

# Work

## Labour of love or necessary evil?

Is work a negative word or a positive one? It can be fulfilling and rewarding, it can also be unhealthy and demeaning, or everything in-between. Where does work fit into God's intentions for human beings? Will we work in heaven? Does work have value only in the pay packet, or is it important for other reasons? To find the answers will require a little work together!



Pray for clarity to see whatever God wants to reveal to you during this study



If you could have your ideal job, what would it be and what would make it ideal?

Share your thoughts around the group.



### Work: Curse or Fulfillment?

Read Genesis 3: 14 – 24      After the Fall  
also Genesis 5: 29

This passage implies that hard work is a consequence of the Fall. Does this mean that all work is a curse we put up with, or is work an essential part of being human?

Many people relish the idea of early retirement, or winning the lottery, or ceasing to work through some other money-making scheme or windfall. Is it God's will for people to prosper without working?

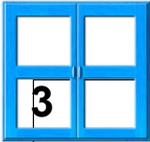


### Work and Purpose

Ecclesiastes 1: 1 – 3  
Ecclesiastes comments on the meaninglessness of life and work as he observes it.  
  
Ecclesiastes is actually asking a big question here.  
What do you think is the reason for work?

Psalm 127: 1 – 2  
  
What purpose behind our work does this psalm hint at?





## Work and Economic Freedom

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Read: Deuteronomy 5: 6 – 21 The 10 Commandments

NB v.6 God brought the people of Israel out of slavery.

How important is it to God that people are not in economic bondage to others?

NB v.12 – 15 Concerning the Sabbath.

Why is it important that work does not become our whole life?

NB v.16 About honouring the older generation.

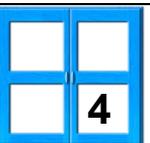
What implications does this have in relation to work and livelihood?

NB v.19 – 21 Injunctions against stealing, false testimony and covetousness.

What relevance does this have to work, employment and business practice?

Isaiah 65: 17 – 25 A New Creation

What are the implications of what this passage reveals about ideals for work and workers?



## Work as Responsibility

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What reasons do these passages give for everyone being involved in some sort of productive work?

Acts 20: 32 – 35

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Ephesians 4: 28

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2 Thessalonians 3: 6 – 15

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What are the personal, community and economic consequences of people not having productive work?



What has this study revealed about the nature of God?



What new thought or understanding has come to you during this study?



What issues, questions or practical implications for your local church, your church denomination, or the wider Christian church, are raised by this study?



*(This section may be used for personal reflection alone or may be shared within the group)*

Which of these motivations apply to your work? Which are most important to you?

- personal fulfillment
- income
- status, recognition
- making a contribution to other's lives or to society
- being part of a team
- as an act of worship for God
- other?

Are any aspects of your work unhealthy for you or others or contrary to God's will for you?  
If so, what do you need to change?



Spend some time as a group praying over what you have discussed, asking God to bring into focus how you may respond to his Word in an ongoing way.



**More Bible passages and discussion questions for further study:**

Matthew 20: 1 – 16      Parable of Workers in the Vineyard

This parable was told by Jesus to speak of the grace of God in bringing people into his Kingdom, but what might it also say about work and livelihood?

What is most fair, that someone is paid only for work done, or that all receive sufficient income to live on?



### Notes on some of the passages referred to in this study:

Genesis 3: 14 – 24 The Fall describes the coming of sin into human lives and the resultant separation of humans from God. These verses suggest other consequences as well, including that people will have to toil, or work hard, in order to produce food.

Genesis 5: 29 This verse, in which Noah is introduced, refers to the land being cursed by the Lord so that it requires hard work to produce crops.

Ecclesiastes. We have encountered some of the sayings of Ecclesiastes before in a previous study. He writes philosophically on his observations of people and society around him. One of his frequent refrains is the 'meaninglessness' of what he sees people doing. His constant questioning of the value of human endeavours can be of real help in causing us to consider what God's purpose for our lives may be.

Psalms 127: 1 – 2 This is a psalm written by Solomon. It was Solomon who supervised the building of the first Temple in Jerusalem; therefore his comments about the Lord being involved in the building and the Lord watching over the city have an added poignancy.

Deuteronomy 5: 6 – 21 This is one of the accounts of the giving of the 10 Commandments (the other account being in Exodus 20). As we have seen in an earlier study, the implications of the 10 Commandments do impact on economic issues.

Isaiah 65: 17 – 25 This vision of a new heaven and earth is a reminder that the world that we live in now, while it is real and concrete and important, is not the whole story. The Lord will bring about a new reality, a new creation, in the fullness of time. As Christians we are called to live now, as much as we can, according to the values of that coming new creation, which we also refer to as the Kingdom of God. The description of that new creation that is contained in these verses includes challenging and inspiring economic ideals. Those ideals, including what it says about the fruits of people's work, can impact on the ideals that we seek to foster in this world now.

Acts 20: 32 – 35 We know from the New Testament that Paul was skilled as a Tentmaker and that he often made use of those skills to earn a living.

Ephesians 4: 28 This verse comes within a passage which gives a number of words of practical advice for daily living as Christian people.

Matthew 20: 1 – 16 It was a common practice that men who wanted work would go to the marketplace and make themselves available for employment. Jesus took this common occurrence and used it to tell a parable, a story that contained a profound truth within it. As with many of Jesus' parables the thought-provoking truth is found in the final twist of the story. In this parable Jesus was getting across that all who respond to the Lord will be treated with the fullness of his grace and that we cannot earn preferment in God's eyes. This point is made again in Jesus' answer to the request of the mother of Zebedee's sons for them to have a special place in his kingdom (v. 20 – 28). In the context of our discussion of work, and reward for work, it is useful to ask whether this parable also has a more literal interpretation, with something to say about the importance of every person receiving sufficient to live on.