



PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

LESSON 1-5: MEANINGFUL WORK

WELCOME & PRAYER

FOLLOW UP FROM PRIOR LESSON

In Lesson 4, you identified various work and business issues going on in your life and ultimately processed one or more with the group. For the issue(s) that were processed, how have the resulting actions gone? Are there any other “alligator” issues that need to be processed?

KICK OFF QUESTION

- What are things in your life that you consider to be meaningful?
- Do you find meaning in your work?

KEY SCRIPTURE

Ecclesiastes 2:17, 12:13 and Matthew 22:37-38

In Ecclesiastes, King Solomon determined his worldly pursuits, as grand and expansive as they were, came up short in providing satisfaction and meaning to his life. He was unfulfilled with the world and found his purpose in the pursuit of God and His commands.

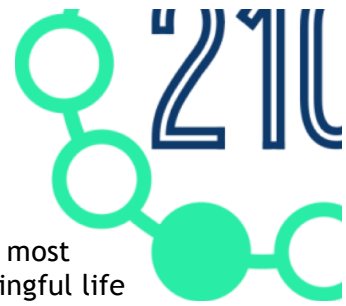
Jesus elaborates on these commands in Matthew by distinguishing the two greatest commands of God: “love the Lord your God with all your heart” and “love your neighbor as yourself.” In these straightforward terms, we can see direct application in everyday life to provide us the meaning that Solomon sought.

How does finding meaning in your work through your relationship with God change your approach to that work?

BIG PICTURE

1. Work, or any other pursuit, devoid of God does not have any real meaning.
2. Loving God (first and foremost) and others (second) above ourselves is not always easy, but it gives meaning to our work.
3. Love does not mean ignoring or foregoing discipline or correction, but it does mean doing so in ways that honors God and others.





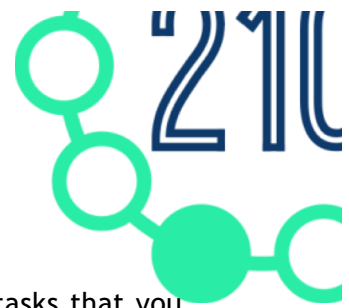
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- When have you found the most meaning in life? When have you found life most meaningless? Identify the circumstances for when you experience a meaningful life and work, and vice versa.

<u>MEANINGFUL LIFE/WORK</u>	<u>MEANINGLESS LIFE/WORK</u>

- Why do we sometimes feel that life is meaningless?
- How can we ask God to help us love others, including our spouses, children, friends, co-workers, employer/boss (yes, even him/her), employees (especially when they don't perform as expected), competitors, suppliers/vendors, and even our enemies?
- As an employee, how do you appreciate and accept discipline?
- At this point in your career, what are your final conclusions to life?
- How do you relate to what Solomon wrote in Ecc 2:17?
- What are the struggles you face in understanding or acknowledging that your life has meaning?
- How do we move from meaningless work/life to meaningful work/life?
- What helps you grow in your love for God and Jesus?





SITUATIONAL EXERCISE

Step into a time at work when you were frustrated with the monotony of the tasks that you were working on. You arrived at the workplace this morning and started on something arduous and are leaving for the day with more yet to be done. The only thing that broke up the hours on this task was the rework you had to do on another item due to a slight change in circumstances after it was already complete.

Does this situation happen a lot? What happens to your attitude when you think your work is meaningless?

WEEKLY APPLICATION

- Identify 1 action step that you can begin doing this week in applying these principles. Over the next 2 weeks, pray specifically for your boss and individuals that report to you. You should also pray for individuals with whom you may have conflict or tension with at work. During Lesson 5, be prepared to report what you personally experienced as a result of these prayers.

CLOSING PRAYER

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Every Good Endeavor*, by Timothy Keller, Chapters 5-6.
- *Work Matters*, by Tom Nelson, Chapter 2.





SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

So I came to hate life because everything done here under the sun is so troubling. Everything is meaningless - like chasing after the wind. Ecc 2:17.

Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey His commands, for this is everyone's duty. Ecc 12:13

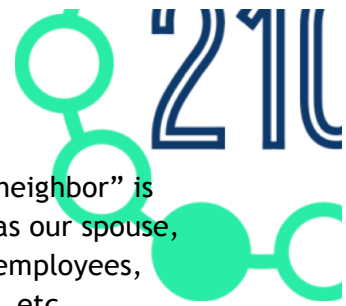
Solomon, King David's son, and heir to the throne of Israel wrote Ecclesiastes. He is frequently referred to as (pre-Christ) as the Teacher. He was considered the wisest person and the wealthiest person in the world at the time. Proverbs presents Solomon's wisdom, which is still valued today. Ecclesiastes shares his disappointments with all the things he chased in life away from God. He had extreme disappointment as he sought wealth, wisdom, popularity, pleasure, etc. Solomon's vivid frustration is seen in Ecc 2:17: "So I came to hate life". He invested much of his life in something as foolish as chasing the wind. This is the guy that built the first Jewish temple for God to live, which did not bring Solomon satisfaction. Solomon finally concludes, "Fear God and obey His commands, for this is everyone's duty" (Ecc 12:3). If we want meaning in life, this is the key. The question becomes - how do we obtaining meaning across all areas of our lives: work and home.

'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all of your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Matt. 22:37-38 (See parallel scriptures in Mark 12:29-31 and Luke 10:25-28)

Matthew, also known as Levi, was a tax collector. (See Matt. 9:9). He followed Jesus for three years, witnessing his many miracles and absorbing his teaching. Matthew also gives the most extensive description of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew heard first hand, Jesus' conversation about the greatest commandments. While not cited specifically, Jesus' quotation references Deut 6:5, where Moses states 'you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength'. The second Old Testament reference is Lev 19:18, which discusses loving your neighbor. Apparently, subjects such as this were commonly argued by religious leaders; such frivolous debates then are not unlike the unfortunate "discussions" many church people experience today - meaningless arguments that do not glorify God, love others, and edify his church. Instead, such debates promote division, rather than unity.

Loving God and loving each other is entirely consistent with our study of being made in God's image, from in Lesson 1. In two verses in Genesis 1:26-27, we are told men and women are made in the image of God, meaning we have the same attributes and need for relationships including love. Our capacity for love comes from the Father. If we are not sharing love and receiving love, we have a significant loss of purpose. Or we might say life begins to lose its meaning. Love is the biggest variable in having a meaningful life. Love of the Father and love of our neighbor. Neighbor in this context is much broader than the common thought of the person across the street.





We frequently misunderstand the word “neighbor”. Here, the use of the work “neighbor” is everyone else excluding you. While it certainly includes those close to us, such as our spouse, our family, and person living across the street, it also includes: our co-workers, employees, customers, shareholders, vendors and suppliers, and their family and co-workers, etc.

It even means our enemies (yes, those people at work who you think gossip about you and treat you unfairly) (We never reciprocate, do we?)

For example, if you do not love your spouse, you cannot achieve the fullness for your marriage that God intends. Thus, in the context of our marriage, we should ask daily: what does loving/respecting my spouse look like? How do I love my spouse as Christ directs? Does my spouse believe my actions reflect love or something else? (See Eph 5)

Likewise, if we are to do this in our marriages and homes, we should do this in our work and business. Thus, we should also ask daily: How do I love/respect my employer/employees (See Eph 6:5-9; Col 4:1)

Thus, we must first love God, and then we can truly love others. This is a fundamental principle in living a meaningful life. God loves others as much as he loves us; therefore, we must love them. However, loving others does not mean there is a lack of discipline. For example, in the context of work, when you screw up, you probably desire mercy from your boss. (See Micah 6:8b - to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.)

Yet, God disciplines us, both directly (our actions have consequences), but also mercifully (Christ died for our sins, so that we don't receive the ultimate discipline we deserve). Thus, forgiveness is also part of His nature. In our workplaces, as owners and managers, we too should discipline our employees with the same love and forgiveness that Christ has for us.

For example, employee evaluations can be given with honest feedback, designed to help a person mature, using prior struggles, not to berate or belittle them, but to help them grow and obtain their potential. Sometimes, loving someone may mean terminating their employment - but doing so in a way that honors God and them. In other words, we find meaning in our work when we understand that loving others is not ignoring struggles or failures - it is about loving them despite their faults and helping them.

When we place our work or business (i.e., performance, profits) above God and others, instead of understanding that our work is about God and others, our work becomes

“meaningless”. Meaningful work results when we understand these truths, and apply them to our work places and business.

Additional Scripture References you can explore

- Mark 12:29-31
- Luke 10:25-28
- Philippians 3:12-14
- Ecclesiastes (entire book)

