

Overview

Do you live to work or work to live? How do you think about your work and how do you relate the ideas of work to the whole of your life? In this Topic we will explore our understanding of work and discuss ways in which we can see work as more than just a job. We will explore the different kinds of work we do and share our ideas about what work means for us and seek to define what we mean by work. These ideas will help us to think more about how we connect our daily work with each other and with God.

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

Introduce the question below. The word 'community' can include communities around the family, around hobbies, around paid work, voluntary work, other activities. As the group list the different communities that they are part of, help each see each community in terms of the work that they do as part of it. This opens up the idea of work as much more than a paid job.

Question

What are the different communities that you are part of?

Facilitator

Go round the group and ask each member what they usually say about their work or what they do when introducing themselves to strangers – say at a party.

Question

'What do you do?' How do you usually answer this question?

Facilitator

Usually people think about work as paid employment (e.g. 'I'm a welder', 'I'm an accountant', 'I'm an administrator' or 'I'm just a mum', or 'Nothing, I'm retired'). And much of our identity is connected to the paid work that we do ('I'm a....'). While we gain a sense of identity and a sense of worth from paid work, we also want to explore a wider view of work and human fulfilment than simply paid employment.

Facilitator

Invite the group to list all the different kinds of work that they do using the activity on the worksheet. Ask each person to share with the others in turn. This is a good way of the group finding out more about what each other does during the week. (This could be an exercise for the whole church community at some point)

Activity

Thinking about the different communities of which you are part, list all the kinds of work you perform

The different kinds of work I do

ME

Facilitator

Share the overview of different kinds of work that people do. Affirm that our understanding of work is much more than a paid job.

Facilitator

Introduce the discussion. Invite each of the group members to select an area of work and think about the following question;

Discussion

Select one of the different kinds of work that you do. Think about the reasons why you do it and how it is valued by you and others. Share your thoughts with the rest of the group – and discover how other people see and value their work.

Facilitator

After that, invite the group members to share their views about the value of an area of work, and draw out the breadth of understanding of the term ‘work’. This discussion should help to move beyond the idea that work only has an economic value – much of what people do will have a social value, a spiritual value (eg. connecting with creativity and other, providing meaning in their lives)

Facilitator

When a number of views have been shared, ask the group members to think for a moment on their own and write down their answer to the question so ‘how might you define work?’

Question

How might you define work?

Facilitator

Share views - go round the group and ask each person for their response. Once you have done this, compare the responses to the list below. This is a list of ideas that have come out of other After Sunday groups who explored this topic. Ask the group to compare their answers with this list and see what they would like to add or what they disagree with. Have brief discussion about the points that emerge. Not all the points on this list see work in a positive way.

Activity for Group **Compare your ideas with this list**

What does work mean to you? *Here is a range of responses from previous groups.*

1. It is hard physical effort towards some goal
2. Friendship and social contact
3. Economic necessity - a means to an end
4. Brings out the best in me and gives meaning in my life
5. Can be fulfilling and a source of self esteem
6. Ways I use my talents and gifts
7. A vocation and what my life is all about
8. Something I want to retire from, but will then replace with other work
9. Curse, or a drudgery – a necessary evil
10. A source of pressure and stress
11. Creativity and freedom
12. The source of our identities – “and what do you do?”
13. Serving others and doing something useful
14. A career
15. A place of community and belonging
16. A hobby, pastime or interest
17. Something I don't have and I want
18. Something I love to do

Facilitator

Introduce the perspective 'A Definition of Work' on the worksheet, and ask group to look through it for a minute. This perspective offers a way of bringing together different ideas about work and encourages people to see work in an integrating way.

Perspective

A Definition of Work

As we have seen, work means different things to different people. Work is much broader than just paid employment. In his book *Unemployment – Under the judgement of God*, Peter Mayhew quotes the work of Prof William McDougall who suggested that there is an 'instinct of construction' in man... 'the playful activities of children seem to be determined by its impulse.' There is an intrinsic satisfaction to be derived from working. Human beings need to work. Work can be as source of real and deep joy.

Work is much more than just an economic matter; it also has social and spiritual dimensions. Work is different from a mere leisure activity, game or hobby.

We offer the following definition of work adapted from Peter Mayhew's book :

Work is a purposeful activity, it leads to a change in the conditions for yourself and others and it has some beneficial social significance as an end. It is through engaging in 'work' that we find meaning and fulfilment, allowing us the opportunity to express our creativity and become more fully human.

Adapted from Unemployment Under the Judgement of God (Contemporary Christian Concerns Series, Vol 1) by Peter Mayhew (Churchman, 1985)

Discussion

What do you think of this perspective on work?

Facilitator

People might need some help to explore the word 'conditions' – the conditions need not be your immediate context, it may be someone else's, conditions can be created or changed to enable positive relationships, learning or warmth i.e. the conditions need not be physical, can be unseen. People might feel that this definition is too purposeful and active – with no room for rest or 'being'. People may feel that some work is not about change that it is about sustaining and maintaining. Most of God's creativity is about maintaining and sustaining. This can be creative too. People may struggle with the idea that everything we do can class as 'work'. This definition may raise all sorts of ethical issues and questions about work, and what is 'good' work, which will need to be explored in another topic. Encourage people to see 'work' in its broadest sense. People may feel that work is toilsome and inhuman. We will explore this in other Topics in this series..

Facilitator

Introduce a discussion on work- life balance. We are setting out to explore whether the idea of work-life balance is helpful and whether there are others ways to imagine the part that work plays in the whole of our lives.

Facilitator

Ask the group to think about and share responses to the following question

Question

How do you understand the idea of achieving a work-life balance?

Facilitator

Lead a discussion to explore the different ways we think about work-life balance and why it is such a popular philosophy. Then introduce the following question about whether there are other ways to think about work given the much broader understanding of work that we have been exploring

Question


Given a broader of work, are there other ways to think about the part that work plays in our lives?

Facilitator

Lead a discussion to explore the possibility of integrating all that we do into a 'whole life', rather than separating and balancing different aspects of what we do.

We explore the question of rest and leisure in the Topic called 'Shabat and Rest' (W7). The other topics on 'Work, Labour and Toil' (W5) and 'Work and Wellbeing' (W6) will also be helpful in exploring this relationship.

During the week you might like to reflect on:



Have you got a good balance of work,
leisure and rest this week?

Facilitator *Encourage people to spend few minutes pondering on what they feel they have learned from the session.*

Ponder **What did you learn from this session?**

Facilitator *Ask group members to share quickly 1 or 2 points and reflect back any common themes or issues that need to be explored elsewhere. Agree with the group what they would like to do next and who is going to lead the next session.*

Prayer **Lord, whatever**

Lord,
Whatever we build,
Give us a glimpse of glory.
Whatever we make,
Give us a sense of wonder.
Wherever we travel,
Give us a sense of reverence.
Whoever we meet,
Give us a sense of awe.
Whatever we do,
Give us a sense of achievement.
Whatever our situation,
Give us knowledge of you.
Amen.

*From 'Powerlines; Celtic Prayers about Work' by David Adam
(Triangle, 1992)*