

UNLIMITED - A new perspective on work and money

Life Group Curriculum

Introduction

Volatility in the stock market, large-scale layoffs, and bank bailouts are just some of the anxiety-inducing news stories that we are bombarded with each day. Amidst financial insecurity where should we turn for perspective? While it might seem counter-intuitive, the wisdom contained in a several thousand-year-old book is the most relevant and timeless source of security for our current struggles. Contained within its pages are the answers to some of life's most important questions. What is the purpose and meaning behind my work? How do I wisely handle my finances? Is it possible to discover generosity in a world shaped by scarcity?

WEEK ONE: WORK

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Today's passage charges us as Christians to work diligently and live purposeful lives. Work shouldn't be viewed as a distraction from our walk with God; instead, work is an essential part of our journey here on earth. We are designed to be creative, productive, and make positive contributions to our communities. While everyone can contribute to the collective good of our communities in some way, it may be true that not everyone will necessarily earn a wage as part of a job. Nor should one's value ever be attached to one's income, career path, or belongings. As we study this passage together, let us be encouraged in knowing that God has placed us where we are in accordance with His plan. Those within our spheres of influence have also been placed in our lives for a reason.

1. When society tells us to judge so much of our identity and worth based upon our career or financial status, how do we feel when our job/career is in jeopardy, or even when we transition into retirement?
2. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10. What are Paul's instructions to the people of Thessalonica? In what ways did he and the other disciples exemplify this?
3. Read Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-37. How do these passages help provide context for Paul's exhortation that "the one who is unwilling to work shall not eat"? Are there lessons for us today (especially when so many workers, as well as those willing yet unable to work, live with food insecurity)?
4. 2 Thessalonians 3:11 highlights a juxtaposition. How does Paul suggest we interact with those who are idle, on the one hand, and yet "busy" being busy bodies, on the other? What is the difference between idleness and leisure?
5. In 2 Thessalonians 3:13, Paul tells us to, "never tire of doing what is good." How does this apply to our lives at work/home?
6. According to the Bible, what is the purpose of work? As time permits, reflect on the following verses: Colossians 3:23-24; Proverbs 12:11; Proverbs 13:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 5:8.

[To answer Question 5, life groups may choose to discuss or work together on the practical application questions below.]

Life Group Practical Application:

- **Step 1:**
 - With your life group, reflect on the verses above (in addition to today's passage) and list the purposes of work according to the Bible.
 - "I should work because _____."
- **Step 2:**
 - Take a moment to individually jot down the types of work, be it personal or professional, that you have undertaken in your life.
- **Step 3:**
 - How do your answers from Step 2 fulfill or relate to what you discovered about the purposes of work in Step 1?

WEEK TWO: MONEY

Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

Imparting lessons learned over the course of a long life, the author of Ecclesiastes meditates upon the meaning of life, work, wealth, and faithfulness to God—with oftentimes surprising, yet undeniably wise conclusions. Today's passage is a meditation upon the ultimate meaninglessness of wealth and the importance of finding satisfaction and peace in the everyday rhythms of life.

1. Describe a time when you have “toiled or labored.” How did you feel afterwards and why?
2. Read Ecclesiastes 5:8-14. What are the consequences of wealth for an individual, their family, and their society? Have you seen or personally experienced any of these consequences described by the author?
3. Review verses 10 and 12. According to the passage, does wealth ultimately provide security for the person who has it? Why or why not?
4. Read Ecclesiastes 5:16. What does it mean to “toil for the wind”? What might “toiling for the wind” look like in our modern world?
5. Read Ecclesiastes 5:18-20. What does the author conclude with regard to one's “toil and labor”? About “wealth and possessions”? Is there anything surprising about these conclusions?
6. How do these sentiments about work and money compare with those found in Hebrews 13:5-6? In your small group, offer up praises to God for those times he has shown his faithfulness in your life.

WEEK THREE: GENEROSITY

1 Chronicles 29:1-20

Today's passage records an offering of gifts by the assembly of God's people for the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. As "a warrior who had shed blood," King David was forbidden by God from building the temple, a responsibility and honor falling instead to his son, King Solomon. David, however, was instrumental in planning the temple and provided the necessary resources for its construction.

1. Describe the best gift you have ever received? What was it that made the gift so meaningful for you?
2. Read 1 Chronicles 29:1-5. Summarize King David's declaration before the people. What strikes you most about his actions in this passage? What does it mean for the king to submit his treasure so willingly to the construction of God's temple?
3. Likewise, what does King David ask of the Israelite leaders and how do they respond? Read 1 Chronicles 29:9. How did the people respond to the actions of their leaders? Are there lessons to be found regarding servant leadership, power, and personal sacrifice?
4. Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-16. To whom, according to the passage, does all wealth and property ultimately belong? In a culture that idolizes the acquisition of wealth, private property, social status, and power, why is it important to be reminded of this fundamental truth?
5. What are the real-world implications of recognizing that everything, from the money in our bank accounts to the very land beneath us, belongs ultimately to God and not to us? Does it change the way we think about the importance of generosity, with regard to our personal finances, our stewardship of resources as a church body, or even how we budget resources in business and government?
6. Read 1 Chronicles 29:17-18. What does it mean to live with integrity, especially as it relates to money? Is there a relationship between integrity and generosity? Why is it important to give "willingly and with honest intent"?
7. As time permits, read Matthew 6:19-24. If everything belongs ultimately to God, how does our giving become an act of worship and devotion? What can you do in the coming days and weeks to invest in the kingdom and purposes of God?