

Why You're Needed in the Marketplace

"May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands" (Ps. 90:17, NIV).

Throughout the church, a view of those in full-time Christian work versus those who work "secular" jobs has created a definite class distinction. There seems to be little evidence of this distinction in the Bible, yet we often hear testimonies from those who left "regular" jobs to go into the mission field or some other "full-time" Christian work.

The often-held view by pastors toward businesspeople was brought home to me one day when I received a letter from a pastor in response to a TGIF devotional that I write for men and women in the workplace. This devotional is being distributed throughout the world, and I have a surprisingly large number of pastors subscribed to it.

One day, I received a very simple note from a pastor that said, "How can a businessman have such wisdom?" This comment spoke volumes to me. Basically, he was implying that clergy are the only ones in tune with the spiritual matters of life and that businessmen and women are focused on the "secular" life. However, God has never said this. He is now helping many of us begin to understand our true calling as disciples of the Lord Jesus but with different roles to fulfill in the body of Christ. And no role is less holy than another.

When I received Christ in 1974, I was a golf professional. God gradually led me away from golf and into business. In 1980, I considered moving into "full-time" Christian work by attending a short-term Bible school to determine if I wanted to be a pastor. I served briefly as an assistant pastor, only to have

the position removed. God took me out of that because it was never His intention for me to be a pastor.

It was more implied guilt than a genuine call of God that led me to consider vocational ministry. I believed I might not have been giving my all to God if I wasn't full-time in the work of the Lord. I have learned since then that work truly is worship to God. *Work* and *worship* actually come from the same root Hebrew word, *avodah*. If you are in a secular job that doesn't violate Scripture, your vocation is just as important to God as is a full-time missionary in India. God calls each of us to our vocation. It is in that vocation where He desires to use us for His kingdom.

The Aim of Our Work

God takes us through the process of life and allows us to develop specific skills and talents for His purposes. The workplace is where many of us have the greatest opportunity to display these gifts.

When young David went up against Goliath, he was only a small shepherd boy. King Saul offered David his armor to protect him from the big Philistine, but David knew the weight of the armor would be a hindrance to him. Instead, David used the skills he had developed as a shepherd to protect his sheep. A slingshot and stones were his weapons.

When the time came for David to exercise his faith in God to slay the giant, he used the talents God had trained him to use. The shepherd fields were David's training grounds. There he learned to fight lions and protect his sheep. Now he would protect God's sheep.

God gives us the same talents to achieve the things He wants us to achieve. However, not all of us will be heroes. Some of us have been called to use our talents to serve others to benefit the kingdom of God. David's faith was the reason God gave him victory. David declared that he came in the name of

the living God and that the whole world would know the God of Israel because of the defeat of Goliath by a small shepherd boy. This is why God gave him victory over Goliath—so the world may know the living God.

The workplace is a training ground for most of us. It is the place where we deal with the everyday challenges of life, but it is also where God wants to reveal His glory “so that the world might know that He is God.” Someone once said that you will have many jobs before you come into the primary calling God has for your life. I have seen this principle at work. God uses our early training, like David’s training as a shepherd, to prepare us for future battles and future experiences that God will use for His purposes in our lives.

That is how God wants to use you and me, so we may proclaim Him wherever we are. He also wants us to use the talents and abilities He has allowed us to be trained with for His greater glory in this world. For many of us, these talents were given to provide valuable services to our employers for the glory of God. We can find comfort in the knowledge that there is no higher calling than to be where God calls us—regardless of whether it is in “full-time” Christian mission work or working at the local hardware store.

Remember the Primary Call

We should step back for a moment and remind ourselves that each of us is called to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ first and foremost. From this position all else comes. The fruit of our relationship with Christ moves us to the level of our calling in work. That work—whether serving on the mission field or delivering mail—is a holy calling of God.

The reason God holds a high view of work is that He created each person in His image for an express purpose in this world to reflect His glory in *all* aspects of life: “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" (Col. 3:17). He knows the number of the very hairs of our head, and He knows what we are wired to do in life (see Ps. 139).

By segmenting this part of our life, we cut off the expression of His life to the world. However, He would by no means let us do that. He knows there are many who will never hear the gospel because they will never enter a church building. You and I may be the only representatives of God they will ever encounter.

Have you ever considered the diversity of gifts and talents God gave humankind? It is amazing to consider. I sometimes think about someone who is working in a particular profession that does not appeal to me, yet God created that person to use his or her gifts for that express purpose. At the same time, He desires that we see our work as worship of Him and a place where His presence and power can be manifested as a testimony to the world.

God is always about creating a testimony of His love and power for the world to see. The Bible is a continual testimony about reconciling the world unto Himself. Later, we will see how God has demonstrated His life through individuals in some dramatic ways in the workplace.

The Value of Secular Work

The *Word in Life Study Bible* provides some good insights into this question of secular versus sacred work.

God values our work even when the product has no eternal value. Christians often measure the significance of a job by its perceived value from the eternal perspective: Will the work last? Will it "really count" for eternity? The implication is that God approves of work for eternity but places little value on work for the here and now. By this measure, the work of ministers and missionaries has eternal

value because it deals with people's spiritual, eternal needs. By contrast, the work of a salesman, teller or typist has only limited value, because it meets only earthly needs. In other words, this kind of work doesn't really "count" in God's eyes.

But this way of thinking overlooks several important truths:

- God Himself has created a world that is time-bound and temporary (2 Pet. 3:10-11). Yet God values His work, declaring it to be "very good" by its very nature (Gen. 1:31; Acts 14:17).
- God promises rewards to people in everyday jobs, based on their attitude and conduct (Eph. 6:8; Col. 3:23-4:1).
- God cares about the everyday needs of people as well as their spiritual needs. He cares whether people have food, clothing, and shelter.
- God cares about people who will enter eternity. To the extent that a job serves the needs of people, God values it, because He values people.

The Importance of Skillful Work

"Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men" (Prov. 22:29).

The Lord has called each of us to be excellent in what we do. Those whom God used in the kingdom as marketplace ministers were skilled and exemplified excellence in their field. Not only were these men skilled, but they were also filled with God's Spirit:

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship'" (Ex. 31:1-5).

Consider Hiram, the master craftsman of bronze to whom Solomon

entrusted much of the temple designs. He was a true master craftsman (see 1 Kings 7:14). Consider Joseph, whose skill as an administrator was known throughout Egypt and the world. Consider Daniel, who served his king with great skill and integrity.

The list could go on—David, Nehemiah, Aquila and Priscilla. Most of these were in the “secular” world of work providing a service that was needed for mankind.

May we strive for excellence in all that we do for the Master of the universe: *“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”* (Col. 3:23-24, NIV, emphasis mine).

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