

Topic	Working Meaningfully in a Broken World
Reference	Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:6
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One thing great about the book of Ecclesiastes is this that it is actually very real. It is very connected to our everyday life. Today we want to go as part of our theme about connectivity. This morning we are going to talk about work.

Dilbert was a great cartoon play that started off 10-15 years ago, basically it was by Scott Adams who was essentially a computer analyst and he basically talk about work. To him work was completely meaningless. He had a boss whom he hated, he had a colleague who got paid for doing nothing and everyday he was stuck in the cubicle without any sense of career advancement and of course Dilbert became very popular. It became a cartoon which resonated with working people and as mentioned Ecclesiastes we think is very depressive but actually it is very-very relevant. So this morning I am going to start off with a very simple question.

Tomorrow most of us are going to go back to work, do we enjoy our work and if we do, why and if you don't, why?

I think they are very important questions because in today's chapter this is what the teacher says

22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, ...

How can your work be meaningful especially in a world which has got so much politics and discrimination and if you are financially not empowered work seems very difficult and again Ecclesiastes has really an interesting point to look at.

Chapter 3 verses 1-8 are probably the most famous verses of Ecclesiastes and he shifts to another theme which is theme of time and it is one of those few verses which resonates with everyone, even if you are not a Christian, you read it and you say, wow this make sense.

There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.

Further he says, I saw something else under the sun and every time you see this phrase 'under the sun', 'chasing after the wind', he has gone into this rhetorical meaning of saying that this is how life is like when you take God out of the picture.

16And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there. 17I said to myself, “God will bring into judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.”

Chapter 3 is a little bit different. God comes very much center of chapter 3 and God will call the past to account, God test man and he brings this all the way to chapter 4.

Work has lot to do with one of the most important capitals that you and I have, time management and when and I spent eight hours a day at work, five days a week, that investment will shape you whether you like it or not. Especially for man, your identity is very much unconsciously defined by your work. You take away that from a man he feels insignificant. Your work in many ways shapes your confidence, your identity. You fail at your work; you think you are not much of a person. You don't make much money, you come to church you see all the other guys who are CEOs you feel very small.

The first thing interestingly as he goes into work, what very interestingly the teacher does is that he gives us the backdrop of the world you live in. It is an animal kingdom; it is a rat race. He is going to play on this when he talks about man's faith and an animal.

How to be happy at work?

Common View

- Match your passion with your work. For example, you say you are doing a lousy job, doing something very boring, but I am very good at rearing fish. I love it. So you crowd fund it. You take that act of faith and you open a shop and then you sell fish and then people plan and teach you. You do a distribution network and your net value goes triple times and suddenly you have assets. So you have matched your passion with your work. After that you find that you are spending too much time at work and it is just absorbing to you, so they call this the obituary test or the legacy test. They ask you to pause and write what you want to be known at the end of your life. You say, well I want to be known as a good father, I want to be known to have contributed to fishers around the knowledge of fishery. I want to help poor fisherman rediscover their value and cut off the middle man and teach you to work backwards. They call this life work balance. Once you do that you begin to match skill set with passion and you discover your personal job calling and as Oprah Winfrey calls, *there is nothing more powerful than discovering this*. A very famous man Earl Nightingale says this, *'the moment you have a purpose and you live that purpose out your life becomes intentional'*. Now I am not saying this is all wrong, but I am going to do something very cruel. I am going to take this and run it through Ecclesiastes because it was such a depressing book. So let's read text this.

Steven Job said, *people with passion can change their work for the better* and Job has did that. In chapter 3:16 we read about wickedness and he does a refrain in chapter 4. He say this

Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed- and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their

oppressors-and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who have already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is the one who has never been born, who has not seen the evil that is done *under the sun*. (4:1-3)

Both these chapters are sandwiched in between chapter 3:22 meaning you have this first statement which is about oppression in chapter 3 another statement which basically replicates it chapter 4 which is about depression and in the middle of that he talks about work. So here is the first reality check on what we call market place ministry.

