

Aim of lesson

This set of lessons is highly relevant to the young people, as they will mostly be thinking about what sort of career they should be following, and perhaps about what further education would be beneficial. They should feel at the end that they have at least sorted out in their minds one or two guidelines that they intend to follow.

The aim of this lesson is to help them to appreciate some basic principles taught in Scripture:

- Work is a blessing from God
- People came to God from a wide variety of backgrounds
- It is important for our happiness, and relevant to our salvation, that we are guided by the right principles in choosing a career.

It is worth noting that lesson 32 in this book is on Further Education, and it may be worth avoiding things that will be discussed then. Or not - it's up to you.

Bible background

Genesis 2-3

Preparation required

Think about your own career, and the extent to which you have been guided by the principles outlined in this lesson. Be prepared to be open about mistakes you have made, and ways in which you have been blessed.

Make sure that you are familiar with what each of the young people is doing; whether they are working, unemployed, studying for exams, and so on, and try to be aware of any decisions they have recently taken, or may have to take in the next year or two.

Suggested outline of lesson

In the beginning

Look at Genesis 2:15, where Adam is told to work (NIV) the garden of Eden. Given that this was before the fall, the basic lesson is that in a world that was 'very good', Adam had a job to do. Ask the young people to think about the positive benefits of work, such as the satisfaction of doing something well, exercise, stretching our mental and physical capabilities.

In this context, of course, it is worth pointing out that God himself had been working during creation, and rested at the end, and that this is often later used as a pattern for our lives.

The curse

Then in Genesis 3:17-19 God curses the ground. Get the young people to think about the differences that the curse would make for Adam. It wasn't just a matter of weeding, and having to work a bit harder, but that the work would be full of frustrations and disappointments, which apply to life in general, not just gardening. Get the young people to think about how the curse would apply if you were, say, a schoolteacher, or a doctor? The point really is that every job is going to have its problems, and we need to be prepared to deal with them.

Lessons from Psalms and Ecclesiastes

Read Psalm 104:16-24 and try to get the young people to appreciate the beautiful picture of the 'works' of God (working still), in which the beasts hunt during the night, and man works during the day. So whatever the effects of the curse, our working lives are still part of God's creation, and in our jobs we can give glory to him.

Read Ecclesiastes 5:8-20 and get the young people to think about the messages of the passage. There are many relevant points that emerge:

- v8 The pressure of having a 'boss' looking over one's shoulder. What about being self-employed?
- v10-11 The insidious nature of greed, which imperceptibly consumes whatever is earned.

- v12 The benefits of being physically tired at the end of the day rather than just mentally frazzled.
- v13-17 The waste of hoarded wealth. How to balance responsible saving with greed?
- v18-20 The benefits of satisfaction from work.

Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Thief

The point of the chart is to recognise that God calls people from many different walks of life: think of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, The Lord Jesus Christ, Peter, Matthew, Paul, Lydia, Bartimæus, the man who was crucified beside Jesus. In God's eyes there is no benefit in becoming 'important' or 'successful'

It's not what you know, but who you know

This last section should lead into a general discussion regarding what should be the desirable characteristics of the sort of job we should be looking for. It's important to keep a balance and to recognise that just as there is no lasting benefit in wealth and 'success', so there is no necessary virtue in poverty.

Paul wrote 'What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things'.

Relevance to our lives

Ideally the young people should be able to look back on this discussion as something that had a real influence on their thinking about their further education and work intentions.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we have to take many decisions about our education and career. Please help us always to remember that these are ways in which we can serve you, not ourselves. When we choose, help us to choose those things that will lead us to your kingdom, and to remember that the Lord Jesus Christ was content to be a carpenter, and then to give up even that for you. Amen.

Other suggestions for activities

- Get the young people to write down the meaning of the following statements:
 - » 'She did really well at school'
 - » 'He's got a very good job'
 - » 'They've got a lovely home'
 then to think about what they would have meant if Jesus had said them.
- If you have time you may like to think about Lot and his decisions:
 - » to go and live in Sodom
 - » to leave it, but dwell in Zoar
 - » to live in a cave
 which reflect a growing recognition of the dangers of belonging to a corrupt world
- Get the young people to write a job advert for the 'perfect' job that they would like to do.