



The Value of Work

Warm-up: Why do you work?

Ecclesiastes 2 (New International Version)

¹ I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. ² "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?" ³ I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

⁴ I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. ⁵ I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. ⁶ I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. ⁷ I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. ⁸ I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man. ⁹ I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

¹⁰ I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
I refused my heart no pleasure.

My heart took delight in all my work,
and this was the reward for all my labor.

¹¹ Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done
and what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;
nothing was gained under the sun.

¹² Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom,
and also madness and folly.

What more can the king's successor do
than what has already been done?

¹³ I saw that wisdom is better than folly,
just as light is better than darkness.

¹⁴ The wise man has eyes in his head,
while the fool walks in the darkness;
but I came to realize
that the same fate overtakes them both.

¹⁵ Then I thought in my heart,
"The fate of the fool will overtake me also.
What then do I gain by being wise?"
I said in my heart,
"This too is meaningless."

¹⁶ For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long
remembered;

in days to come both will be forgotten.

Like the fool, the wise man too must die!

¹⁷ So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸ I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ¹⁹ And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. ²⁰ So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²¹ For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. ²² What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? ²³ All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

²⁴ A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

²⁶ To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

What did Solomon do to discover the meaning of life and work?

Why do you think Solomon pursued his search for meaning with such passion?

Why is it so important to understand your purpose in life?

What value for work did the king see in verse 10?

What does verse 26 say is the key to happiness in our labors?

What was the problem with wisdom that Solomon discovered in verses 15 and 16?

How do we please God in our work?

Why did Solomon come to hate life (verse 17)?

How are wisdom, knowledge and happiness connected?

Why is work so difficult in this fallen world?

Can those who do not know God be happy in their work?

What do you think Solomon thought of the workaholic?

What is our purpose? Why did God create us?

What frustrated the king about work?

What will we be doing in eternity?

Why did Solomon see work as meaningless?

What becomes of the fruit of the sinners' labors?

What was the major breakthrough in understanding the value of work that Solomon voiced in verse 24?

How is it that the wealth sinners accumulate will end up in the hands of those who please God?

Why do you think it is pleasurable to be creative in our work?

What conclusion did Solomon come to about the meaning of work?

What did Solomon come to understand about how our work is coupled to fulfilling our purpose in verse 25?

Wrap-up:
What have you found that gives meaning to your work?