



The Value of Work

Has work become drudgery for you? Join us in discovering what the wisest man in the world prior to Jesus concluded about the value of work. King Solomon gives us the key to happiness in our work. When we apply Solomon's conclusions to our own lives, we'll find our work more rewarding for ourselves and more beneficial to others.

There is a hand-out for this class which you may use as "pre-work" for participants to come better prepared for the discussion.

Warm-up: Why do you work?

Certainly to earn a living but I also work to serve the purpose of God in my life. God is using me to perform a role in blessing the world with technology that makes access to information easier. This technology may be used to help people to better know God or give people more distractions to enable them to avoid God. Either way, it serves God's purpose.

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?

Solomon experienced all aspects of life to its fullest extent. He pursued pleasure in verses 1-3, he acquired wealth and power in verses 4-9. Then for most of the rest of the chapter he analyzed the value of all his hard work.

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

Verse 3 gives Solomon's motivation: *"I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives."* Solomon was searching for the purpose of his life – something we all have a desire to understand.

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

If we can understand why we are here, this will help us to better fulfill our purpose. Nothing will be worse than to face your Creator at the end of your life not having fulfilled the purpose for which you were created.

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

Solomon enjoyed his work... work has an inherent benefit in the sense of accomplishment that comes with it.

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

Human wisdom is focused on getting by in the world and this has no value beyond the end of a person's life. If all a person has is human wisdom, they are no better off than the fool which has no wisdom. The only kind of wisdom that has value beyond the here and now is godly wisdom that has an eternal perspective.

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

Work is hard in this fallen world and the fruit of a person's labors had no value beyond this life. (You can't take it with you when you go.) What was produced became someone else's who was free to squander it.

Why is work so difficult in this fallen world?

One of the consequences of the sin of mankind is that things require vigilance to maintain...

Genesis 3:17-18 - Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you

The thorns and thistles of Adam's day have become silicon bugs and computer viruses in our day.

What do you think Solomon thought of the workaholic?

I imagine Solomon came to think of the workaholic as a fool who had his priorities messed up.

What frustrated the king about work?

Solomon came to see work as meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Why did Solomon see work as meaningless?

He realized that he could work hard all his life and amass great wealth but at the end of his life, it would all go to someone else that did not even work for it. Solomon was saying, "What was the point?" "Why work so hard if in the end there was no value for him in eternity?"

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

The satisfaction that comes from accomplishment in work is its own reward. This sense of satisfaction is a reward from God. God uses work to satisfy the needs in our life but he also rewards us with a feeling of fulfillment in a job well done.

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

God is in the creation business and we are made in His image so as God delighted in His creation, we too take pleasure in the creativity we are able to express in our work. Also, it is pleasurable for us when we know we are fulfilling the purpose God intended for us...

Genesis 1:28 - God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (NIV)

When God told us to subdue the earth and rule over His creation, it shows that God wants to use us to participate with Him in sustaining His creation.

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

Here Solomon was acknowledging the sovereignty of God, God is Almighty and in control of all things. It is God who keeps us alive and provides us with not only what we need but also what brings us joy. God gives us work to do that both meets our needs and serves His purpose.

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

The key to wisdom, knowledge and happiness is to please God in our work.

How do we please God in our work?

We obey God...

Matthew 22:37-39 – ³⁷Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (NIV)

- We are loving God when we have a right attitude about who He is, that fact that He is sovereign and ultimately we are working for Him. This means we involve Him in the details of our work, praying for his help through-out the course of our work.
- We are loving our neighbor when we are taking the action that is in their best interest. God desires a relationship with us and He delights in our efforts to improve our relationship with Him and others.

How are wisdom, knowledge and happiness connected?

All of these come from God. Wisdom is an understanding of how to apply the knowledge we have been given so that it will impact eternity. Knowledge is an understanding of the truth and happiness is a byproduct of fulfilling the purpose for which we were intended.

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

They may convince themselves that they are happy for a season. But deep down, there is discontent because God has put a longing in each of us that may only be filled through a right relationship with God and working to serve His purpose.

What is our purpose? Why did God create us?

God created us so that we may know Him, so that we may have a relationship with Him. We are here to prepare for eternity... life is a test to see who is willing to spend eternity in a relationship with their Creator and, after this is determined, how close a relationship we chose to have with Him.

What will we be doing in eternity?

In the beginning before mankind's fall in the paradise of Eden, it was God's plan for people to work...

Genesis 2:15 - The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (NIV)

So I expect that God will have meaningful work for us to do in eternity. God is in the creation business and He will include us in this activity. Retirement involving ceasing from all labors is not a biblical concept.

What becomes of the fruit of the sinners' labors?

The sinner works to gather up wealth that will end up in the hands of another and ultimately in the hands of those who please God. Thus their labors are meaningless, they serve no useful purpose.

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

The universe was created for God's people, to provide a context by which we may better know Him. There will come a day when the universe as we know it today will be burned up and used as the raw material for a new universe God will create to take its place. Only those who please God will get to enjoy this new universe. So ultimately everything of value will end up in the hands of those who please God.

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

Apart from seeking to please God, there is no satisfaction in whatever we do. So if we seek to please God in our work, we will gain wisdom, knowledge and happiness. The satisfaction we have in a job well-done comes from fulfilling the purpose God intended for us.

- So the meaning of our work is to help us prepare for eternity by improving our capacity to please God through practice.

Wrap-up:

What have you found that gives meaning to your work?

- **Future value:** Making people I work with aware of my position regarding Jesus Christ makes me a witness for Him. They are watching me to see what it means to be a Christian. Thus when I do a good job, my work may be used by God to lead people to Him.
- **Future value:** By practicing obedience to God and integrating Him into my work, I am earning a greater capacity to serve Him in eternity which He will reward me with.
- **Present value:** I also get to serve God by bringing order to a piece of His creation by resolving DSP customer problems. This gives me a sense of accomplishment and a peace knowing that I'm fulfilling His purpose for me.
- **Present Value:** I'm also earning a living for my family.