1. To be able to work at your passionate is a privilege.

Do you think the guy out there who takes your rubbish bin has passion? Do you think the guy who stands in front of your condo gets kicked around has passion? Do you think the maid that cleans your office and gets bullied has passion? Do you think there are many slaves at a time of Christ at Paul had passion? Passion is elitism and during those days if your dad was a farmer you are a farmer, no need to talk about passion, you just follow. Your dad was a fisherman; you are a fisherman. Your dad was a carpenter; you are a carpenter. For the greatest man that walked on this earth was as son of a carpenter.

2. Your passion can change.

That is really the point of Ecclesiastes. He says this in earlier chapters

I undertook great projects; I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees...2:4-6

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind, nothing was gained under the sun 2:11

Even though he had everything he has nothing. Passion changes, it is in settable.

3. God can call you to a vocation you are completely not passionate about.

There is a time for everything. He has made everything beautiful in his time. God ordains the time and he can tell you. There is a time to build and there is a time to tear down and there are days, seasons, God will put you in a job, you completely have no passion for because he wants you there. That happens with church. As the church grows some very reluctant people have to take up more leadership roles and people who will say, I am not spiritual enough, we have to step up to the plate if we love the church. It is quite selfish to say that you want to do everything just because you are passionate about.

Joseph will pick up what Paul says in Philippians, I know what is like to be abased and I know what is like to abound. He was in the darkest of prisons, framed for rape and what

did he do, he didn't sit there and say 'Life Sucks', he managed the prison. He brought management structure to the prison. He reorganized the prison and the jailor saw a man with passion and that same passion was when he became King and here is the sign of godliness. Whether you are in a prison, in a job you can't stand in a cubicle with low pay or you are a CEO of a company with a driver, you are either abased or abound, God is at the center. In the end God does not ask about your ability or your talents or your passion, about your hour availability. Passion is part of it but really not the key.

Reflect on what legacy you want to leave behind.

A rich client of mine sat me down and he said, before I kick the bucket I have to do these few projects and he explained to me how his massive projects will benefit the state, how he got the state involved and how is buying lot of land bank and he will do this and then God will take him home and that is his legacy. Another rich client of mine says that, it is your legacy and it is your business, what it has to do with me.

Legacy is illogical if there is no God, because when people say they want to do this however noble it is and it say people will remember them, clearly saying this is you and you are just doing it for yourself. You want people to remember you. They are not going to remember you very long and I think Tim Keller put it very wisely in a very interesting book he wrote called 'Connecting your work to the Word of God'.

Legacy for Christian isn't about leaving something behind. Legacy for Christian is preparing to meet God. Legacy only has value if you are certain there is a God that you are going to go to and he is going to review your work and essentially this is what he says at the end of Ecclesiastes. The teacher says

I also said to myself, "As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like animals." 3v18

Basically it is saying if there is no God you are like an animal. Man's faith is like that of the animals, the same fate. This is really brutal. It is a first statement of an atheist. As one dies so does the other, all have the same breath. A man has no advantage over the animal, everything is meaningless. All go the same place, all come from dust and all to dust will return. Here is the cruncher, who knows if the spirit of man rises upwards and the spirit of the animal goes down into the grave.

Does your dog think about its legacy? Does a dog think what is the meaning of life and the purpose of my work?

No, why do man think about this even though you are not a Christian because you are hardwired for eternity. If you are not a Christian and you ask yourself these questions, what is the purpose

of life, what is my legacy? How can I make my life meaningful? It means innately in you there is a hardwiring for relationship with God.

Keller says this in Every Good Endeavour

*Everyone will be forgotten, nothing we do will make any difference, and all good endeavours, even the best, will come to naught. Unless there is a God. If the God of the Bible exists, and there is a True Reality beneath and behind this one, and this life is not the only life, then every good endeavour, even the simplest ones, pursued in response to God's calling, can matter forever. **Tim Keller, Every Good Endeavour: Connecting your work to God's plan for the world***

Affirm your personal job calling.

Many management books actually teach you this. They actually have a worksheet at the back. A lot of them teach you to find this, focus on that and drive yourself from that. Now it adds value to a certain limit. Oprah Winfrey says

There is no greater gift you can give to receive than to honor your calling. Its why you were born. And how you become most truly alive.

