

Worship Part 2- Work

By

Former Pastor Dr. Joel Minto *

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Avad is usually translated into our English version in three ways, service, work and worship. And it overlaps in meaning so it is difficult to separate the three meanings into nice succinct parts. That makes it very interesting on what God means when he uses the word *avad*. We talked about the numerous times this word is used throughout the Old Testament and how important it is as a word group. Let's explore the second aspect of *avad*: work.

Now this is an interesting aspect of the word *avad*. Most of us, me included, think of our lives in two different sections, one devoted to our work and the other to our worship. God however thinks of these things as one and the same.

This word is used in reference to vocations both "secular" (Exodus 5:18; Ezekiel 29:18) and "sacred" (Exodus 13:5; Numbers 3:8; Joshua 22:27), both paid (Genesis 29:27) and unpaid (Jeremiah 22:13). In Exodus 34:21, God gives further clarity to the fourth commandment regarding the Sabbath: "Six days you shall labor [*avad*], but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest."

I have heard it said by many noted writers and apologists that all we really need to know about God and Man's existence and expectations can be found in the first few chapters of Genesis. *Avad* appears for the first time in the Genesis narrative in chapter 2:4-9:

This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This section begins with the phrase, such is the story or this is the history. This "elleh tolledot" is a formula used in Genesis which is a distinguishing characteristic. It is used a total of 10 times in Genesis. The "tolledot" formula is also used in 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2. In each of its other ten occurrences, it introduces what follows, invariably in close connection with the name of the person already mentioned in the narrative. Its use indicates that a new and significant development is at hand. A very specific and covenantal relationship is formed here:

1. The earth is barren
 - a. No shrubs – to grow
 - b. No plants – to grow
 - c. No rain – to cause growth
 - d. No man – to 'avad' (work) the caring for the growth

So a very special covenant was formed between God and man. Man was formed to work and could not provide rain and God does not work but is the one that provides the rain. Man was placed in the garden "to work it and take care of it." (2:15)

The perfect, fertile garden needed to be worked.

Work is part of the perfect, sinless world that God created.

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It has interesting implications for our daily lives. Unless we are in ministry, we tend to think of our jobs as secular concerns. Making money is our own business, not God's, as long as we share a little bit of it in church on Sunday. How different is our perspective if we consider our work equivalent with our service to God, which is the way that we worship him! In this light it is interesting to hear God's command about Sabbath again -

Ex. 34:21 "Six days you shall work (serve, avad), but on the seventh day you shall rest (shabbat - to cease or rest).

So from my perspective I have always had this backwards, one day to avad (worship/work) Him and six days to do our secular jobs. Unfortunately that is not what God says.

Pastor Dave Huber in his article "Work as Worship" says it this way; "We also should be thinking about how we use our working lives for serving God. Every aspect of our lives at work is a witness to the God we serve. Are we dedicated employees, are we patient with our co-workers? Honest with company money? Do we share our faith when it is appropriate? Our worship of God on one day of the week should be just a small reflection of our worship of him the rest of the time."

So where do you stand on this second meaning of the Hebrew word "avad". Does it change your thinking? I pray that it does. As we continue to study these words together you will see an overarching sense of community and how we relate to the community around us. We don't exist in a vacuum or even in a restrictive setting as our Church families. We operate in the larger sense of community. That alone should change how we present ourselves as worshippers of God.

* Pastor Joel has a Doctorate in Biblical studies from **Master's Divinity School** and is a contributor to Selah Life Ministries