

WORK: JOB OR JOY?

by Calvin Habig

A young man, tired of working for others, went into business for himself. Later a friend asked him what it was like to be his own boss.

"I don't know," he replied. "The police won't let me park in front of my own place of business; tax collectors tell me how to keep books; my banker tells me how much balance I must maintain; freight agents tell me how my goods must be packed; customers tell me how my goods must be made; federal, state, county and local agencies tell me how to keep records; the union tells me whom I can employ and how and when; and on top of that, I just got married!"

Many people feel the same way in their work lives. They feel out of control of their destiny. They wake up to find that their jobs have molded their lives: their friendships, their personality and their future.

What help does the Bible provide for us in this?

WORK: God has designed that we work

One of the ways in which God created us to be like him is in that we work. When he created men and women, he created them in the Garden of Eden to work.

The Bible says,

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed . . . The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:8-9,15)

God states that he expects us to work. In the fourth commandment, having to do with the Sabbath day, God states, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh is a Sabbath to the Lord your God."

A little card in a restaurant read, "Thank God you have some place to go on Monday morning." How different from the usual attitude!

WORSHIP: We give honor to God by our work

My main purpose in life is to give honor to God. And my (and your) job or profession is one of the ways we can seek to honor God.

Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

The story is told of the 11th century German king, King Henry III, who having grown tired of court

life and the pressures of being a monarch, applied to a monastery to be accepted for a life of contemplation. The religious superior of the monastery, Prior Richard, is reported to have said, "Your Majesty, do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king."

Henry replied, "I understand. The rest of my life I will be obedient to you as Christ leads you."

"Then I will tell you what to do," said Prior Richard. "Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has placed you."

When King Henry III died, a statement was written, "The King learned to rule by being obedient."

Like King Henry, we too often tire of our role and responsibility. Like King Henry we need to be reminded that God has placed each of us in a particular place to be faithful there. Be it as a plumber, mother, lawyer, or whatever, God expects us to be faithful where he has placed us.

WORTH: Our work does not determine our worth

Too often today the first question we ask someone after we meet them is, "What do you do?"

Continued on page 12

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Continued from page 11

It is as if being a pharmacist, a teacher, or a meat cutter defines who we are and summarizes our value in life.

People in our day are struggling with an identity crisis. They are searching, more than ever before, for purpose and self-worth. There is a lie that is increasingly prevalent in our day. The lie says that self-worth is achieved by excelling in the marketplace. To exercise your abilities in a paying job means that you are a worth-while person.

I see older men who die shortly after retirement because their total significance in life has come from what they did for a living. When that ends, they often die, because the thing that gave them significance is gone.

When people lose their job, often it is a devastating blow, in part, because they identified their self-worth with being successful with that particular job. If the job ends, they are devastated, and at times commit suicide, because they drew their self-worth from the wrong thing.

In Jeremiah 9:23-24 God identifies three areas that people falsely use to find significance: wisdom, power and wealth.

The world defines greatness in terms of these three factors. If you excel in one or more of these, the world says you are important. If I earn my Ph.D. (or maybe my GED), if I work my way up to manage several dozen people at work, if my salary is large enough to be listed on the front page of the local newspaper, I feel important.

In Philippians 3:8 Paul calls such thinking, "dung, rubbish, garbage." In God's plan, I am significant not because of what I do or what I have, but because I know and understand God and that He created and loves me.

I am not more important or more significant because I have certain gifts or a certain job or earn a certain amount. My importance is not based on the fact that I have the ability to try cases in court, change the transmission in a diesel truck, keep a spotless home and cook gourmet meals, change bedpans in a nursing home or manage the books of a \$10 million business.

My significance or importance does not come from those things. My significance comes from my relationship to the creator.

Conclusion

Work, Worship, Worth. God expects me to work—and work diligently. My work is to be an expression of my worship of God. By how I do my work I either give honor to God or I am a shame to his name. But my worth as a person doesn't come from my work. It comes from my relationship to God. My significance comes from knowing God.

Do I know him? ◆



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