



w e e k



The gifts of work and rest

Ecclesiastes 4:4-5:7

ECCLESIASTES 4

4 THE LONELINESS OF WEALTH

...⁴ I saw that all labor and all skillful work is due to one person's jealousy of another. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

⁵ The fool folds his arms
and consumes his own flesh.

⁶ Better one handful with rest
than two handfuls with effort and a pursuit of the wind.

⁷ Again, I saw futility under the sun: ⁸ There is a person without a companion, without even a son or brother, and though there is no end to all his struggles, his eyes are still not content with riches. "Who am I struggling for," he asks, "and depriving myself of good things?" This too is futile and a miserable task.

⁹ Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. ¹⁰ For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up. ¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they can keep warm; but how can one person alone keep warm? ¹² And if someone overpowers one person, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not easily broken.

¹³ Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer pays attention to warnings. ¹⁴ For he came from prison to be king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom. ¹⁵ I saw all the living, who move about under the sun, follow a second youth who succeeds him. ¹⁶ There is no limit to all the people who were before them, yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. This too is futile and a pursuit of the wind.

5 CAUTION IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Better to approach in obedience than to offer the sacrifice as fools do, for they ignorantly do wrong. ² Do not be hasty to speak, and do not be impulsive to make a speech before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. ³ Just as dreams accompany much labor, so also a fool's voice comes with many words. ⁴ When you make a vow to God, don't delay fulfilling it, because he does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow. ⁵ Better that you do not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it. ⁶ Do not let your mouth bring guilt on you, and do not say in the presence of the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry with your words and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷ For many dreams bring futility; so do many words. Therefore, fear God.

Life Group Discussion Guide

Lean In

If you had a completely free day to yourself to do whatever you want, what is one thing you would want to (realistically) be a part of that day to make it a great day? A particular meal? Coffee with a certain person? Time engaging in a favorite hobby?

Look Down

How does the Teacher describe the extremes of overwork and idleness? _____

Look Out

How does our culture reward overwork—even when it damages people? _____

Look In

What would it look like for us to practice work and rest more intentionally in community? _____



Family Discussion Questions

Questions for Kids

What does it feel like to let God take care of your worries?

How can we remember God cares for us every day? _____

Questions for Youth

What work do you love to do? _____

How do we work and rest in a way that honors God? _____

RHYTHM
REMINDER



Worship



excerpt from

The Gospel Goes to Work

by Steve Graves

A Wall Street investment banker found himself growing weary of his work. Even though he was only in his thirties, he told me he wanted to quit work and retire. He had the money to do it. And if he did, he would be fulfilling the daydream many of us have had.

Yet, in my role as his executive coach, I advised against it. I urged him to take time off and craft a vision for where he might flex his commercial muscles during the next season of his life. He didn't have to keep doing what he was doing, but he shouldn't give up on work.

He wouldn't listen to me. He quit his job and said, "I will never work again."

I didn't believe him. Life would teach him that he had made a mistake, I was sure. So I bet him that he'd be back at work within eighteen months.

It wasn't long before I collected on that bet, all \$20.

This man was operating out of a mental "bad box." He let his temporary weariness make him overlook the fact that human beings are hardwired by our Maker to work.

While you and I may not make that particular mistake, we most likely have our own bad boxes when it comes to work. In many different ways, our view of work can be broken. We people of faith make work out to be something it is not, and in the process we let ourselves be handcuffed by our misunderstanding of work. Yet work remains a fundamental part of God's spiritual economy.

Consider the following three common ways in which Christians operate out of a bad box when it comes to thinking about work. Do any of these sound familiar to you, or make you think of other ways in which you take an unbiblical view of work?

” *The Gospel itself never changes. But as it lends itself to endless applications, it remains ever fresh and powerful.*”

BAD BOX 1: WORK IS ENEMY TERRITORY

For those with this misunderstanding, work is part of the secular world, not to be confused with the sacred world. “God stuff” includes such things as prayer, Bible study, worship services, and donations of time and money to worthy “ministries.” Work is secular.

This approach is totally counter to Scripture. This dichotomy, the split between the sacred and secular, doesn’t occur in God’s Word. In fact, Scripture spends a good deal of ink and paper making the point that these two should be tied together, that work is part of God’s everyday involvement with people.

BAD BOX 2: WORK IS SALVATION

For people who buy into this myth, work becomes God.

They don’t go to work; they go to Work.

They don’t seek success; they seek Success.

They don’t have ambition; they have Ambition.

Their entire identity becomes wrapped up in their job.

This is a particularly dangerous side of any “our company is family” culture. Many organizations, religious or otherwise, sell a family-oriented culture as a benefit. And it can be. Yet people who take this idea to the extreme can become emotional and spiritual prisoners to their jobs as a substitute for an intimate connection to their Maker.

The truth is that work is a great environment in which to discover God and to glorify God, but it is not God.

BAD BOX 3: WORK IS A LOW PRIORITY

Many followers of Christ, if asked to list their priorities, would order them this way: God, family, self, and work. But is this kind of ranking even biblical? Doesn't a holistic view of life see God as involved in every aspect of our lives?

Consider a new set of priorities for life: God. That's it. There is no number two or number three or number four. In living out a commitment to that priority, we must make Him an integrated part of everything we do, family, self, work, and everything else. This means we don't downgrade work in order to try to make God preeminent in our hearts.

Besides, relegating work to caboose status is as impractical as it is unbiblical. If we really put work last, we would not leave for work each day until we had done everything we should for God, family, and self. We'd never earn a living and we'd all be moving back home with our parents! No, the truth is that work is part of a balanced approach to life and God.

READY TO RECEIVE HEAVENLY PAINT

As I've said, your life and work is a big canvas on which God is painting the gospel story. Work does not make up the whole of that canvas, but it occupies a large area of it. I hope you are persuaded that you should be inviting God to intentionally paint in the work area of your life as in every other area.

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