

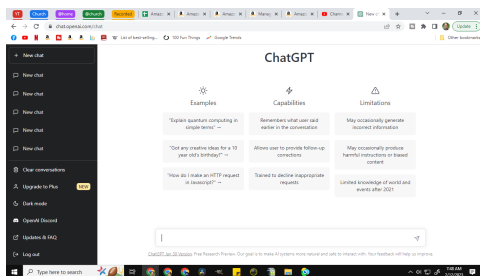
Ecclesiastes 2:18-23

Collecting Stuff to Give Away

Main idea: We're not to work for a paycheck, or in order to gather stuff for ourselves or others. We're to work from the heart, serving the Lord Christ.

If you've been on the internet recently, you may have heard about this website called ChatGPT.

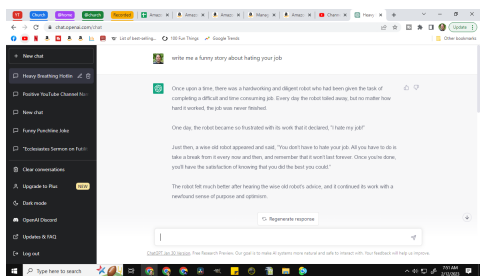
[Screenshot of ChatGPT]



ChatGPT uses artificial intelligence to chat with you, so that you can ask it all kinds of questions, and it will give you an answer in a conversational way. It doesn't always give you a correct answer, but it does try to give you an answer.

So I asked ChatGPT to write me a funny story about hating your job, and this is what it told me:

[Screenshot of ChatGPT story]



Once upon a time, there was a hardworking and diligent robot who had been given the task of completing a difficult and time consuming job.

Every day the robot toiled away, but no matter how hard it worked, the job was never finished.

One day, the robot became so frustrated with its work that it declared, "I hate my job!"

Just then, a wise old robot appeared and said, "You don't have to hate your job. All you have to do is take a break from it every now and then, and remember that it won't last forever. Once you're done, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you did the best you could."

The robot felt much better after hearing the wise old robot's advice, and it continued its work with a newfound sense of purpose and optimism.

Now, I found that story pretty ironic, because ChatGPT is a robot, and its job is to tell me whatever I tell it to tell me, and it told me about a robot that doesn't like its job.

But I also think that maybe we can all relate to this story. Maybe you've felt before like a robot, just going through the motions, whether at school, or work, or even in your relationship with God, and you felt trapped, and just came to the conclusion that it's all meaningless. Have you ever felt that way? If so, you might be able to relate to our Scripture today.

Ecclesiastes 2:18-23

I hated all my work that I labored at under the sun because I must leave it to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will take over all my work that I labored at skillfully under the sun. This too is futile. So I began to give myself over to despair concerning all my work that I had labored at under the sun. When there is a person whose work was done with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and he must give his portion to a person who has

not worked for it, this too is futile and a great wrong. For what does a person get with all his work and all his efforts that he labors at under the sun? For all his days are filled with grief, and his occupation is sorrowful; even at night, his mind does not rest. This too is futile.
(Ecclesiastes 2:18-23)

Father, we can often feel so hopeless about our work. We devote ourselves for years to our occupations, only to often feel empty, or like we've wasted our lives. So help us to get our eyes off of ourselves, and onto You, to see how You're working all around us, even as we work. In Jesus's name, Amen.

I've talked with many people over the years who have hated their jobs. And I've definitely had jobs that I've hated. When I was in college, for example, I needed a job during the summer, so I applied to Steak n' Shake. I worked there for exactly one day. I didn't like it at all. My boss had me making french fries for literally 8 hours straight. After my shift, maybe I was just being a big baby, but I told my boss thanks for the opportunity, but I wouldn't be back. And I literally went home and cried, and prayed, "God, I know I need a job this summer, but I can't do that!"

The very next day, my college called me and said that they could use some help in the business office, where I had done a work-study the previous school year to help pay for my classes. So I went from whining about work, to praising God that He had provided work for me that I would enjoy.

Now, in all honesty, I shouldn't have been a big baby about Steak n' Shake, and I should have praised God for providing that work as well. Because the point isn't really where we work, but whether we're working for ourselves or for God.

So in our passage this morning, we're going to be faced with several reasons why we might really hate work so that we might be corrected in how

we think about work, and therefore begin to make our work all about worshipping God. Verse 18.

I hated all my work that I labored at under the sun because I must leave it to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will take over all my work that I labored at skillfully under the sun. This too is futile. (Ecclesiastes 2:18-19)

So the first reason that we might hate work is because we often engage in work with the wrong motives. Talking about all the stuff he gathered or accomplished through work, he said that he “must leave it to the one who comes after me.” In other words, he wishes he could take it with him, or at least keep it all for himself, since he earned it, but he can’t! After all our work, we die, and we can’t keep anything we’ve acquired. Instead, it’s passed on.

Now, some of us like the idea that we can pass some things on to our kids, but not Solomon. His first thought is, “They don’t deserve all this stuff! They didn’t work for it!” It’s not so much that he’s against the idea of giving an inheritance, but rather that he no longer has control of the stuff he passes on.

