

International Conversation Café

Bible Topic: Work, Work, Work

Have you ever wondered how much time you spend in various activities over a lifetime?

According to msn.com, it was reported that the average person over a lifespan of 75 years, spends 26 years sleeping and another 11 watching TV. We spend 8 years shopping, 4.4 years eating, and 10.3 years working. Ten years measured by 24 hour days is a long time. It is no wonder we think seriously about how we spend our working hours.

What attitudes do you bring into the workplace? The Bible has a lot to say about work that can shape our attitudes which in the long run, help us live longer and happier. The first example of work is in Genesis one where we see God at work. There he is creating the heavens with the sun, moon, and stars, and the earth with animal life, plant life, and most importantly, man and woman whom he created in his image. At the beginning of chapter 2, we read this conclusion.

Thus, the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

²By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so, on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Restate in your own words what this Scripture is saying.

What was God's work?

What was God's rest?

As chapter 2 continues we see that God gave the man work to do.

¹⁵The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

¹⁹Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

While this story is intriguing in many ways, what we would like to notice is what it says about work.

What was the work God gave man to do?

Was work at this point considered a blessing or a curse? Why?

As the story of creation continues, we see that the man and woman disobey God and eat the fruit he tells them not to eat. One result of that disobedience is that work becomes more difficult. Here is what God told Adam in Genesis 3.

To Adam he said, "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.”

Tell the story in your own words as a group and then to the person sitting beside you.

Describe the obstacles farmers face as they work to grow food?

Describe the obstacles workers face as they work in business, laboratories, education, and industries.

How do these obstacles affect our attitudes about our work?

Ever since the curse, people have been trying to overcome the obstacles in the work place. We do this by improving technology, management and employee relationships, offering better working conditions and benefits, and by trying to find meaning and satisfaction in our work. Consider Solomon’s advice about life and work.

This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. ¹⁹ Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. ²⁰ They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart. Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

Solomon looked at eating, drinking, working, and wealth as a gift from God. What might be some benefits of looking at these things as a gift from God?

A person’s “lot in life,” refers to their situation in life: for example, your family, wealth, jobs, and opportunities. Why do you think Solomon says the ability to accept your situation is a gift from God?

Would you want this gift, to accept your lot in life? Why or why not?

How might one obtain this gift of contentment?