

# God at work 2: The knotty problem of work

## Discussion guide

From **Genesis 3:17-19 and Ecclesiastes 2:17-26** (linked to sermon on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2026) [www.stjamesbythepark.org/current-sermon-series](http://www.stjamesbythepark.org/current-sermon-series))

*This was part of a series on God at Work – where by 'work' we mean any role (paid or unpaid) that takes up time during our week e.g. looking after (grand)children or other dependents, walking the dog, Parkrun, commuting, helping with Scouts, working in an office, etc etc.*

**Intro:** Describe one experience where you have felt a knot in your stomach in relation to work as Simon described. As you reflect on this experience what explanation do you have to account for this? There might be a few contributory factors rather than just one.

QUESTIONS (Please choose those you think are meaningful for your group context)

### **Read – Genesis 2:7-9a followed immediately by Genesis 3:17-19**

What differences did you notice between these two accounts? For anyone wanting to explore more the idea of two kinds of work mentioned by Simon see <https://bibleproject.com/podcasts/two-kinds-work/>

Have you experienced any 'thorns or thistles' in your work? Have you ever been a 'thorn'?

Has the frustration of your work not being as fruitful as you desire made you tend toward idealism or cynicism? Why or why not?

### **Read – Ecclesiastes 2:17-26**

The word translated "*meaningless*" in the NIV Bible which is repeated 30+ times in this book within the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament is from the Hebrew word, *Hevel* has the connotation of both "*vapour*" or "*smoke*" and "*enigma*" or "*paradox*". The Teacher referred to in 1:1-2 in his polemic against all the ways human beings try and build meaning and purpose in their lives apart from God describes work as *Hevel*. For a brilliant overview of the Book of Ecclesiastes which is 8 minutes long see <https://bibleproject.com/videos/ecclesiastes/>

Put into your own words the basis for his argument that work is *Hevel* from 2:17-23

Another refrain repeated in Ecclesiastes is the phrase "*under the sun*". How do verses 24 – 26 provide an alternative narrative to doing things "*under the sun*"?

What might it look like if we did our work '*under the Son*'? *Apologies for the corny word play!*

## **Read – Ecclesiastes 4:1-12**

What other problems of work are exposed in these verses?

How might verses 9-12 more commonly used in reference to a marriage relationship be applied positively to our work?

### **Optional question:**

What did you make of the suggestion that the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment to keep the Sabbath was given as a necessity post-Eden but was not required before that and will again be redundant in the ultimate future of the new heavens and new earth where an eternity of Sabbath Rest will be enjoyed? See

<https://bibleproject.com/podcasts/two-kinds-work/>

### **Quotations from Sunday's sermon**

*"We were designed to know, serve, and love God supremely – and when we are faithful to that design, we flourish. But when we instead chose to live for ourselves, everything began to work backward. After this turning point the human race began to live against the grain of the universe, against the grain of our own making and purpose."* Tim Keller Every Good Endeavour p85

*"Thorns and food. Work will still bear some fruit though it will always fall short of its promise. Work will be both frustrating and fulfilling, and sometimes – just often enough – human work gives us a glimpse of the beauty and genius that might have been the routine characteristic of all our work, and what, by the grace of God, it will be again in the new heavens and new earth".* Tim Keller Every Good Endeavour p95

Philosopher Luc Ferry in Brief History of Thought says this, *"In the traditional worldview, work was considered a defect, a servile activity – literally, reserved for slaves. In the modern world, it becomes an arena for self-realisation, a means not only of educating oneself but also of fulfilment.... Work becomes the defining activity of man ... His aim is to create himself by remaking the world"* quoted in Every Good Endeavour p142

*"Many of us fail to understand that our limitations are a gift from God, and therefore good. This produces in us the burden of trying to be something we are not and cannot be."* You're Only Human Kelly M Kapic 2021.