

Sermon Series: Wisdom for All—Lord of Life Lutheran Church—1/28/2001

Title: “Wisdom for Work and Success”

Text: Ecclesiastes 2: 18-26

Introduction: *Illus.: Advice on Success*

Theme: Does your work/success define who you are or does who you are define your work and success.  
Depending on how you answer this question will indicate whether you are filled with Divine wisdom from above.

### *Coming to grips with the dirty little secret about work*

- **PRINT AND READ ECCLESIASTES 2: 18-23**
- **Work is consumed with the curse of sin which infects all of us**
  1. **Print and read Genesis 3: 8-13 and 17-19**
  2. **It is hard work (*toil*—vs. 18a)**
  3. **You may be well meaning and dedicated but not everyone around you is (vs. 19a)**
  4. **You don't have control over its success (vs. 19b)**
  5. **It is painful and often unbearable (vs. 22)**
- **Dysfunctional and spiritually harmful responses to our fallen work**
  1. **Despair (vs. 20)**—there is no hope, there is no God—*“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” Psalm 53: 1*
  2. **Self-trust (vs. 21)**—work harder not smarter—focus on *“legacy building”* rather than *“humbly serving”*
  3. **Losing sleep (vs. 23)**—not only physically harmful to your health, it will emotionally, mentally, and spiritually drain you *“In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves. Ps. 127:2*
    - a. **ILLUS.: REST IS PROFITABLE, TOO**

### *What is so redeemable about your work?*

- **PRINT AND READ ECCLESIASTES 2: 24-26**
- **Our work is a creative part of God's creation in us**
  1. **Same word for “good” used of my work as it was of God's in Genesis 1 (“satisfaction” vs. 24b)**
  2. **We were created in “God's image”—holiness, creativeness, purposeful work**
  3. **Take each day's work a day-at-a-time and don't let yesterday's or tomorrow's evil spill over to today. (vs. 24a)**
    - a. **ILLUS.: AN UNPLEASANT TASK DAILY**
    - b. *“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Matthew 6:34*
- **Our work is “from the hand of God” through Christ and has begun the process of redemption (vs. 24c)**
  1. *Everything is from God and by God and for God. Glory belongs to him forever! Amen! Romans 11:36*
  2. *It is a gift from God to be able to eat and drink and experience the good that comes from every kind of hard work. Eccles. 3:13*
  3. *Everything you say or do should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Col. 3:17*
  4. *Whatever you do, do it wholeheartedly as though you were working for your real master and not merely for humans. You know that your real master will give you an inheritance as your reward. It is Christ, your real master, whom you are serving. Col. 3:23-24*
- **When working for the Lord, you don't have to work for a legacy (vs. 21, 26)**
  1. **Focus on being godly rather than being happy in your work**
    - a. **ILLUS.: CHASING AFTER HAPPINESS**
    - b. Purposeful, meaningful work cannot make me happy; only God can give purpose and meaning and joy to my work
    - c. **ILLUS.: A CAR, A WATCH, AND AN ARM**
  2. **Focus on leaving behind rather than gathering up in our work**
    - a. *A godly life brings huge profits to people who are content with what they have. 1 Tim. 6:6*
    - b. When my goal is working for the Lord rather than for my paycheck, He will adequately take care of that, as well
    - c. *And everyone who gave up homes, brothers or sisters, father, mother, children, or fields because of my name will receive a hundred times more and will inherit eternal life. Matthew 19:29*

## Advice on Success

1. Nothing is foolproof to a talented fool.
2. The early bird may get the worm, but the second mouse gets the cheese.
3. Borrow money from a pessimist. They don't expect it back.
4. If at first you don't succeed, destroy all evidence that you tried.
5. Experience is something you don't get until just after you need it.
6. The sooner you fall behind the more time you will have to catch up.
7. If at first you don't succeed, then sky diving isn't for you.