Many people believe that and the system behind this is and in most management books will pack this in one way or other. They will map out what your skillset is, they map out your impact on society and they map out that you feel something good about it and in that middle is what you were born to do. They call this your sweet spot. They say this is you. This is what you are born for, whether you are a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist or an atheist this is your calling in life.

Steve Jobs was driven by his passion, he fitted everything. Passion, legacy, these things can be very subtle idols because the million dollar question is, is it your purpose or God's purpose. These are two purposes I read in two Christian books and I read it three to four times because I don't want to judge the guy wrongly

- “My purpose is to train and raise leaders all over the world”. This guy has sold millions of Christian management books, teaches you intentional reading. He runs workshops.
- “My purpose is to build up megachurches to impact society”.

What is the common thing between two?

There is one very subtle idol here which is called respect, because when you walk in the room and tell people what you do, people will respect you. When Jesus came, he didn't do something that he wanted to do, in fact he told his father. If you can remove this cup from me and when the King of Kings came he was beaten, humiliated and tortured.

Paul says this, who being the very nature God consider equality of God nothing to be ...put on the nature of a servant that is calling. Either that the only person calling is your ego. No matter how noble you think it is there is self-interest in it.

Bottom-line of Ecclesiastes is about wise decision making. Because the Bible teaches that there is a specific vocation calling for everyone. I want to humbly tell you, No. Life is unfair and Ecclesiastes tells you, you make the most of it within God's moral will and God's sovereign will because God is sovereign over the times of your life.

We all have dreams, so Ecclesiastes was quite interesting and here is the first thing which really struck me.

1. **Understand what it means to work with tranquility.** We get this at the end of chapter 4 in a verse which is not very often quoted but it is really interesting and it says this

6 Better one handful with tranquility than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind.

The fact that two handfuls with toil is chasing after the wind means it is not biblical. Biblical is one hand full with tranquility.

So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. 3:22

A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God. 2:24

I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. 3:12

Scripture is very clear about being happy in your life. God is asking each one of us to be happy, it is a commandment.

Response 1: Be ruthlessly ambitious.

And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. 4:4

Why some of not happy is because we are always comparing. There will always be someone who is better than you and the devil will whisper you, you are useless, you are mediocre but that comes from a bad place because we are comparing. So if you want to be happy stop comparing. You only compare with yourself.

Response 2: Be completely indifferent to work.

Fools fold their hands and ruin themselves. 4:5

Proverbs has something similar, **A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of hands to rest, and poverty will come on you like a thief, and scarcity like an armed man. Proverbs 6:10-11**

It begins because you are not a good steward. You are not happy because of your environment, because of us. The first extreme is when you are very brutally competitive and the second is when you are completely lazy. You came into the working world with passion and you want to do a job well and you got sideline for promotion and you have been stuck at the same place for the last 10 years and not getting anywhere and you feel irritated. But you are working for God and when you do that it becomes self-fulfilling. You are not going to get anywhere because your mind has just tow you, you won't get anywhere. So ambition is important.

Solution:

Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind. 4:6

If I cup my hands together I can get a lot of stuff, it is an agricultural metaphor. If I pull one hand in much less and when you put two hands together he says this, yes, you are going to become very-very rich, but it is going to be at the expense of your family, your church, your health and everything else is chasing after the wind, but when you can pull yourself away and say I have done my numbers, I have done the hard numbers. I can save on this if I can live a simpler life, I can put my kids through a decent university, I can save for my mom because she has got dialysis and I can even give to ministry, so I don't compare myself to others and how long I work hard and hard, and this enough. This is tranquility.

Tranquility has many words going around it, quietness, flexibility, contentment.

Working with tranquility redefines our ambitions.

The ESV and KJ has another word for tranquility. It is quietness.

And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. 1 Thess 4:11-12

The idea of not being lazy is here, don't be dependent. Don't get involved because these things actually you are trying to do this to stab other people to get up your career.

