



ECCLESIASTES 3:9-14 [AMP]

29 What profit is there for the worker from that in which he labours? 10 I have seen the task which God has given to the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.

11 He has made everything beautiful and appropriate in its time. He has also planted eternity [a sense of divine purpose] in the human heart [a mysterious longing which nothing under the sun can satisfy, except God]—yet man cannot find out (comprehend, grasp) what God has done (His overall plan) from the beginning to the end.

12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good as long as they live; 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and see and enjoy the good of all his labour—it is the gift of God. 14 I know that whatever God does, it endures forever; nothing can be added to it nor can anything be taken from it, for God does it so that men will fear and worship Him [with awe-filled reverence, knowing that He is God].

START TALKING

1. What stood out to you from Sunday's message? What challenged you or encouraged you?
2. What has God been doing in your world - what can we celebrate?

START THINKING

1. According to the writer of Ecclesiastes, God provides simple gifts for us to find meaning and joy in e.g. a meal with friends, conversations with a loved one... How can we shift our focus towards appreciating these simple gifts?
2. Can you think of examples where seemingly small or mundane tasks can be transformed into acts of worship? How can we cultivate a mindset that recognizes the value of even the smallest actions?

START SHARING

1. How did Sunday's message impact your understanding of the significance of your work? What practical steps will you take to ensure that your work is built on the foundation of Christ?
2. What did you learn from Brother Lawrence's example of finding purpose and significance even in the smallest tasks, seeing them as acts of love and service to God? How will you apply that in your work this week?

START PRAYING

Thank you, Lord, that work isn't just a place that we go to for provision and our daily bread; it's something that is ordained as part of Your creation. No matter the tasks, Lord, it is worship to you. Amen.

START DOING

This week, pay attention to the simple, mundane task in your day. Notice if your attitude to them changes when you re-frame the context on these tasks being worship to God.



If you dive into Ecclesiastes without understanding the overall context and meaning, it can be quite a tricky book to read and can leave you feeling disturbed and depressed.

Last week we learned that the author of Ecclesiastes is Solomon - he is known as the wisest man that ever lived. He had access to incredible resources, incredible influence, and had incredible power as the king of Israel. And yet, even with all his life experience, Solomon still says he can't find meaning in anything but in God.

Solomon tackles three big themes:

1. The march of time happens to all of us - generations come and go with previous generations long forgotten.
2. We all end up in the same place - whether you were a good person or whether you're a bad person, whether you served God or didn't serve God, we all land up in the grave.
3. Life has quite a random nature and the results aren't always what we expect - the fastest person doesn't always win the race; the wisest person doesn't always end up with the most wealth - there's a lot of life that is unpredictable and that we cannot control.

The translation of the word "meaningless" that is used so often is from the Hebrew word "hevel". Hevel refers to smoke or vapour, and the author is saying that a lot of the things we try to find meaning in are actually like smoke - you can't get a hold of it, and it has no real substance when you take a closer look. The author of Ecclesiastes is not saying that life has no meaning, but rather that since we can't control our lives we should stop worrying about the big things and start enjoying things like a meal with a family or a great conversation with a loved one i.e. focus on the simple gifts that God gives us.

9 *What profit is there for the worker from that in which he labours? 10 I have seen the task which God has given to the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. 11 He has made everything beautiful and appropriate in its time. He has also planted eternity [a sense of divine purpose] in the human heart [a mysterious longing which nothing under the sun can satisfy, except God]—yet man cannot find out (comprehend, grasp) what God has done (His overall plan) from the beginning to the end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good as long as they live; 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and see and enjoy the good of all his labour—it is the gift of God. 14 I know that whatever God does, it endures forever; nothing can be added to it nor can anything be taken from it, for God does it so that men will fear and worship Him [with awe-filled reverence, knowing that He is God].*
Ecclesiastes 3: 9 -14 [AMP].

This Sunday, Steph unpacked the theme of work with a big caution that we should be looking for meaning and for purpose in our work. Work is a big part of our lives. It's estimated that the average person will work for approximately 90 000 hours in their lifetime (five days a week, eight hours a day, 48 weeks a year). We're going to be working for well over 40 years in our lives.

God knew from the beginning that work was going to be a big part of our lives. We were designed to work: *The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.* Genesis 2:15.

In Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve sinned, God said to Adam, *"Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

The scripture also introduces to us that God Himself is a worker. In John 5:17 Jesus says: *"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."* So not only did God's original design have a plan for us to work, but God is also always working. And, we will be working in heaven: *Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!* Matthew 25:23.

God has put in place a plan of Salvation for us to be restored back to our original design. We are image bearers (the Word says that we are made in the image of God), we are made to create, we are

made to produce, we are made to accomplish... to His glory - not to our own.

Work matters to God, but not in the way that we think. We think with a worldly perspective so, for example, give more credibility to some roles and less to others e.g. a neurosurgeon vs a cleaner. But it doesn't matter to God whether someone is operating on a brain or cleaning an office. What matters to God is the heart with which someone is doing the work. Our work can be a place where we find identity and purpose, our significance. A place where we find
Distraction; where we look to for provision and security... power and independence, and influence over others.

In the eyes of the world, work looks a certain way but God's plan was never that we should look to our work for identity, purpose, meaning, security and provision because that is something we should find in Him. When God looks at our work, He sees it as worship.

In the 16th century, there was a monk by the name of Brother Lawrence that lived in a monastery in France. He was referred to as someone that was quite clumsy and not very useful, so he spent most of his time in the kitchen making soup and washing dishes and he wrote the following: *"You ought not to be wary of doing the little things for the love of God who regards not the greatness of our work but the love with which it is performed."*

How should we be looking at work?

23 Whatever you do [whatever your task may be], work from the soul [that is, put in your very best effort], as [something done] for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing [with all certainty] that it is from the Lord [not from men] that you will receive the inheritance which is your [greatest] reward. It is the Lord Christ whom you [actually] serve. Colossians 3:23-24

Should there be a difference between a follower of Christ and a non-believer doing the same job?

Yes! As followers of Christ, we should be more committed, and show greater ownership and loyalty than non-believers would in the same job. The word of God says that if a man asks you to go a mile, you should go two miles i.e. go above what is being asked of you because it's a part of your worship to God. That is how people will recognise that there is something different in your life, and you'll be giving glory to God. The way we carry stress should be vastly different from Christ-followers to non-believers because we are working knowing that our Father cares and loves us; and because He has promised that He will never leave nor forsake us. Also because He has promised in Romans that every single thing in our lives - including work - will work for the good because we love Him and we are called according to His purpose. Finally, we have access to God's helper - His Holy Spirit - in every task that we do.

Does our work matter in eternity?

Absolutely! In Luke 19:17, we read: *"'Well done, my good servant!' his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.'*

In 1 Corinthians 3:12-14, Paul says: *If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. This applies to each of us too. If our work is built on the foundation of Christ, we too will stand that test and receive a reward; but if our work is not built on the foundation of Christ, we too will suffer great loss!*

Brother Lawrence said, "It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God." He also said the following: "Lord of all pots and pans and things...Make me a saint by serving meals, and washing up the plates!"

God doesn't look at work the same way we do, God looks at our heart - even the smallest thing is part of our worship to God. In Ecclesiastes, we read that God makes everything beautiful in its time. The work that we are busy with may not always look that important, but God will make it beautiful in it's time!

Solomon finishes Ecclesiastes by saying: Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.*

14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14.