## Rest Is Profitable Too

The story is told of two men who had the tiring job of clearing a field of trees. The contract called for them to be paid per tree. Bill wanted the day to be profitable, so he grunted and sweated, swinging the axe relentlessly. Ed, on the other hand, seemed to be working about half as fast. He even took a rest and sat off to the side for a few minutes. Bill kept chopping away until every muscle and tendon in his body was screaming. At the end of the day, Bill was terribly sore, but Ed was smiling and telling jokes. Amazingly, Ed had cut down more trees! Bill said, "I noticed you sitting while I worked without a break. How'd you outwork me?" Ed smiled. "Did you notice I was sharpening my axe while I was sitting?"

## An Unpleasant Task Daily

A mythological story is told of a young farmer who picked up a newborn calf that had been born out in the field. Every day after that he went out in the field to retrieve it to the safety of the barn at night and he would pick it up and carry it in. Since the calf's weight increased ever so slightly every day, the young man did not notice the increase. As the myth goes, by continuing to lift the calf day after day, his strength grew with the calf's weight until eventually he could still lift it after it had grown into a full-sized bull.

## Chasing after Happiness

In New York City, there are eight million cats and eleven million dogs. New York City is basically just concrete and steel, so when you have a pet in New York City and it dies, you can't just go out in the back yard and bury it. The city authorities decided that for \$50 they would dispose of your deceased pet for you. One lady was enterprising. She thought, *I can render a service to people in the city and save them money.* She placed an ad in the newspaper that said, "When your pet dies, I will come and take care of the carcass for you for \$25." This lady would go to the local Salvation Army and buy an old suitcase for two dollars. Then when someone would call about his or her pet, she would go to the home and put the deceased pet in the suitcase. She would then take a ride on the subway, where there are thieves. She would set the suitcase down, and she would act like she wasn't watching. A thief would come by and steal her suitcase. She'd look up and say, "Wait. Stop. Thief." My guess is the people who stole those suitcases got a real surprise when they got home. A lot of us are like those New York thieves. We're chasing after happiness, and we grab what we think will give us happiness; however, when we get it, it doesn't quite deliver.

## A Car, A Watch, and a Arm

I heard a joke this past week about a young man who was driving his BMW around a curve when he realized the car was out of control and about to plummet over a cliff. The young man jumped out, but his left arm was severed from his body. He stood there looking down at his burning BMW and said, "Oh, no! My car! My car!" A man, who had stopped to help, said, "Mister, you have just lost your left arm, and you're crying about your car?" The young man looked down and said, "Oh no, my Rolex watch!"

## Eccles. 2:18-26

I came to hate everything for which I had worked so hard under the sun, because I will have to leave it to the person who replaces me. <sup>19</sup>Who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? He will still have control over everything under the sun for which I worked so hard and used my wisdom. Even this is pointless. <sup>20</sup>Then I fell into despair over everything for which I had worked so hard under the sun. <sup>21</sup>Here is someone who had worked hard with wisdom, knowledge, and skill. Yet, he must turn over his legacy to someone else, who didn't work for it. Even this is pointless and a terrible tragedy. <sup>22</sup>What do people get from all of their hard work and struggles under the sun? <sup>23</sup>Their entire life is filled with pain, and their work is unbearable. Even at night their minds don't rest. Even this is pointless. <sup>24</sup>There is nothing better for people to do than to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in their work. I saw that even this comes from the hand of God. <sup>25</sup>Who can eat or enjoy themselves without God? <sup>26</sup>God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to anyone who pleases him. But to the person who continues to sin, he gives the job of gathering and collecting wealth. The sinner must turn his wealth over to the person who pleases God. Even this is pointless. It's like trying to catch the wind. [GW]

## Genesis 3:8-13, 17-19

In the cool of the evening, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking around in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees in the garden. The LORD God called to the man and asked him, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden. I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." God asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat fruit from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?" The man answered, "That woman, the one you gave me, gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the LORD God asked the woman, "What have you done?" The snake deceived me, and I ate," the woman answered. Then he said to the man, "You listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree, although I commanded you, 'You must never eat its fruit.' The ground is cursed because of you. Through hard work you will eat food that comes from it every day of your life. The ground will grow thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat wild plants. By the sweat of your brow, you will produce food to eat until you return to the ground, because you were taken from it. You are dust, and you will return to dust."