

June 14, 2026 (Lesson 2)

BIBLICAL WISDOM FOR WORK (Proverbs—Ecclesiastes)

1. **About Work and Laziness** (Proverbs 14:23; 18:9; 23:4; 24:27, 30-34)
2. **What Makes Work Vain?** (Ecclesiastes 1:3; 2:4-6, 11, 18-23; 5:12)
3. **What Makes Work Rewarding?** (Ecclesiastes 9:7-10; 11:1-6; 12:13-14)

Central Truth: A right attitude toward work makes it more rewarding.

Focus: Consider and heed divinely given wisdom for work.

Evangelism Emphasis: Heeding the wisdom of God's Word can have a positive influence in the workplace.

Golden Text: "He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster" (Proverbs 18:9).

Our previous study taught us that productive work has its origin in Jehovah, the Creator (Gen. 1:1). God has ordered that every seven days we have a time of rest and revitalization (1:1, 31; 2:1-3). Israel engaged in regular festivals—times of celebration and vacation from labor, for God has ordained rest and leisure. However, as we will learn in this lesson, He abhors inactivity, sloth, and laziness.

Industrious, hard-working people are uncomfortable around laziness and those who are slothful and take advantage of others. God honors those who work for a living, but He is displeased with those who make excuses for not working.

1. ABOUT WORK AND LAZINESS

A. Poverty, Profit, Destruction, and Riches (Proverbs 14:23; 18:9; 23:4)

14:23 In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury.

18:9 He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.

23:4 Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.

The dignity we should ascribe to work is seen in the Genesis story in God the Creator and Adam the laborer, both God and man working—not grudgingly or of necessity, but as sheer delight. Work has dignity. Often, we focus on the toil that ensued for Adam following the Fall, but God had already given Adam work to do before he fell into sin. Our need to work and be creative is part of the image of God that He deposited into the psyche of all human beings (1:26).

Work goes beyond what we do in our profession or career. It also includes housework, doing dishes and laundry, driving children to and from school, chores around the home, volunteering for church and community, and more.

“Work is as much a basic human need as food, beauty, rest, friendship, prayer, and sexuality; it is not simply medicine but food for our soul. Without meaningful work we sense significant inner loss and emptiness. People who are cut off from work because of physical or other reasons quickly discover how much they need work to thrive emotionally, physically, and spiritually” (Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*).

When David said, “I [have] not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Ps. 37:25), he implied industrious people who work and put their trust in Jehovah are individuals without want. Their needs are supplied. Jesus affirmed this truth (Matt. 6:33). On the other hand, poverty is a plight over which many have no choice, and affected people are to be ministered to and not shamed. Giving to them is giving to the Lord, and He will repay those who do (Prov. 19:17). But God’s Word differentiates between those who are poor through no fault of their own and those in poverty because of sloth, laziness, and wishful thinking. Idleness among the able-bodied leads to “penury” (14:23), meaning “poverty” (NKJV). The Hebrew word for *poverty* means “to be in want”—the opposite of God’s promise to those who work and put Him first (Ps. 23:1). Proverbs 18:9 says, “A lazy person is as bad as someone who destroys things” (NLT).

It has been said, “If your outgo exceeds your income, your upkeep becomes your downfall.” Biblically, work anticipates making profit (Prov. 21:5; Ps. 128:2). There are those who oppose capitalism and disdain those who have accumulated wealth through work, administration, and investments. Proverbs gives an interesting comparison between the worker who earns an honest

profit and the dreamer who talks but produces little. One obtains wealth, the other lives in poverty (14:23).

It is often said “money is the root of all evil,” but that is untrue. Having money or accumulating wealth is not sinful; instead, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10 NKJV). Many who have accumulated wealth have become generous benefactors for charity and for the church. Our view of wealth is what matters. One can love money and possess little to none of it, then seek to gain it wrongfully through theft or deceit. One can also possess money and become so jaded by its purchasing power and its status symbols until they no longer control their money—their money controls them. The Biblical warning is straightforward: “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; do not trust your own cleverness” (Prov. 23:4 NIV). Many are the stories of those who have lost their integrity, their families, and their health trying to obtain wealth. Multitudes have bought the fallacy that money can produce happiness. Jesus called this “the deceitfulness of riches” (Matt. 13:22).

A Norwegian Proverb

The lazier a man is, the more he plans to do tomorrow.

B. Planting, Building, and Laziness (Proverbs 24:27, 30-34)

²⁷ Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.

³⁰ I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding. ³¹ And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. ³² Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction. ³³ Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: ³⁴ So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth; and thy want as an armed man.

The Book of Proverbs gives us a clear warning about ordering our priorities. The writer uses agricultural terminology (24:27), telling us to work the ground, till the soil, gather the crop, and make a profit before we start building our house. In other words, invest in productivity before comfort.

The financial downfall of many young couples is seeking to quickly obtain the kind of house, car, appliances, and other conveniences their parents accumulated over many years. They fail to consider the many hours of hard work invested by the previous generation. Jesus spoke about a man who set out to build a tower, saying he must first count the cost or risk becoming embarrassed when he fails to finish what he started (Luke 14:28-30).

