

## FINDING MEANING IN WORK PT 3

### **Why is it that our work can sometimes seem so fruitless.**

When we are young we often have dreams of making a difference in the world. We want our work to change things. To have an impact. And yet we often hit middle age, and come to realize that we are not going to achieve our dreams and goals. We become disillusioned and cynical. Our ability to dream is greater than our ability to achieve.

All of us will have seen the impact of conflict in a workplace. That conflict can cause the organization to flounder, for good people to leave and good ideas to founder. We have seen projects and companies go downhill due to bad management and incompetence. Some of you are farmers. Seen hard work of decades wiped out in days by weather and flooding.

Then we see death impose itself. Mozart died at the age of 35. Martin Luther King was shot dead. Imagine what they could have achieved if they had lived longer. Think of people you know who had real potential to make a difference but it didn't happen.

How do we make sense of the fact that often we don't see the fruit of all our hard work. We live in a world of injustice and sickness, and selfishness and natural disasters. How do line up God's incredible design for work, with it's potential to bring about his purposes with the reality that we often see.

In the last two weeks we have looked at God's design for work and the Dignity of work. Work is the cultivating and creating of culture, for Christians it is kingdom work. Work is service to one another.

All kinds of explanations are given, but the Bible gives a very clear explanation for the struggle of work. It is a result of human kinds rebellion against God. (sin). And it has had huge impact of every aspect of life, but especially on work. We can never find satisfaction in work until we get our heads around the impact of sin.

Read Gen 3:16-18 God put Adam and Eve in the garden and said they could eat of any tree but one. Was that tree special. Was it poisonous? No probably not. The tree was a test. God was saying I want you to do something for me - a simple test of obedience that you might not understand but because of who I am. It was a way of acknowledging who God was.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed the command, they did "become like God" as the serpent said they would. By this we mean that they decided was right and what was wrong. We were designed to be in relationship with God, in a relationship of love and obedience. That is when we flourish, when we know life as it was intended to be. However, we choose to be the source of our own authority then things start to go wrong. Every area of life is now subject to decay. Spiritual, social, physical, cultural

Ch. 3. See Adam and eve experience shame, brokenness guilt. We see distrust replace openness. No longer openness and transparency. We see them blame each other and God. We see Sin distorts sex, love, and marriage. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. The relationship between men and women will become a battle for power and control. Both child bearing and work are now called painful labour. Work is not the curse. Thorns and thistles will come up as we seek to grow food.

Remember last week gardening is a metaphor for all human labour. All human work is going to be subject to frustration and fruitlessness. All work is going to be subject to pain, conflict, and weariness So we have this double actioned thing going on. We are designed to work and contribute to the world. We see the potential of what we could do. And yet often our work is hindered by frustration and failure.

We see this played in people in extremes of idealism and cynicism. Sometimes we can even go back forwards and forwards between the two. The idealist says I am going to make a difference I am going to make the world a better place. The cynics says. Nothing will change. Do not get too excited. Do just what you have to do and no more.

Gen 3:18 says the ground will produce both thorns and food. Work will make some difference. There will be some fruit. But it will always fall short of it's promise. Work will be both frustrating and fulfilling.

The hope that we have as Christens is that this world is not the end. Our work in this life is not the final word. Yes just as we are sinners and fall short of the glory of God so our work falls short. However, it is not lost. God is going to restore this world. We see glimpses in our work of what might be. In addition, we have this hope. Our work is not in vain.

### **However, work can also seem to be pointless.**

The book of Ecclesiastes shows the pointlessness of work very clearly Eccl 2:17

The writer searches for meaning in life. Under the sun. If you just focus on this world, can you find meaning? In addition, the writer searches in three places. First, he tries to make sense of life through learning. Then he tries to find it through pleasures. Lastly, he tries to find meaning in life through hard work and achievement. However, he comes to this very depressing conclusion. Work was meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

There is a sense of accomplishment in achieving something. Working hard and seeing a result. However, the writer says. Well even if you are one of the few people who really does achieve something really signification, it is all for nothing because it does not last.



