



## [Genesis 3:17-19](#)

(17) And to Adam He said, "Because you have hearkened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree—of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it!'—the ground is cursed for your sake. In sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life. (18) It shall also bring forth thorns and thistles to you, and *thus* you shall eat the herbs of the field; (19) In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you *are*, and to dust you shall return."

*A Faithful Version*

Over the past several hundred years, the idea of a "work ethic" has captured the imagination of philosophers, theologians, and ordinary men and women. The fundamental principle in any ethic of labor is that hard work teaches certain virtues and enables people to advance beyond the circumstances of their birth. If a young street urchin desires, he can—through hard work and integrity—climb from welfare to well-paid. The "rags to riches" motif grew from this ethic of work.

In His curse on Adam, [God](#) tells the man that his entire existence—"all the days of your life"—would be filled with labor. He would have to work for every morsel of food that would pass between his lips or those of his family. He would have to wage war on the natural processes of nature, such as weather, weeds, insects, fungi, and disease, to reap a crop, and he would never be assured of success. He would sweat in work, and he would sweat in worry.

All of this fighting, as one would expect, would take its toll on him. The constant pressure to provide for his own would drive him to work harder, longer hours. He would be constantly exposed to the fickle elements, which would sap his vigor. All this work would age him prematurely, and one day in the midst of his labors, he would simply die and return to the dust that he had been fighting all his life.

But amidst this struggle would come something of eternal consequence. Notice the

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words of Solomon:

For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are sorrowful, and his work grievous; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity. There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. ([Ecclesiastes 2:22-24](#))

Solomon, knowing the human condition was a result of God's purpose, reveals that men can receive something good from his toilsome lot. Verse 26 lists three virtues we can derive from our labors: "For God gives [wisdom](#) and knowledge and [joy](#) to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God."

A person who combines his work with a [relationship with God](#) will receive growth in character! On the other hand, a sinner, cut off from God, must endure the drudgery of the struggle, and the rewards of his work would eventually benefit the righteous, not himself!

Later, Solomon repeats his observation in chapter 3:

What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. . . . I know there is nothing better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God. (verses 9-10, 12-13)

This seems to verify that God's curse on Adam is in the end a gift from Him! Why is this curse really a blessing? We find the answer in verse 11:

He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time [or, *God times everything beautifully*]. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

The curse, if properly used, can lead a man to merge his life with God's "work" or purpose, which leads to "eternity" or [eternal life](#)! Man, apart from God, has no idea what God is doing, but one with a relationship with Him will have it revealed to him—and he can then use this knowledge to "work out" his [salvation](#) ([Philippians 2:12](#))! He can direct his labor along eternal lines.

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— Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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