TOPIC PRINTABLE

Work, money and purpose

Work as part of what people are made for, money as something to use rather than serve, and giving as a response to grace.

MATTHEW 6:19–21

"Don't lay up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consume, and where thieves don't break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus asks where the heart is anchored. Possessions are not condemned, but they can be lost, and "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

MATTHEW 6:24

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Mammon.

Money is pictured as a rival master, "Mammon." Jesus does not call money evil; He says it cannot be served alongside God.

1 TIMOTHY 6:6–10

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we certainly can't carry anything out. But having food and clothing, we will be content with that. But those who are determined to be rich fall into a temptation, a snare, and many foolish and harmful lusts, such as drown men in ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some have been led astray from the faith in their greed, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

The warning is against "the love of money" and against being "determined to be rich," not against money itself. The alternative offered is contentment: "godliness with contentment is great gain."

GENESIS 2:15

The LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it.

Before anything goes wrong in Genesis, the first human is given work: "to cultivate and keep" the garden. Work belongs to the goodness of creation; the sweat and thorns come later (3:17-19).

COLOSSIANS 3:23–24

And whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord": ordinary work as service that Christ sees. The words were first addressed to enslaved people in Christian households (3:22), and the next lines tell masters to give what is "just and equal" (4:1). They value faithful work; they do not ask anyone to accept mistreatment.

LUKE 12:15–21

He said to them, "Beware! Keep yourselves from covetousness, for a man's life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses." He spoke a parable to them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man produced abundantly. He reasoned within himself, saying, 'What will I do, because I don't have room to store my crops?' He said, 'This is what I will do. I will pull down my barns, build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. I will tell my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years. Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry."' "But God said to him, 'You foolish one, tonight your soul is required of you. The things which you have prepared—whose will they be?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

"A man's life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things which he possesses." The rich farmer plans carefully; his mistake is planning only for himself and not being "rich toward God."

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6–8

Remember this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Let each man give according as he has determined in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that you, always having all sufficiency in everything, may

abound to every good work.

Giving that is free, “not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” The abundance Paul expects is grace, so that the giver “may abound to every good work” — enough to keep doing good, not a return on an investment.

PROVERBS 6:6–8

Go to the ant, you sluggard. Consider her ways, and be wise; which having no chief, overseer, or ruler, provides her bread in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.

The ant works without an overseer and gathers in season. Proverbs prizes diligence and foresight; as wisdom sayings, these describe how life usually goes rather than guaranteeing results.

ECCLESIASTES 2:22–24

For what does a man have of all his labor and of the striving of his heart, in which he labors under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail is grief; yes, even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity. There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God.

The Preacher admits that work can bring sorrow and sleepless nights — and still concludes that to “make his soul enjoy good in his labor” is from the hand of God.

ECCLESIASTES 5:10

He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.

“He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver”: an observation from experience that wanting more does not stop at enough.

SIRACH 27:1–2

Many have sinned for profit. He who seeks to multiply wealth will turn his eye away. As a nail will stick fast between the joinings of stones, so sin will thrust itself in between buying and selling.

Ben Sira notes how easily wrongdoing slips into trade: “sin will thrust itself in between buying and selling.”

Honest dealing takes attention, not only good intentions.