

Overview

Do you find that some parts of your work seem creative and fulfilling whilst other parts feel like a drudge and a real struggle to get through? How do we make sense of these different aspects of work as a whole? In this unit we will explore the idea of work and seek to discover how we might describe the work that is central to who we are. We will have a chance to reflect on ways that we might enhance the joy and satisfaction we and others experience through our work.

This is your worksheet; for notes, ideas and questions

Facilitator

Offer a quick overview of this session and note that there are other Topics in this series that relate to the wider question of work and how we connect our faith with our work. Some issues that may come up in discussion will need to be dealt with in another session.

Remind people that the worksheet is for their use and notes only. Ensure introductions if there are new group members

Facilitator

Ask the group to make a list on their worksheet of what they enjoy and don't enjoy about the actual work that they do, remembering that work is more than just paid employment (as discussed in 'Our Understanding of Work' Topic GW1). In 'Work and Wellbeing' (Topic GW6), we explore the issue of work and well being, which also relates to this.

Question

Which parts of your work do you enjoy most? Which do you enjoy least?

Enjoy most	Enjoy least

Facilitator

Ask people to share ideas and compare their preferences eg. Some people may hate working with numbers, some may love it. This could be due to personality differences, differences in experiences or it could be that it is the environment we work in.

Facilitator

Introduce the idea of work, labour and toil and (without going too deeply into it) point out how all three words are used in scripture. Go on to ask the group to share their ideas about what they think the different meanings of the words might be.

Question

Work, Labour and Toil

Work, Labour and Toil are used in the Bible; sometimes in the same passage. For example : "We did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it: but with toil and labour we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you" (2 Thessalonians 3:8 NRSV)

What do you think are the different meanings of work, labour and toil?

Facilitator

Ask the group to share their different ideas about work, labour and toil. Are there any common themes (without getting bogged down in definitions)?

Facilitator

The perspective below offers some background to the ideas of work, labour and toil. The text should be read aloud – perhaps ask 4 volunteers to read a section each (the introduction, work, labour and toil). There is some helpful background reading which shows how other languages also have different work for work. Try to establish a shared understanding of the three words

Perspective

Work, Labour and Toil

The idea of work is actually a rather complex thing. We may think of it initially as if it were about (paid) employment, but there is more to it than that. There is more to work than “job. For example it may well include voluntary work, unpaid work of various kinds, and can embrace all human activity including hobbies and recreation. We might gather the idea of work under three headings, and it would be good to reflect on our own activity, our “doings” under these headings – they are labour, work and toil.

Labour is about the necessity of having to work – addressing the chores, if you like, and the repetitive nature of human activity just to keep things going e.g. everything from brushing one’s teeth to cutting the grass to earning an income to pay the bills. It has something to do with repetitiveness and necessity. In the ancient world what was prized above all was freedom. Consequently labour (as what we can call work) was best done by slaves. In Hesiod’s *Works and Days* farming is done by slaves and tame animals and the idea is the gentleman farmer who does not have to do this himself and has leisure for other pursuits.

Work is what we choose to do in what expresses our creativity. Thus the artist works. As the Psalmist prays “Prosper the work of our hands” or as in Charles Wesley’s hymn: “Forth in thy name O Lord I go, my daily labour to pursue ... in all my works they presence find ... To labour on at thy command, and offer all my works to thee”. Here labour and work go hand in hand and may even be synonymous. But work conveys a sense of purposive change that brings fulfilment and is more than the repetitive round of human existence. Thus (significantly) God is thought of as a worker or a craftsman who makes things, rather than a labourer who does things.

Toil is a concept attendant on both labour and work. The single English word covers what in Greek are the two words *kopos* and *ponos*. *Kopos* is effort and energy informed by the desirability of the best outcome i.e. the harder the work the richer the reward. *Ponos* expresses more the hard graft, the struggle and pain (cf painstaking) involved in so many tasks. The idea of toil (especially as *ponos*) naturally associates itself with the aforementioned meaning(s) of labour, *kopos* (as effort), is perhaps more the counterpart to the aforementioned meaning(s) of work. In these ways we can think about how toil engages with both labour and work. In many regards the aim is to take toil out of labour as much as possible – labour-saving devices and strategies.

With work, on the other hand, effort is necessary and desirable – maximum effort rightly applied and understood is a key driver of human creativity and inventiveness. Of course as with the interface of labour and work, it is a moot point when hard work becomes toil and drudgery.

‘Work, Labour and Toil’ by Revd Dr Jim Francis, and written for After Sunday 2009, based on the work of Hannah Arendt in her book The Human Condition (1999, Chicago University Press)

Facilitator

Ask the group to consider how their ideas about work, labour and toil relate to these descriptions. Try to establish a common understanding of the terms.

Discussion

How do your ideas about work, labour and toil relate to these descriptions?

Facilitator

Apply the three ideas about work to our own lives. Give the group members a few (5) minutes to do this exercise on their own. Then invite each individual to share their observations, particularly to see if there are common themes within the columns

Activity

Looking at your ‘work’

Pick up to 5 key areas of your current life/kinds of work e.g. your job, family and leisure. Identify for each what activities you regard as labour, work or toil in each area.

What is the balance of labour, work and toil across each of your chosen areas? It may be helpful to put a percentage.

Key areas of my life and work	Labour	Work	Toil

Facilitator

Having completed the analysis of work, labour and toil, ask the group members to share any patterns or observations in turn. Use the following questions to lead a discussion about ways to find a better balance of work, labour and toil for ourselves and for others where we influence the work that they do. Draw out some discussion about how we imagine God to be interested in our work. God cares about all of our work. Maintaining and sustaining are very important forms of work and can be creative in themselves. If people are experiencing all toil and labour, then perhaps they need to question whether they are doing the right kind of work. Are there things in the work environment that are causing excess toil and labour?

Analysis

Questions to explore

- What does this analysis tell you about what you value in your work?
- How does your perception of what is Work, Labour and Toil differ from other members of the group?
- How is the balance of time /energy between the three columns and can it be improved?
- Is there any way that Labour and Toil could be made more meaningful?
- What would you most like to change about the pattern in your life?
- What small practical steps could you take towards that?
- Does this give any insight into how we imagine God's work in creation?

Facilitator

The challenge in this discussion is to help people to begin to work out where the balance of work labour and toil lie in life.

Facilitator

During the week, you might like to reflect on :



Facilitator

Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session and ask them to share quickly 1 or 2 points.

Ponder

What did you learn from this session?

Prayer

God of grace and goodness
who made us body and spirit
that our work and our faith may be one:
may we, by our life and our worship,
join in your labour to bring forth a new creation in justice, love and truth;
through Jesus our Redeemer
Amen

From Celebrating Common Prayer (Continuum, 2005)