Ecc 2:18-20 When you leave your workplace, within a few years, no one will remember whom you were or what you have done. In a few years' time, your great achievements will be forgotten. This sense of meaninglessness takes away your sense of joy in work and alienates us from God.

Eccles 2:22-23 We lie awake worrying about work.

Later the writer talks of the frustration of bureaucracy. Ecc 5:8 In this case it would have been govt bureaucracy. But now many of us work in places where there is endless bureaucracy. Where there is injustice. How much of our work is hindered by endless red tape and regulations?

We have also people end up doing mindless jobs with no work satisfaction. With industrialization and specialization, we now have many jobs where people just feel as if they are a cog in a big wheel. We have systems where management seem very divorced from the reality of those at the bottom of the scale. We have executives paid 100's of thousands while others are paid minimum wage.

Work can also isolate us from each other. Ecce 4:7-8 We work longer hours and have no time for family or friends. We find ourselves on the treadmill of work and then think. Why am I doing this? We say we are doing it for our family and yet how many families have broken down because work has become consuming. Marriage and kids have suffered.

Ecclesiastes is one of these books that unless you read it all, you can end up feeling more miserable than when you started. He gives hints of answers, but Ecc 1 also has to be read in the context of the NT. Ecc 3:22. Eccles 3:13 Yes, we are designed to work; we cannot escape work, so how do we find satisfaction in it, given all that is fighting against us?

Says. Well it is a gift from God. How do we get the gift? Ecc 4:4-6 is funny scripture that is hard to understand but it gives us a clue. He is commending one handful with quietness with two options. One is the fool who does nothing and so has nothing in his hands. The other is the two handfuls of wealth that comes with hard work but also with a sense of pointlessness. Yes, we are to pursue work and finding satisfaction in this world from work is a gift from God. We have to know both hard work and quietness as it were. We will not find satisfaction in hard work alone. Or in not pursuing work. We need a work and quietness balance. Major theme of the Bible. Balance between work and rest.

Hint of what we know is to come in Jesus as well. Come to me all who are weary and heavy-laden and find rest in me. True satisfaction is only found in Jesus Christ, not in pursuit of work. Look more that this in the next weeks. This balance in life is to counteract two powerful forces at work. That work become an idol and that work alienates us from others. Jeremy will be talking about this 2 weeks time.

Ultimately, our sense of contentment is going to come as we pursue a relationship with Jesus. That was beyond the writer

of Ecclesiastes' ability to see. Without Jesus we will never find the kind of satisfaction the writer of Ecclesiastes is searching for.

We will not be working to service others or for the satisfaction of a job well done. We will be working to make a name for ourselves. . Ecc 4:4

So in the first 2 messages we saw something of God's purpose for work. Designed to work. Dignity in work. Through work we build and cultivate the kingdom of God and we serve others.

But if we are honest we know the pain and frustration of it. Only makes sense when we understand the profound impact that the fall has had on it. Maybe today you can make sense of some of what you have experienced or are experiencing right now. This would lead us to despair, like the writer of Ecclesiastes. Except we know what he did not know.

Given some hints at some of the answers of navigating this tension. Weeks 5 and 6 we will explore how Jesus and that gospel changes things. Christ came to deal with sin, and bring restoration. Profound impacts for our work.

Don't be surprised at the struggle of work. But know there is hope.

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#### REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- What are some of the "thorns" of work that you have experienced?
- Have you ever felt like the writer of Ecclesiastes and wondered that the point of all your work is?
- In the tension between idealism and cynicism about your work, where do you sit at the moment?
- How is the balance between work and rest in your life at the moment? What impacts have you experienced when this gets out of kilter?
- How does the belief that Jesus is going to come back to earth to bring restoration bring hope to you?
- True satisfaction in work is a gift from God and true rest is only found in Jesus. How do we experience this? What does it mean in reality?
- Pray for each other concerning your work; for faithfulness in the struggle, for the gift of satisfaction and for true rest.



**CENTRAL BAPTIST**

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