

SOUL FOOD

APRIL 18, 2017

ECCLESIASTES 5:18-20 OCCUPIED WITH JOY

One of the many maxims that I heard growing up was that idle hands are the devil's workshop. When I got to college I began to see this maxim lived out. Many of my dorm mates in the freshman dorm got into various forms of trouble simply because they were bored and did not want to occupy their time with work and study. They did not know that a prime source of joy was staring them in their faces. Work!! Who knew? Well, Solomon knew.

Scripture teaches us about the value of work. Remember that God gave Adam and Eve the command to keep the garden and tend to it before sin ever entered the picture. So, work is connected to one of the prime purposes for our very existence. Consider Solomon's words here. He says that it is good, fitting, and reasonable to eat and drink and find enjoyment in our toil during the "few" days that God gives to us. I must admit that I cannot remember ever hearing the words toil and enjoyment ever used in the same sentence. What led Solomon to make such a statement?

Solomon points to the reality that when one is truly engaged in his work God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart. This does not mean that one will not experience challenges and struggles in his/her work. Solomon puts his finger on a vital truth that one is more emotionally and psychologically healthy when he is occupied with work and accomplishing fulfilling tasks. I know that over the years when encountering men who were unemployed, they truly struggled emotionally and psychologically. They found it difficult to even get up in the morning. They were not occupied with joy.

Solomon says that it is the gift of God to accept one's lot and rejoice in his/her work. While he makes this point in the context of one who is wealthy and empowered by God to enjoy his wealth, the same principle of truth holds for all who are engaged in work and productivity.

This reminds me of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount concerning anxiety. Jesus teaches us to not be anxious about tomorrow, for we must be focused on the challenges of the moment. I think Jesus teaches that there is a distinction between concerns and worries. We have control over our daily concerns in terms of work, chores, and other matters that we must accomplish. As we focus on these things we have less time for worry and anxiety. Joy connected to toil and work. Who knew?