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Work is Pointless
Ecclesiastes 2: 18-23

Work is pointless DIG: Why do you work? When do you feel like not working? What is meaningful work for you? Are you working under the sun or above the sun?

REFLECT: What is the solution for not wasting your work under the sun? What kind of difference will I make with my life? Will I have anything to show for my hard work?

If you make work your life, it will leave you empty.



Remember **Solomon's** quest. In headlong pursuit of the meaning of **life**, **the Teacher** indulged in all **the pleasures** of the flesh. Afterwards **he** reconsidered the advantages of **wisdom** as compared to **folly**. But no matter how hard **he** tried, **his** quest failed. Eventually, **he** ended up hating everything **under the sun,** cutting **God** out of the picture, and one of those things that **he hated** most of all was **work**. **I hated all the things for which I had worked under the sun, because I saw that I would have to leave them to the man who will come after me (2:18). He works** hard, then **he dies**. What happens to **his** wealth after **his death**? **He** couldn't take it with **him**![260] On **his** own principles, **the man** who **worked under the sun** should hardly object to this, provided **his** money lasted **his lifetime**; yet **he** *does* mind, for **he** shares our inbuilt longing for what is permanent. The more **he** has toiled at **his life's work**, the more galling will be the thought of

its fruits falling into the hands of others – and as likely as not, into the wrong hands. This is another blow to the hope of finding fulfillment in hard **work**. **His** very success will accentuate the **pointlessness** of it all.[261]

This verse continues and completes the thought of the previous verse. Expressing utter skepticism, **the Teacher** exclaimed: **Who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? I** may **work** diligently and **wisely** through **my** whole **life**, but, when **I die**, **a fool** may take over the benefit of **my labor**. **Yet this fool will have control over all the things I worked for and which demonstrated how wise I am under the sun. Solomon** felt this loss deeply. **The king** used this rhetorical device to reveal that no one, especially **himself**, knows the answer to the question, and that frustrated **him** greatly. Contemplating that possibility led **Solomon** to once again conclude that **life is pointless (2:19).**[262]

Solomon was the world's most successful businessman. But when **the king** died, **he** left all of **his** earnings to **his** oldest **son, Rehoboam**. **The Teacher** may not have known whether **his** successor would be **wise**, but *we* certainly do. **Rehoboam** was such **a fool** that **he** lost more than eighty percent of **his father's** kingdom and divided the monarchy (**to see the link click Dc – A House Divided**). **Thus, I came to despair over all the things I had worked for under the sun. Here is a man whose work is done with wisdom, knowledge and skill; yet he has to leave it to someone who has put no work into it. Solomon** concludes with a punch by calling the situation described here as being **evil**. Showing **his** moral outrage **over** the unfairness of **life**, **the king** said: **This is not only pointless, but a great evil (2:20-21).** An abyss of despair results.

Leaving it all behind is bad enough, but there is another serious problem with **work**, and that is the **work** itself! The first problem is that our **work** will be someone else's reward. The second problem is that our **work itself** is toil and trouble. **For what does a person get in this life from all the work he does under the sun?** When **the Teacher** talks about toiling **under the sun**, we imagine someone **working** long, hot hours out in the fields, sweating under the high humidity and burning heat. But no matter what kind of **work** we do it always takes its toll on us. **His whole life is one of pain, and his work is full of stress; even at night his mind gets no rest. This too is pointless (2:22-23).** The compulsive **worker**, overloading **his** days with toil and **his** nights with worry, has missed the simple joys that **ADONAI** is holding out to **him**. The real issue for **him** was not between **work** and rest, but, had **he** only known, between **pointless work** and

meaningful **work**.[263]

For believers, meaningful **work** is **work above the sun, looking to Messiah the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2a).** For, **whatever we do, we** should **do** it **from the heart, as for the Lord and not for others (Colossians 3:23 NAB). Joseph** is a good example of this. **He** probably had more hardships than most of us. **He** was sold into slavery by **his** brothers, wrongfully put in prison and had to stay there much longer than **he** should have. But because **he** was faithful to **work above the sun, he** was able to save **his** family from starvation, save all of Egypt and most of the world also. Our successes may not be as dramatic, but they will be just as pleasing to **ADONAI** when we keep our eyes on **Him**.