What is *laziness*? A lazy person possesses little to no desire to work. One may be lazy in preparation (planting the crop) or in execution (working the field). In Proverbs, the lazy person talks about getting a job but doesn't (14:23), and doesn't give an honest day's work for his pay (18:9). In 24:30-34, the writer describes going by the field of a lazy man—the vineyard of a man who neither planned nor executed a plan. There he discovered an overgrown field, with its border wall broken down. He predicted poverty would come to the owner of that field like an unwelcome intruder, and neediness would hold the man hostage.

§ *In Proverbs 24:33, why does the writer use the term "a little" three times? What is the point?*

2. WHAT MAKES WORK VAIN?

A. Solomon's Endeavors (Ecclesiastes 1:3; 2:4-6, 11)

1:3 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

2:4 I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: ⁵ I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: ⁶ I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees.

¹¹ Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

Solomon wrote three books of the Bible. In his early years, he wrote the Song of Solomon, an optimistic love poem. Later he gave us the Book of Proverbs, a collection of wise sayings spoken and written by him and others. Late in his life, he penned Ecclesiastes, the musings of a miserable

older man looking back over years of personal and national backsliding. Nearing the end of his days, Solomon's sad deduction was everything he had worked for was in vain (Eccl. 1:2), and the profits he acquired were now unprofitable to him (v. 3). He had sought and obtained everything his eyes lusted for. In his commentary on these verses, English theologian John Trapp asked, "How many are there [like Solomon] that have died of a wound in the eye?" Solomon's great sin was not *what* he had accumulated but, rather, *how* and *why*!

His "great works" included luxurious houses, enormous vineyards and orchards, extravagant gardens, and an intricate irrigation system (2:4-6). Solomon achieved greater wealth and acclaim than all the kings before him (v. 9). Whatever his heart craved, his wealth acquired until his acquisitions made those of his father David pale by comparison. King Solomon was paid exorbitantly through taxes collected from working people, tribute money paid by foreign kings to maintain peace, and assessments levied against the various provinces of the nation. His throne was made of ivory overlaid with gold with a golden footstool. His drinking cups and eating utensils were of gold because silver was considered beneath his dignity (see 2 Chron. 9:13-27).

§ *What does Solomon's repeated use of "me" (2:4-6) say about him?*

B. Solomon's Dissatisfaction (Ecclesiastes 2:18-23; 5:12)

2:18 Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. ¹⁹ And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.

²² For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? ²³ For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

5:12 The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

Solomon lamented that at death he would leave his fortune to another, realizing while he had attended to his passions and his lifestyle of unrestrained pleasure (Eccl. 2:18), he had neglected his parental responsibilities and would eventually bequeath it all to his rebel son, Rehoboam.

Commentator Adam Clarke said, “Alas! Solomon, the wisest of all men, made the worst use of his wisdom, had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and yet left but one son behind him, to possess his estates and his throne, and that one was the silliest of fools.”

This Solomonic lamentation, along with many contemporary examples, reminds us of the importance of wills, trusts, and other financial documents that protect our assets in ways that safeguard them from future abuse, provide for our families, and continue to support the work of the Kingdom and honorable charities. As surely as Solomon spent his life looking for love in all the wrong places, he wasted his wisdom for business by acquiring wealth for all the wrong reasons, then failing to protect it.

Ironically, aged Solomon contrasted the sleep of a working person with that of a rich man, concluding the laborer can sleep well, while “the rich seldom get a good night’s sleep” (5:12 NLT) because he has too much on his mind.

Window or Mirror?

Material wealth is either a window through which we see God or a mirror in which we see ourselves.—Warren Wiersbe

3. WHAT MAKES WORK REWARDING?

A. Keep Working! (Ecclesiastes 9:7-10)

⁷ Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. ⁸ Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. ⁹ Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in

this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Some commentators suggest this passage is Solomon's attempt to be cynical and somewhat humorous at once. In the *Enduring Word Commentary*, Pastor David Guzik paraphrases the words of a totally frustrated Solomon, "Life is utterly meaningless, and our common death and destiny prove it to be so. So, forget about all I have said and have a good time." It is as if he is saying life has no purpose, so do the best you can and have a good time. It brings to mind a 1960s' television commercial where the announcer said: "You only go around once in life. Go for all the gusto you can get." The "gusto" in this ad was an alcoholic beverage—ultimately unsatisfying.

Even though expressed through cynicism, these words from Solomon (when read in context with other Scripture promises) drive home some powerfully positive truths. Work, though not always pleasurable, should be enjoyable. Work can cause us to prosper and be happy, and life can be good (Eccl. 9:8). God takes note of our labors, and profit from our work helps provide income sufficient to "live joyfully" with our spouse and family (v. 9). So, work even if your job situation is less than ideal. Give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay—"do it with thy might" (v. 10). Psalm 128:2 says, "When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you" (NKJV).

