

Community Leader's Guide [3.14.10]
Ecclesiastes: Losing Your Illusions
Week 4 – Ecclesiastes 2:17-26

Working for a Living

17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind. 18 I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun ...

Most people will spend half of their life commuting to and from work and doing the tasks of work. It seems to command more of our attention than it used to. Why? Live for work (driven, find significance, meaning) Some work to live (survival, fear, feel stuck) Some are ambivalent (unnoticed, unappreciated, in a boring routine)

Which one of these are you? Explain your life in your vocation either in or out of the home. Why is it like that for you? (Look at the most frustrating parts, that will help you discern your heart motivations)

In light of this...consider

- The Scriptures give a very positive view of work.

We were created to work...not for work. Working is an aspect of being in His image...we were created for Him, not work. Yet, He put us here to work to expand the beauty of the garden across creation.

Adam received work as a gift from God. Where do you know you have lost sight of this?

- If work is a gift from God, why does it feel like work?

Adam and Eve's failure to continue to trust God and live in dependence and satisfaction brought hardship into humanity's life. He did not curse them, He cursed their work. What was meant to draw out of us the creativity and passion that reflected a glorious Creator...now fights against us.

Wrong place to look for meaning. Why?

- Someone else will profit from your work – everything will be given to another when we die
18 I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, 19 and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.
- Its not fair
20 So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, 21 because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.

We work ourselves to exhaustion then it ultimately goes to someone else (example of Solomon and Reheboam, he lost 1/6 of Israel) In light of this: what if we just gathered up all the golf clubs, boats, motorcycles, RV's...all the toys that we think we need but we never really have any time to use? What if we got them all and sold them and plant a couple new churches?

How does this strike you? Does any of your stuff come to mind? You certainly don't have to sell it, but reevaluate: Why did I buy this? Why do I still have it? Has it taken a divine-like roll in my life? (taking up my thoughts and affections because they are connected to big things that I trust in.)

- The work itself is horrible!
*22 What has a man from all the **toil** and **striving of heart** with which he toils beneath the sun? 23 For all his days are full of **sorrow**, and his work is a **vexation**. Even in the night his heart does **not rest**. This also is vanity.*

Because of sin, no matter how good our vocations are, work never stays at work and robs us of precious peace of mind and sleep.

3 ways to respond:

1. Laziness – we can give up and pretend that work is the enemy of life. Many of us are under the illusion that we do this. We can convince ourselves that our 20 hours are hard work when in reality it's not and we spend the rest of the week online. We're deceived into thinking that we are working hard. We are actually doing the minimum to just get by.
2. Addiction - We're driven and defined by our work and it becomes our therapy and our way to overcome the curse. We think we can be "the one" to do it right.

Which one of these are we the closest to right now? What is suffering as a result?

To all of this Solomon gives us this wisdom:

- Work Hard (9:10) *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom."*
- Work Smart (10:10) *"10 If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed but skill will bring success."* (Many of us are disorganized, and you don't think your life through very well. B/c of that you work hard, but little gets done b/c you don't work smart)

3. The Grace of Work - Live and Work Unto God (this is the difference maker)

24 There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

- Enjoy God. When we remember that we were created by God and for God and that in His presence is fullness of joy...that makes all the difference. We were created to work, not for work. *"We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do".*

Do you find that when you are enjoying God, not for what he gives, but for who he is, that everything else seems full? What past enjoyments seem flat now because this joy has waned?

- Realize that the hardest work that has every been done on this earth was accomplished for us by Jesus on the cross. Greatest and most difficult has been done: Redemption. Jesus often called himself a worker...He said that He was here to do the work of the Father. He did his heaviest and most difficult work, not in the carpentry shop, but on the cross...where he declared the redeeming work of God 'finished'.

Does this fact cause us to rejoice? Take time to reflect on this and let it change hearts. Honestly, do you see your work as trying to accomplish redemption? If so, from what hell are you trying to escape? Poverty-hell, Loser-hell, Shame-hell? How can redemption accomplished change this for those in your community?

- He not only gives us the work, but he gives us the capacity to enjoy it.
26 For to the one who pleases him, God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

So...what does this look like? - Working Under The Son

1. Because of Jesus we can wake up with anticipation and ask, *'what is God going to do in my work today? 'How will he un-nerve me, expose the illusion, draw me closer, use me, bless me through my work?'*

Are you always be bouncing between enjoying and hating work? In your Communities, get folks to share the God-given purpose in their work...anticipating and expecting that He is using you as an instrument of redemption in the world and your work as an instrument in your life.

2. We can know that our work is not the most important thing in the world, it's not what we live for. It does not define us. If we fail, we are not complete failures. God loves us successful or not, rich or not.

Are we more motivated to earn the praise of those we respect, or to make a comfortable salary than hearing Jesus say, "well done good and faithful servant"?

Reflection Questions:

1. Do I work for the praise of others, the world now...or the world to come?

There is nothing wrong with being rich, working hard, planning well, being fruitful...the question is simple though: will you work for yourself or God?

2. What rewards am I seeking? Is the desire for the blessing of your Father the sweet and compelling energy behind your work?

3. Do I pray, plan, perspire to make more money so that I can give more away? (nothing wrong with new clothes or furniture...don't make that mistake...not inherently wrong...but our work has one true purpose behind it, we are ambassadors)

**How does the gospel free us from illusions that work and money were never meant to fulfill us.
THIS IS THE BIG QUESTION!**