

Why Work?

Our jobs are so important because they occupy such a large part of our lives. On average, we work 40% of the waking hours of our lifetime.

Maybe you can identify with a man named Jerome K. Jerome who said, "I like work; it fascinates me. I can sit and look at it for hours."

Actually, most discussions about work aren't too funny. Some people estimate that as many as 90% of the workers in the United States see themselves as victims who are trapped in an unfulfilled daily routine of work.

Al Glenn in his book Taking Your Faith to Work tells the story of a minister who was speaking to a college fraternity. He asked the president of the fraternity who introduced him, "What are you living for?" The young man responded by saying, "I'm studying to be a pharmacist." The minister said, "I understand that is how you are going to earn your livelihood, but what are you living for? What is your purpose in life?" The young man finally ended an awkward silence by saying, "I'm sorry, sir, but I haven't thought that through yet."

Of the 30 men present that day only 2 could give an adequate answer to the question. Most knew how they would earn their livelihood but only two knew their purpose for living.

Do you know your purpose for living? How does that purpose relate to your job? My guess is that if you are unhappy at work it is spilling over into the rest of life and if you are happy at work the rest of your life is strengthened because of it.

People express various areas of their jobs with which they are dissatisfied. High on the list has to be inadequate pay. And yet, for most employees, that's probably not the Number 1 area of dissatisfaction. There are other concerns that are more of a problem than the amount of money we are paid. Poor relations with fellow workers tops the list for many. Pressure, tension and stress are common complaints. At the other extreme is boredom; people don't find their jobs interesting on a daily basis. Some say they experience a lack of fulfill-

ment; others are angry with their employer. Some talk about fatigue; they're burned out. Others say that there is just too much work to be done and too little time to do it in. Some feel unappreciated; they have a sense of unimportance in the company. Many feel a sense of failure.

The good news is that God points the way to job satisfaction. The key to job satisfaction is a positive attitude. Some people have super jobs with high pay and marvelous working conditions and they hate their jobs and complain. Others have absolutely terrible jobs, awful working conditions and lousy pay and they are content. The key to contentment is primarily in the person and not the circumstances.

Jerry White, author of the book Your Job, tells about a visit to a machine shop. He watched a master machinist take a piece of metal and produce a part to the exact specifications of the drawing. The man obviously enjoyed his work and was proud of his product. White asked him if the young man across the shop could do the same work. The machinist replied, "Nope . . . first off, he doesn't care. Second, he won't take the time to learn how to do it right. But mostly he just doesn't like to work. You can't do anything right if you don't like what you're doing."

What's the difference between the two workers? Attitude!

It's like an old story that comes from England where a passerby asked three men on a construc-

tion project what they were doing. The first man said he was earning money. The second workman said he was laying brick. When the third was asked what he was doing he said, "I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build St. Paul's cathedral!" The difference was attitude.

There are all kinds of biblical truths for building a positive attitude. The first truth is that God is a worker and we're created to be like him. Genesis 2:1-3 tells us the story of how God worked to create the world. In Genesis 1:27 we're told that we are created in the image of the God. And in Genesis 2:15 we read, "The Lord God took the

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man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

Work is part of perfect God and perfect man; it pre-dates the fall into sin. In other words, work is a super-positive part of what we were meant to be! In fact, I'd go so far as to say that I anticipate that we will have work to do in heaven, as much as we do here on earth!

A second biblical truth that helps to build a positive attitude is that God commands work. Exodus 20:9 contains the fourth of the Ten Commandments: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.” In II Thessalonians 3:10 we're told, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.” And in I Timothy 5:8, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” There can't be any doubt that God thinks work is good and necessary and normal. It is not something to be avoided or shirked! Even Sigmund Freud agreed about the positive necessity of work, seeing work as a balancing factor in a person's life that helps to change both society and self.

A third truth from the Bible to help build a positive attitude toward work is that God gives great opportunities through work. Work can help to build our faith. Some of our greatest challenges to trust God and depend on him are found on the job.

Work provides fulfillment. God created us to need the fulfillment and satisfaction of taking on labor and doing it well. It gives us a growing sense of self-value, achievement and meaning in life.

We can glorify God in the work we do. Outside of our families, the workplace has to be the greatest place for us to live for the glory of God. I Corinthians 10:31 says, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” A major part of our life is spent on the job and it is there that we have many opportunities to honor or discredit God. It is there that we have our largest audiences and greatest demands to live for God's glory.

Another opportunity work provides is through excellence. Where else do we have such opportunities to attain excellence? The sage in Proverbs 22:29 said, “Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.” Where else do we have that

opportunity to excel to the glory of God?

And then there's service. Like Jesus in Mark 10:45, we are called to serve, not be served. Employment holds most of our God-given opportunities to serve others outside of our family.

But, maybe the greatest opportunity of all is witness. When Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:13 he said, “You are the salt of the earth.” Have you ever had a piece of meat where all the salt was dumped on one spot? It tastes awful. Salt needs to be spread around to do its job. Our jobs are God's way of spreading the salt of Christian witness. You are the salt of God in your office, company, neighborhood, school or business. You are there as Jesus' ambassador more than as an employee to earn a living. You are Jesus Christ where you work!

Let's move on to a second way in which God points the way to job satisfaction. It's by deciding who's the boss. There are three possibilities of who is the boss when we're at work: (1) others; (2) self; or (3) God.

Many employees give control of their lives over to other people. Their work and time and everything belong to someone else. This is not always the boss of the company. Sometimes it is family or friends or society. We work to get status before others. We work to be better or richer or more famous than others. Some people take their jobs and live their lives because of the expectations of their parents. Many live totally to please others.

Working for others will eat you up! They will own your soul. You will never meet many of their expectations. It will destroy your self-esteem. Other people will use you for their interests. Seriously ask yourself, “Am I working for other people? Is what I do, how I do it and everything else for someone else?”

A second possibility of who is the boss is as bad if not worse than the first. It is Self! This is the person who is internally driven to seek selfish ambitious ends. He is willing to hurt others to get ahead. She watches out for Number 1. Tension, stress, overwork, competitiveness and greed often characterize this person. Often the self-worker blames others for his problems. He says the company creates the pressures, gives too much work, etc. However, if she switches companies she will fall into the exact same patterns.

Studies show that such people are prone eventually to lower self-esteem, lower regard by other people, higher frequency of heart disease and they tend to make more mistakes on the job. Often this expresses itself in the classic workaholic. Some estimate that as many as 50% of American white collar workers are workaholics.

This is not to say that we are to have a disregard for other people or that we are not to work hard or enjoy our work. The question is: "Who is the boss?" When we awaken in the morning who are we going to work for this day? Who do we want to please? Who will define for us success or failure? I submit to you that working for others and working for self are highly destructive, lead to unhappiness and dissatisfaction and actually produce lower quality and quantity of work!

The alternative for the Christian – the best alternative by far – is that we work for God! The counsel of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3:23-24 is:

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Compare that to Ephesians 6:5-8 (actually, this is addressed to slaves, but that is a cultural thing – the counsel applies to all employees at all times):

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

Every Christian has the same calling. We are not called to be businessmen, builders, attorneys, homemakers, clergymen or teachers. We are called to serve God! Serving God may be in one occupation or another, but our true "vocation" is working for Jesus Christ. The other is only our means of

livelihood while we work for him. Jesus was a carpenter, but his calling was to serve God. Peter was a fisherman, but his calling was to serve God. The Apostle Paul worked as a tentmaker, but his calling was to serve God.

Jesus Christ insists that he be the Lord of all of life, and that includes being our boss in the work that we have. He may order us, as our boss, to work for a certain company. He may ask us to be content with a specific wage. He may tell us to put up with all kinds of hassles that we would not choose - - - but let's not forget that he is the boss. It's not the manager or the supervisor or the company president or the chairman of the board or the stockholders. As Christians, we can only have one boss and that boss is Jesus Christ.

Ted Engstrom says in his book Work Trap, "Regardless of who pays the salary, God is the one for whom we work."

This realization

revolutionizes our work! No matter what our company pays, ultimately it will be God who pays our wages. God is the one we please no matter what anyone else thinks. Our complaints and criticisms can go right over our supervisor's head to the real Boss, God himself. Christians don't have to be complainers at work. God handles any injustices and promises to make things right in the end. We don't goof off when we know God is watching.

I heard on the radio about a survey that was taken of 1500 employees in the State of Michigan. The average "goof-off" time for employees was 55 minutes per day for men and 35 minutes per work day for women; the more people were paid the more time they tended to waste.

We don't need to overwork and kill ourselves when we are working for God because those aren't his expectations. We have the divine help and power of the Holy Spirit to do our jobs well, to find work and to make decisions.

A Russian soldier was captured by Napoleon's army. They branded his hand with the letter "N" and said, "Now you belong to Napoleon." The Russian soldier grabbed a knife and cut off his own hand, shouting back, "I belong to the Czar!"

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The Christian works for and belongs to Jesus Christ, no matter what the cost.

Mary Stauffer is a missionary to the Philippines. During one of the family's furloughs in Minnesota she was kidnapped, was held captive, suffered bizarre abuse and was even attacked in the courtroom during the trial following her escape. Everyone was amazed at her ability to stay calm and keep her sanity and dignity throughout all of this. But how did she do it?

The answer is to have Jesus Christ be the boss of life. Living and working totally for him enables the Christian to maintain dignity and integrity in the best and the worst of circumstances.

Practically, what does that mean? Let me give you some suggestions. First of all, quit your job and go to work for Jesus Christ. Oh, this probably doesn't mean ending your present employment - - - although it might! What I'm saying is that you should decide that it isn't the company, it isn't the employer, it isn't yourself that you're going to work for; it is Jesus Christ! He will be your boss from now on. Write a contract agreeing that you will work for him. Spell out the terms. Sign and date it. Reread that contract at least once each week.

A second practical suggestion is simply to decide on a positive attitude. Ask God to give you a positive attitude in your work no matter what the circumstances. Decide that you will no longer let other people and circumstances control your attitude. Instead, with the help of the Holy Spirit, be in positive control of your own attitude every day.

Finally, ask God to prove himself in your work. Every day pray and ask God not only to go with you to work but to show you that he is there. Ask him to make you the kind of employee he wants you to be. Ask him for satisfaction that comes directly from him and not directly through other people or money. Ask God to show you how to turn problems into victories rather than defeats. Keep a written log of your prayer requests and of God's answers.

I predict that you will find a satisfaction you never before dreamed possible. And I predict that your employer will find a renewed employee working for the company. Will you do it? Will you: (1) Develop a positive attitude, and (2) Decide that Jesus Christ is your boss?

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Colossians 3:23-24)

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