

# Work, Occupation and Purpose

Work is more than earning money or staying busy. It shapes how we think, how we live, and how connected we feel to others. Most people have experienced this: when you finish something useful — helping someone, completing a task, contributing to a group — there is a quiet sense of satisfaction. That feeling comes from usefulness.

Swedenborg teaches that this love of being useful is not just for life on earth. It continues into eternal life. Heaven is described as a kingdom of uses, where everyone has a meaningful role and enjoys contributing.

The Bible points to this when it says:

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them.’”

(*Revelation 14:13*)

This “rest” does not mean inactivity. What ends is inner struggle — frustration, resistance, and conflict. What continues is the love of doing what is useful. The good qualities developed through work go with us and grow stronger.

## Work and Occupation

Work and occupation are related, but they are not the same.

- Work is the activity itself — the effort, care, and attention put into doing something useful.
- Occupation is the role or position a person holds in society.

Work answers: *What am I doing?*

Occupation answers: *What role do I hold?*

Titles and roles change, but the way a person works — with honesty, care, and responsibility — shapes who they become. Meaning comes more from the work than from the title.

## Why Idleness Undermines Life

Everyone needs rest. A break after effort is healthy. But a life built around avoiding responsibility slowly loses direction.

Swedenborg quotes an old saying: “Idleness is the devil’s pillow.”

The point is practical. When there is nothing meaningful to do, unhelpful habits and attitudes have more room to grow. Too much unstructured time can pull attention inward — toward distraction, self-focus, or behaviour that damages relationships and self-respect.

Idleness does not always look like doing nothing. A person can be constantly entertained and still be idle if the aim is simply to avoid responsibility.

This is why, in the spiritual world, everyone is engaged in work. Useful activity keeps the mind outward-looking and ordered.

## How Work Shapes the Inner Life

Work places healthy limits around life. Responsibilities encourage better habits and wiser choices. While these limits can feel restrictive, they often protect us from decisions we would later regret.

More than that, useful work gives the mind something positive to engage with. Over time, the satisfaction that comes from contributing changes us. We lose interest in patterns that undermine focus, trust, or care for others.

Swedenborg describes this as turning away from what damages us inwardly. He sums it up with the phrase “*shunning evils as sins*”— meaning an active choice not to build a life around what we recognise in our conscience as being destructive.

As usefulness becomes central, inner conflict quietens. Work stops feeling like pressure and starts providing balance and direction.

## Ordinary Work Still Matters

Not all work is exciting. Many roles are repetitive or unnoticed. Meaning does not come from how impressive a job looks, but from how it is done.

Every honest occupation contributes to the common good in some way. When a person focuses on doing their part well, even ordinary work can bring real satisfaction.

Swedenborg applies this to everyone — workers, businesspeople, farmers, soldiers, servants. What matters is sincerity, responsibility, and usefulness.

## The Human Side

Every occupation involves human contact. In work, at home, and socially, our actions affect others. A person shaped by useful work tends to be attentive, reliable, and considerate.

Ultimately, work prepares us to become people others can rely on — people whose attention naturally turns outward.

As Jesus said:

“Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”

(Matthew 25:21)

And as Swedenborg wrote:

“All the goods which are called goods of charity are nothing but uses, and uses are nothing but works for the neighbour, for our country, for the church, for the Lord’s kingdom.... For to love anyone, and not to do him good when we have the power, is not to love him; but to do him good when we have the power, and to do it from our hearts, this is to love him; and then all things of charity toward him are contained within the very deed or work.”

(Arcana Coelestia 6073)

## Take-away

So, who we become depends far more on the work than the title we hold, and a life oriented toward usefulness brings clarity, connection, and lasting purpose — now and beyond this life.