You see, if our motive in working is just to make a lot of money, so that we can buy a lot of stuff, so that we can pass that stuff on to the next generation, it’s not going to lead to a fulfilled life. Because we don’t know what the next generation is even going to be like! We see all the time how there can be major shifts even from generation to generation regarding huge moral and societal issues. Some people seem to think this is a new thing, but it’s actually a very old thing. Just about every generation thinks that the next generation isn’t as good as the previous generation. So it’s almost like whatever we leave to the next generation in the form of an inheritance might actually go against everything we worked for in order to give them that inheritance. That’s a pretty depressing thought!

So we work all of our lives, just to pass things on to the next generation, who will either do the same with it, giving it to the next generation, or else just waste everything that you spent so much time gathering. That's not to say leaving an inheritance is a bad thing, but rather that it's not the best thing.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:21:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:21)

The best thing isn't to gather a bunch of stuff, whether to try to hoard it or even to give away, the best thing is to find our treasure in Jesus. And when we don't find our treasure in Him, when we seek treasure in all the things that the world offers us, it leads to a very unfilled life.

Verse 20.

So I began to give myself over to despair concerning all my work that I had labored at under the sun. When there is a person whose work was done with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and he must give his portion to a person who has not worked for it, this too is futile and a great wrong. (Ecclesiastes 2:20-21)

When it says he must give "his portion," it's talking about the reward of all his work. It's talking about the result. It often refers to physical stuff, but the emphasis is really on the honor or outcome of the work.

It's kind of like how the Revolutionary War resulted in freedom for us, even though we didn't fight in the Revolutionary War. If we don't appreciate the sacrifices of those who fought in that war, the Teacher call this kind of thing futile and a great wrong.

So a second inferior motivation to work is to make things better for the next generation. Maybe you're not too concerned about stuff, but you're just trying to make society better for future generations. It sounds really noble, and it's certainly good to give yourself in service to others, but once again, it's an endless, meaningless cycle in and of itself.

If in all of our parenting, and politics, and desires for the future, we work hard, not just in our jobs, but also in life in general so that our kids would have it better than us, we're actually being kind of naive! Because the next generation could totally reject everything we've worked for.

So the Teacher in Ecclesiastes says, "I hated my work!" and that he even gave himself to despair. He threw himself a pity party and just wallowed in the sheer meaninglessness of working all of his life ultimately with nothing to show for it. Verse 22.

For what does a person get with all his work and all his efforts that he labors at under the sun? For all his days are filled with grief, and his occupation is sorrowful; even at night, his mind does not rest. This too is futile. (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23)

So after the Teacher reminded us that we can't keep stuff that we earn from our work, and that any result of our work is ultimately passed on to those who didn't earn it, he does point out one thing that we do get as a result of our work: grief. We get sorrow. We get restless.

I'm sure we've all had days and nights in which we couldn't turn off our brains, and we're tired of dealing with work, or debts, and no matter how much we work, we feel like it doesn't make a difference.

But realizing this can actually be a good thing. It's when we feel like we've hit rock bottom that God can show us that He is sufficient.

Because no matter what you think you're achieving with your work, you're probably giving yourself far too much credit. Life is not about what we can achieve. It's about resting in the One who sustains us and provides for us, and even gave His life for us so that we might live in Him.

So much of life, we try to gather more and more, but in the end, none of that matters! Working for stuff for yourself doesn't matter, and working for stuff for others doesn't matter. We have a very twisted idea of work when we work for stuff at all!

Instead, Paul writes about a much better motive for work in Colossians 3. It says:

Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24)

So we're not to work for a paycheck, or in order to gather stuff for ourselves or others. We're to work from the heart, serving the Lord Christ.

And yet, we will receive an inheritance. But it's not an inheritance of riches as we often think about wealth. We'll receive an inheritance of the Lord Himself, being in right relationship with Him, and even being righteous in Him, actually enjoying serving Him perfectly and forever in worship in the life to come.

That's what eternal life is. Eternal life isn't what so many people picture heaven to be like. It's not laying on clouds and doing nothing and being fed grapes by angels for the rest of time. No! That sounds extremely boring. You might enjoy it for a minute, because we all like the idea of rest, but we were created to work, and we find fulfillment in work, if we work not for ourselves, but for the One who made us.

You see, eternal life is abundant joy while actively serving God. And I can't stress enough that it's joy! We won't get bored serving God. We won't find it laborious. We won't hate it. We'll find it invigorating, and exciting, and joyful to serve the Lord forever and ever, because that's what we were made to do. Not for a paycheck, and certainly not for stuff, but simply as we rest in Him.

And if that's what we'll be doing in eternity, God invites us to begin that today. Jesus described eternal life not as something that begins when we die, but something that begins in this life and extends into eternity. In John 17:3, Jesus said this in prayer to God the Father:

This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent —Jesus Christ. (John 17:3)

Eternal life is knowing Jesus as our Savior, through whom we can know God as our Father. That doesn't start when we die. It starts here, in this life. And if you've never come to know Jesus as your Savior, it can start today.