

You Are What You Love: Week 5

Week 5: Purpose in Work (A teaser for the next series)

Ecclesiastes 4:9-16

Welcome the online people.

Review:

There are three main voices in the Wisdom literature sections of scripture. Think of them as **three voices**. Proverbs is a wise young counselor; Ecclesiastes is a middle-aged brilliant cynic and Job is an older experienced man.

They are all working to answer two questions:

What is a good life?

How do I get it?

Each “voice” gets a chance to answer this.

We are spending this series looking at the slightly cynical voice of Ecclesiastes. He will work to show what is really in the heart and what it will really do.

Are you aware of what you are modeling to others?

Today we ask the question: Can you find the good life from work?

Opening Illustration:

Your purpose isn't hiding under a rock.

The other day I was listening to an interview with a young millennial entrepreneur. She was talking about her relentless pursuit to find her purpose. How it felt so elusive. She came from a family of means, was well educated and even picked up a great job upon graduation. Despite all these things working out she still felt like she hadn't found her purpose. She ended up quitting her job and traveled the world. Even that that didn't satisfy for long. After exhausting her resources, she ended up at a job that was even less appealing than her first one. As she remembers facing a truth that changed her life.

She said the lie our parents believed is that our peace will come from security. The lie my generation believed is that our peace will come from purpose and that our perfect purpose is hiding somewhere, we just have to keep looking until we find it. I didn't find peace until I realized perfect purpose isn't out there hiding from me, I have to take the raw purpose that was presented to me and make the most of it. She discovered how to do this in Christ.

See,

Perfect, fulfilling purpose from a job isn't hiding from you; it doesn't exist. The perfection of your purpose can be brought to almost any job you have.

That's the beauty of the Gospel – incarnation. God to man. Perfection into what is broken.

Scripture:

Ecclesiastes 4:9-16

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. 10 For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! 11 Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? 12 And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

13 Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice. 14 For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. 15 I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. 16 There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

Observation:

- The first section we read is about relationships. The second is about conquering culture. It's about winning in society, becoming the absolute best. The question still remains. Does this make someone whole?
- The enemy is trying to convince you that you can be truly fulfilled through conquering at work. He is also working to convince you that you win at work by beating everyone else out.
- "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition is gone, pride is gone."-C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity.
- What actually happens when you leave everyone else behind? Conquering at the cost of relationships leaves one alone and this is a worse state than having the world.
- This leads to a great series of questions.
- Can we find purpose from work?

You don't find the deepest of meaning and purpose from work, you have to bring meaning and purpose to your work.

- How do you bring purpose to your work?
 - Know your origin and destination. You were crafted from a family and we as believers return to an amazing family.
 - Realize that healthy relationships are vastly superior to money and power. Don't pursue the latter for the former.

- Acknowledge the limitations of vocational work. Eternal worth can't be received from a job that is temporary. You have to reverse the narrative, bring what is eternal into what is temporary.

Final Thoughts: (Invite worship arts team up)

"If our culture work is going to be restorative—if it is going to put the world to rights — then we need imaginations that have absorbed a vision for how things ought to be." - James Smith, You are What you Love (P. 179)

About 10 years ago I was working with a young adult who was truly restless, on the inside. Externally he had his life together. He was in great shape, well educated, good looking and one of the young men in our young adult group that dated often. After a few years, lots of dates, a lot of world travel and a number of careers sampled he ended up engaged and a schoolteacher. He thought marriage and inspiring the next generation would fill his purpose tank. A few months before he was to marry (I was doing the wedding) he wanted to meet. He was in tears and visibly anxious. He was literally shaking in my office. "Pastor Mike, it's not working. I am second guessing this marriage, my work, everything." I replied, "what do you mean by 'working'?" He responded, "I'm not whole, I don't know, something isn't right and I don't know what to try now." See, he believed that perfect purpose that will totally fulfill is hiding out there somewhere and he had to find it. I told him to change his narrative. Instead of believing that perfect purpose is hiding from you, live like you can bring God's amazing purpose into what God has put before you. Over the next few months I encouraged him to start praying for his students, to become very aware of where they need help, start thinking about how God would interact with them. Bring divine purpose into the mess. In your relationship, your future marriage, instead of seeing the broken purpose as a sign to run, see it as a place to bring God's purpose into the brokenness. Change the narrative. Incarnate, God to man – the gospel in your context.

One final story.

I almost left this church a few years ago. I felt really stuck. A few employees had resigned. The ones that were here were way more interested in their careers than you and this church. I had preached a very mediocre sermon and was driving home really discouraged. Truth be told I went online and looked at jobs in Colorado. I thought I felt the mountains calling. I ended up on the phone with my deepest mentor, my dad. He changed the narrative. Instead of seeing the broken pieces as evidence that it wasn't working for me, he encouraged me to view it as God would. What would it look like to bring the heart of God, eternal purpose, into the brokenness? What if the job wasn't what was supposed to fulfill me, what if I admit that it can't fulfill me? What if I found my fulfillment in Christ and brought that to my work?

Next Steps:

Two questions:

1. Have you shifted your pursuit of fulfillment from work to the purpose of God? That's the first step.
2. Reflect, how can you bring God's purpose into your workplace?

References:

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Smith, James K. A. You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, a Division of Baker Group, 2016. Print.

Understanding the Wisdom Literature: <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/wisdom-series/>

Understanding the literature types and postures of Wisdom Literature: Bartholomew, C. G. (2012, 2016). Wisdom Literature. In Faithlife Study Bible. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

The word used here, hebel, means “vapor” or “breath” and is used in Isa 57:13 parallel with “wind” and in Prov 21:6 for “a fleeting vapor.”

Garrett, D. A. (1993). Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of songs (Vol. 14, p. 282). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom sayings that examines the meaning of life’s endeavors, the value of common wisdom, and the problem of injustice. The opening verse presents the speaker as a member of David’s royal family, but his name is not mentioned.

Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). Faithlife Study Bible (Ec 1:1). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity