

THE PURPOSE OF WORK
Work Matters • Part 1 & 2
Discussion Guide

“What do people really get for all their hard work?”
Ecclesiastes 3:9 (NIV)

In our lifetime, we'll spend an average of about 150,000 hours at work. Work dominates and defines approximately 40% of our lives, but a recent survey shows that two thirds of all workers would prefer to change jobs! “What do people really get for all their hard work?” as the author in Ecclesiastes 3:9 above asks? What is God's will for our work? The most obvious reason we work is to stay alive! This is the “survival level” of work. The best work for us is that which allows us to express who we are. Because God is more interested in who we are than in what we do, work is a place God grows our character. Our work demonstrates what we believe more than our words; the quality of our work may be our most powerful testimony. Our work also allows us to help others in need. We can use our work, skill, and business to further God's kingdom.

Open your group with a prayer. This is only a guide – select the points you want to discuss.

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”
Genesis 2:15 (NIV)

1. Genesis 2:15 above indicates that work has always been part of God's plan – even in paradise. The result of sin is that work is harder; the fall brought difficulty, drudgery, and disappointment. How do you think work was better originally?

Jesus: “My Father is always working, and so am I.”
John 5:17 (NLT)

2. What does John 5:17 above tell us about God, and what are the implications of this for us?

3. Since we're called to work now (and we'll also work in heaven), which of these six purposes for work seem most important to you: (1) Necessity: to meet my needs, (2) Identity: to express my talents, (3) Maturity: to develop my character, (4) Credibility: to witness to others, (5) Charity: to help others, and (6) Eternity: to further God's kingdom.

“Each of you has been blessed with one of God's many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So use your gift well.”
1 Peter 4:10 (CEV)

4. We have the option of wasting, spending, or investing our lives. When we're working according to our S.H.A.P.E. (Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experience), we'll tend to be more successful and satisfied, and more fruitful and fulfilled. What do you think “well” (the last word) means in 1 Peter 4:10 above?

“Be sure to do what you should, for then you will enjoy the personal satisfaction of having done your work well, and you won’t need to compare yourself to anyone else.”

Galatians 6:4 (NLT)

5. Galatians 6:4 above indicates that it’s OK to take pride in doing a job God made you good at – as long as you don’t compare yourself to others! Proverbs 12:27 (MSG) says, *“A lazy life is an empty life.”* In light of these verses, what are some examples of satisfaction you think work should provide?

Diving Deeper (optional)

“Be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and with what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things.”

Matthew 6:33 (GNT)

1. How might our work in furtherance of God’s kingdom for eternity be improved if we take the verse above to heart?

“Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

Matthew 6:20 (NIV)

2. The best investment we’ll ever make is to manage our resources in this world for God’s eternal purposes. What are some ways we can use our lives and all that we have been given for getting people into heaven?

Review any assignments or commitments made during your previous meeting.

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE LEADER NOTES

Suggestions for This Week’s Study

Icebreaker: What is some unusual work that Christian believers have used for God’s purposes?

Goals: What is God’s purpose for work? How might believers use their work in any occupation to further God’s kingdom purposes for themselves and for their world?

Final Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I now realize that while I’m at work, you are working on me. I want you to use my job for all six purposes in my life. Please use my job to express what you made me to be. Help me to find the right job for my shape. Use my career to develop my character, to bring people to you, and to further your kingdom. In Jesus’ name – Amen!*

Preparing to Lead Your Group

Pray for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God’s wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God’s instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.

Plan where you want to take your group in the next 60-90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God’s five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission

and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.

Ponder your progress after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn't. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

Using This Sermon Discussion Guide

Talk It Over is a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. We've designed it so it can be completed easily within 30-45 minutes. As the discussion leader, you should preview and evaluate the questions based on the needs of your group. Decide in advance what is most important to focus on, should time not allow for the entire lesson.

Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, consider using the Diving Deeper section or add additional Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.

The questions relating to Bible study methods are helpful to develop Bible literacy and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can help your group be aware of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.

Personal applications are essential for growth and should be included in every discussion. When discussing how they will apply principles, group members may state very general goals such as "I need to spend more time in prayer." It is important for you to help people make goals that are very specific and commit to specific plans of action by asking, for example, "How are you going to begin?" An example is to get up 25 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.

Your goal as the leader is to bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their needs for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.