The Prince family rang in the second day of the New Year with a lunch of Vienna sausages, sliced cheese and chips. While certainly not the most upscale lunch cuisine, it was quite functional for a quick lunch amid a day of household labor.

Actually, it was just a small fraction of the Princes who gathered to enjoy this quick feast. Some friends had taken our four youngest for an afternoon of play. This development left our 12- and 10-year-old boys home to tackle some long-delayed domestic projects.

The conversation at the lunch table bounced around and then drifted to the topic of work and the use of time. Some of the most important parental conversations occur over Vienna sausages or PB&J's, and this was one of those moments. My wife and I were pointing out to our sons that work is given by God for our good and helps form our character (Genesis 2:15).

We wanted them to understand that there is a reason they poke around and piddle at their work (unless, of course, it is the only thing keeping them from some sort of play). The problem, we explained, was that they failed to see the inherent value of work and viewed it as a necessary evil that hopefully will at least lead to something far better.

We explained that this was why diligence in the use of time during work only became important to them if the carrot of play was dangled before them as sufficient motivation (TV, going outside, games, reading). There is a good, old-fashioned word for this -- selfishness. The problem with this kind of selfishness is not just that we do not get the attic storage cleaned up before the little ones get back home; it is that it is sinful (Phil 2:3-8).

In explaining to my sons that Satan is pleased with them working as long as they see it as drudgery and despise it, something was happening to me. I was convicted.

I had been reminding my sons that their problem had as its root the false assumption that time existed for them. They often act as though the only issue in the use of time and labor is personal benefit or convenience. I wanted to be clear to them that there is a grave danger in acting as though time was created simply for us and serves no greater purpose. I concluded by telling them work and the use of time are not neutral issues; they are spiritual ones that have to do with biblical theology, morality and wisdom (Proverbs 6:6-11; 26:13-16; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:23; 4:5; Philemon 2:14).

As I was driving the truth home I was beginning to wonder whether or not I was instructing them or myself at this point. My thoughts began to race with how easily I slip into begrudging God's gift of work and the fact that He ordained that work would chiefly characterize our lives. It is not just my boys who often think their lives would be better if they just could play more and work less. How can I fall prey to such foolishness when history is littered with the destructiveness of the lives of people who worked only to gain and not to give?

Play and rest are certainly God's good gifts as well, but they are not the enemy of work, or its competitor; they are work's complement. In fact, play and rest lose meaning and value and become the spiritual weapons of Satan apart from a life characterized by diligent work. Constant verbal complaints about how we begrudge work and the time it takes are not cute; they are demonic.

People who recognize the hand of God in the created order realize that He does not do any of His work grudgingly or minimally. Those who have experienced the abundance of His gracious work in the Gospel of Jesus Christ are to respond to everything in life with abundant effort "as for the Lord" (Colossians 3:23).

I think that lunch of Vienna sausages, sliced cheese, and chips may prove to be one of the most important that I enjoy all year. I will spend the majority of 2009 working, and so will you. Therefore, it is not hard to define one of your primary spiritual battlefields. Whether we are studying, washing dishes, changing diapers, teaching school, dusting furniture or digging ditches, let's battle the Evil One and our own selfishness with the blessing of diligent work in 2009.