Working with tranquillity crucifies selfish ambitions

Keller says this *“So when we say that Christians work from a gospel worldview, it does not mean that they are constantly speaking about Christian teaching in their work....Instead think of the gospel as a set of glasses through which you “look” at everything else in the world...Christians in business will see profit as only one of several bottom lines: and they will work passionately for any kind of enterprise that serves the common good.” Tim Keller, Every Good Endeavour*

Instead of saying God help me have what I want. This morning God is saying God, help me want what I have. It is really about contentment and tranquillity with contentment leads you to flexibility.

You become flexible whether it is good times or bad times, you are able to take it and tranquillity returns us to Eden. When God put Adam into Eden he worked creatively and he loved his work and when people see that in you even though office politics are bad, but you know God is your real CEO and things are really hard and you don't get your promotion or we swing the other side, you are really making massive amount of money, you decide that is not important. You downgrade your car; you say you can spend more money on church. They see your flexibility. They see your life. They see your ambition is not just to climb up, they see Christ. Work with tranquillity.

Remember there are seasons to your working life.

So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them? 3:22

You don't know tomorrow. BJ Miller was a successful man. One day he had an accident that caused him his legs and his hands and he became very involved in palliative care. We always say that at the end of our lives people look back and say what I have achieved. He gave a different perspective. He said, when he was at death bed he was sitting in hospice and he looked out and he saw snow and the nurse came in, took a snowball, smuggled it in and he was contemplating the end of his life. He held the snowball and he watched that snowball just drip and he said he never felt more alive in his whole life. He gave a very interesting statement. He say, people at the end of their life remember what it is to breathe life.

You and I go to work, either we are very sucked in by the negativity around us, we can't see good things. Either that we are so driven to build our empires we don't pause. When you live the moment you will be happy. I want you to go back and look at your job and find that snowball and live, why, because tomorrow you never know what happens.

Timing is everything is business. At the right time you can make tons of money or you can lose everything. With God timing is everything.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. 3:01

What do workers gain from their toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. 3:09 (refer 1:3, 2:11)

If you are going through a hard time, difficult time, a time where you are not building but being destroyed, remember this, in this season, pause and find some beauty in that, God is training you. Remember Joseph, as he played years and years in prison he didn't go into a ball of negativity but he became a very good steward and as he language in prison God trained him to be a king.

So if you are in a bad place at your work right now, God put you there to train you and he has great plans for you.

Pursue Godly Ambition.

There is a reason why they say that everything is meaningless. ESV says vanity of vanity. There are two things, one is in vane but interwoven in it is the self-centeredness of it and that is where we all are. Ultimately being a Christian is about either God gets all the glory or I get it and I can hijack God into it and say I am doing it for God, but actually we are doing it for ourselves, because he is not king in my life. That is really what the gospel is and you can sit here in church and you can say I am doing it for God, you are actually doing it for yourself and you can fool yourself for years. Now Ecclesiastes is a rhetorical device, if there is vanity of vanities and the double meaning means so meaningless, the other extreme is there is king of kings, holy of holies, lord of lords. If doing all of this without God is completely meaningless the moment you put God into it, it is completely meaningful and this is why you have to dream big for the King of Kings.

John Stott says this

Ambitions for God, if they are to be worthy, can never be modest. There is something inherently inappropriate about cherishing small ambitions for God. How can we ever be content that he should acquire just a little more honour in the world?

Christians should be eager to develop their gifts, widen their opportunities, extend their influence and be given promotion in their work- not now to boost their own ego or build their own empire, but rather through everything they do to bring glory to God.

Wherever you are in your job, God is calling for you dream big for him. We have this thing ambition which is wrong when it is centered around yourself, when it is centered on God, you do massive things.

Tomorrow when you go to work dream big, enjoy your work, you never know what tomorrow happens and when you do that God will truly make you feel more alive than you ever did because we worship a servant king and as he went out he spent time in the slumps on a daily basis and I want you to understand today, work with tranquility. Remember there are seasons in your working life, pursue Godly ambition for the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. So wherever you are at work I pray that you really feel alive at work tomorrow.