

Dr. August Konkel, Proverbs, Session 22, Work and Wealth, 6-min. Video Overview

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Let's be real for a second. Most of us spend the best hours of our day and the best years of our lives, well, working. But what if our entire modern way of thinking about work and wealth is built on a really shaky foundation? Today, we're going to dig into an ancient perspective that completely flips the script on what it means to have a good career and, you know, a rich life.

And it all kicks off with a question I think every single one of us can relate to. Why does work, for so many of us, feel less like a calling and more like a painful, repetitive grind we just have to get through? Where does that feeling even come from? So to get to the bottom of this, our source material starts by helping us diagnose the problem. And it turns out, ancient wisdom literature has some really specific words to describe this negative feeling we have about work.

This is where it gets super interesting. The source makes a key distinction. The first idea is toil, or *etzev* in the original Hebrew.

This isn't just about working hard; it's that painful struggle you feel when you pour all your effort into something, and it just doesn't work out the way you want it. Then there's busyness, or *inyon*, and that's that feeling of being endlessly occupied, just constantly swamped by tasks, even if they're not that hard. Sound familiar? Yeah, I thought so.

According to this wisdom, that feeling isn't some random accident of modern life. It's actually traced all the way back to that foundational story in Genesis, you know, where humanity decides to define good and evil for themselves without any higher wisdom. And that attempt to control everything, to guarantee the outcome of our efforts- well, that's what leads directly to this constant struggle, this *etzev* in our work.

We want to be in charge, but we find out pretty quickly that we just can't be. And this line from Psalm 127 just captures that feeling perfectly. It is in vain that you eat the bread of pain itself.

You work yourself to the bone; you eat the bread of pain, all just to survive. The source is saying that this is what work becomes when it's cut off from any deeper meaning. It's just a painful, futile way to stay alive.

Ok, so if work as toil is the problem, our modern world pretty much screams one solution at us: get rich, right? Work your tail off now so you can pile up enough money to escape the grind later. But does that actually work? To answer that question, the source points us to this absolutely fascinating case study, a figure from the book of Ecclesiastes, often called The Preacher. And this wasn't just some guy with a nice 401k.

This was a person who decided to test this whole money equals happiness theory to its absolute limit. I mean, just look at this list. He piled up incredible wealth.

He said yes to every single personal desire he ever had. He built huge, amazing projects. Anything he could possibly imagine wanting, he got.

He basically won the game of life by today's standards. The whole shebang. So this is the crucial question, isn't it? After getting everything anyone could ever dream of, after reaching the absolute peak of success, what did he find out? Was he finally happy? Was it all worth it in the end? Nope.

Not even close. His mind-blowing conclusion was that this relentless chase for wealth and pleasure was, and I quote, the most unsatisfying thing. He had it all.

And he felt nothing. It was empty. It didn't fundamentally make his life any better.

And here's the reason why. The source explains that when you make satisfying your desires the main goal of your work, you're basically signing up for a kind of slavery. Why? Because our desires are a moving target.

They can never be fully satisfied. The more you get, the more you want. It's a treadmill you can never, ever get off.

And on top of all that, there's the little problem that wealth itself is just not that reliable. I love this metaphor from the Book of Proverbs. You spend your whole life trying to cage it, and then one day, it just takes up wings, and it flies away.

Think about it. A market crash, some bad luck, and a whole lifetime of work can just vanish. Okay, so if work as toil is miserable, and chasing wealth is just an unsatisfying trap, what's left? This sounds kind of bleak, right? Well, the source doesn't just point out the problems.

It actually offers a solution. But it requires a pretty radical shift in how we see everything. This right here is the heart of the whole thing.

It's a total change in perspective. Step one, you have to stop seeing your job as just a tool to get something else, whether that's money or power or status. Step two, you start to see the work itself as the reward.

And step three, you learn to find real satisfaction in the day-to-day process, and you're content with what that process gives you. So, the real goal isn't some huge bank account or retiring at 50. The real goal, according to this ancient wisdom, is to find actual joy, fulfillment, and meaning in the stuff you do every single day.

The reward isn't waiting for you at the end of the road. The reward is the road. Now, if you really take that idea seriously, it leads to a pretty shocking conclusion.

One that challenges one of our most sacred modern beliefs. Let's talk about retirement. I mean, come on, let's be honest.

Isn't this the dream we're all sold? You grind it out for 40 years specifically so you can get to a point where you never have to work another day in your life. That's the goal, isn't it? Well, get this. According to the source, the entire concept of retirement is just not there.

It doesn't exist in the Bible. It's not an ancient ideal for a good life. In fact, as an idea, it's surprisingly new.

Just look at this timeline. The idea kind of pops up in the 19th century, but it doesn't really become official policy until the Great Depression. And you know why? It was a political tool to get older people to leave the workforce so there would be jobs for younger people.

It was born from economic desperation, not some grand philosophy of human flourishing. But today, we've turned it into this universal, almost sacred life goal. So what this ancient guide really leaves us with is a choice.

A fundamental choice. It lays out two completely different paths for how we can approach our work, and really, our whole lives. On one side, you've got work as a trap.

It's just a tool to get more stuff, more status. It's driven by desires that can never be satisfied, and in the end, it makes you a slave to the grind. But on the other side, you have work as a purpose.

It becomes a source of daily joy and satisfaction. It's driven by finding fulfillment in the process itself. And in the end, it actually enriches your life instead of draining it.

And that really brings us to the final question. The one this whole explainer is really asking you to think about. I want you to look at your own life.

Your own career. Right now. The path you're on.

Is it enriching you? Or is it, slowly but surely, enslaving you?