Start With Your Bed

If you make your bed every morning you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride, and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter. If you can't do the little things right, you will never do the big things right.—Navy Admiral William H. McRaven

B. Invest Wisely; Don't Worry (Ecclesiastes 11:1-6)

¹ Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. ² Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.

⁶ In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.

The statement about casting bread upon waters (v. 1) is likely reminiscent of scenes the king had observed at Israel's various ports along the Mediterranean Sea. Products from Israel were shipped to trading seaports in Turkey, Greece, Italy, and other foreign lands. "After many days" those ships would ultimately return with goods from other lands to be marketed in Israel. Ancient sea travel was laborious and slow, and turnaround time required many days. The message here is that get-rich-quick schemes, financial pyramids, and other shortcuts are unsure, but persistent work and systematic investments produce lasting dividends to those willing to work, save, and wait.

The admonitions in Ecclesiastes 11 speak not only about investing wisely in anticipation of gaining a profit, but also about giving with intentionality, understanding God rewards those who do. Sharing our financial increase with those less fortunate, giving to the church and to honorable charities are other forms of investing. While we do not give to get, there is a promised reward to those who give expecting nothing in return (Luke 6:35, 38). With both investing and charitable giving, the time to start is now, because we do not know what the future holds (Eccl. 11:2).

Verses 4 and 6 say we should "sow" faithfully and consistently. In *The Word for Today*, Pastor Chuck Smith writes, "There won't ever be a perfect day or perfect time to do the important things. You just have to do them. . . . Don't watch the clouds. Watch the One who will be coming in the clouds."

§ *Describe how verse 5 contrasts our knowledge with God's knowledge.*

C. Reverence God (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

¹³ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

Much of Ecclesiastes is the sad spewing of one who started out with divine favor and extraordinary wisdom, but squandered his life in backsliding, idolatry, and debauchery. His great wisdom was prostituted for pleasure's sake, and it appeared he might go to his grave in bitterness. He is the epitome of the one Jesus spoke of when He asked, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36). The message we get from Solomon is that working hard to accumulate stuff for stuff's sake is a lifelong exercise in futility. Solomon was not an "old man" when he died. Historians calculate he was between fifty-five and fifty-nine years old, yet much of his final book is a poor-mouth requiem about himself and his emptiness because of his ill-advised and sinful choices in life.

The most optimistic section of Ecclesiastes is the final few verses where Solomon seems to recant his negativity by giving us one of the most righteous appeals in his writings. Solomon proclaims the reason for our existence is to give reverence and obedience to God to whom we will one day give an account. The Hebrew word translated "fear" (Eccl. 12:13) does not speak of being afraid of God, but rather of reverencing the awesomeness of a God who looks from Heaven, sees the inhabitants of earth, and "considers everything they do" (Ps. 33:15 NIV). God observes our work ethic!

Solomon concludes the proper response to the fear of God is to "keep his commandments"—something the king had failed to do for many years. Keeping His commandments hearkens us back to Eden and to a working, productive God who created a working, productive human race. Perhaps Solomon pondered what his life might have been had he followed his own advice years sooner.

Ignoring God’s laws concerning marital fidelity left Solomon unfulfilled and conflicted. Defying God’s laws about acknowledging other gods rendered his life miserable and meaningless. It is as if he was crying out at last, “Oh, that I had feared God and kept His commandments all these years! Oh, that I had invested my years in productive service instead of spending them in things that bring no lasting peace.” It is as if we can hear him say, “Don’t make the same mistakes I made. Do right. Work honestly. Honor God.”

Most Important Thought

The most important thought that ever occupied my mind is that of my individual responsibility to God.—Daniel Webster

LEARN FROM SOLOMON’S LIFE

Solomon, who “loved the Lord” (1 Kings 3:3), started strong, having been personally advanced by his father, David, to a throne that was almost subverted by his half-brother Adonijah but previously promised to Solomon through his mother, Bathsheba. Solomon’s one request of God upon his inauguration was that he be granted wisdom—an understanding heart (vv. 7-14). Over time, however, Solomon fell into sin through adultery, idolatry, greed, and debauchery. He failed to use the “understanding heart” God gave him. Instead, he consistently occupied himself in a disobedient lifestyle that gave him everything but left him dissatisfied.

At the end of Ecclesiastes, we see Solomon renewing his faith. Heretofore, all had been vanity. His spirit was vexed. He decried eternity, insisting the dead know nothing, have no reward, and are forever forgotten (9:5). In his conclusion, he again fully acknowledged Jehovah (12:13). He also said our work (occupation) is important and will be judged by God—all of it, whether good or bad (v.

14). His message to us is that whether we work and how we work matters to the God who created us to be productive. Work. Create. Produce. Because we will give an account to God!

Daily Devotions

- M. Noah Working (Genesis 6:14-22)
- T. Isaac Working (Genesis 26:12-18)
- W. Jacob Working (Genesis 31:36-42)
- T. Jesus' Disciples Working (John 21:1-12)
- F. Apostle Paul Working (Acts 18:1-3)
- S. Workers in an Evil Occupation (Acts 19:24-32)