

Working Nine to Five: *What Jesus Thinks About Your Job*

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A short time ago I heard a DJ on a Christian station lament about “work.” One of his comments was directed toward a friend of his who was struggling with his job. He said, “*Hey friend, you don’t have to go to that stinkin’ job!*” I shuttered.

The average American will spend more than 100,000 hours on the job before they retire at age 65. And yet few give significant thought to the importance or meaning of that work. Consider the following examples:

- The executive woman who says: “*I’m tired, I’m exhausted. I love my work but I miss my family.*”
- The business man who travels 16 days a month. He longs to be at more of his kids activities but can’t because his job requires him to travel that much.
- The woman who left her job and said, “*I don’t know who I am any more. Work was my life. So when I left my job, I felt that my life was over.*”
- The house wife who says: “*When will this monotony ever end? When will I get to have a real life again?*”
- The 40 year old who has just switched careers for the second time and wonders, “*Is this what I’m suppose to do? Will I be happy in this new job?*”
- The person who has had a couple of his friends enter “full-time ministry” finds himself asking, “*Why can’t I work at something significant?*”
- The assembly line worker who says, “*I’m bored with my work, but the pressure to make enough money to pay bills each month is overwhelming.*”

Have you found yourself asking the questions: “*Is there more to work than just to pay bills?*,” “*Why did God put me in this job?*,” “*Isn’t work a curse from the fall?*”

I talked with ten people this last week: all were frustrated to one degree or another with their work. Dolly Parton captured the spirit of the workplace in her hit song, “*Working 9 to 5, just a way to make a living . . .*”

Your perspective about your work and your workplace is very strategic. In our scramble to juggle everything on our platter we too easily can lose sight of what’s important.

In a few weekends we will celebrate Labor Day. Is that day just an excuse to take a day off – or does it have real significance to your life?

How many have ever heard a sermon on work? Not many. In the last thirty years, I’ve heard two – one by my former pastor when we were living in Texas, and one by Doug Sherman, who heads up a ministry to Christians in the marketplace.

Let’s consider a more Biblical view of work. Jesus spent many years of His life working as a carpenter. Paul worked at times as a tent-maker to support himself in the ministry. God ordained work – hard work. Work, therefore, is both honorable and productive. And yet so many times we fall into negative thought patterns when it comes to our work.

How does God view my job?

I. God Commands Us to Work

Genesis 2:8, 15⁸ *The Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed.* ¹⁵ *Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.*

Imagine what it was like to work before the Fall. Adam and Eve had a clear sense that **work was much more than something they *did* – it was an expression of what they *were***. They were aware that work was a responsibility assigned by their Creator, and that they were uniquely qualified to fill this role. As they labored, **they knew that God was aware of their efforts, and they sensed His pleasure**. At times His presence was so real that work seemed like a kind of partnership. Hard work produced clear and impressive results, and they had a deep inner sense of fulfillment.

But after the Fall a great change took place. **God Himself withdrew from both relationships and work, and both love and labor were corrupted**. As Adam and Eve lost their awareness of God's presence, they began to lose their sense of the purpose of their work. *Why am I doing this . . . Why does this matter?* They no longer felt God's pleasure exclusively, but now they also felt His anger and rejection. **Work had little to do with fulfilling their design now; too often it had to do only with survival**. Work had become much harder, and it seemed boring, repetitive, and futile. In short, **work had lost much of its *meaning***.

The biblical meaning of work is far different than most people believe: *Work means fulfilling your God-given design to make an impact on the world around you.* Work was **not** the curse mankind received. Rather, it was *how* that work was to be accomplished. It would be through painfully fighting the "*cursed ground*," battling with the "*thorns and thistles*," by "*the sweat of your face*" (3:17-18).

Adam was not assigned work as a punishment for his sin; on the contrary, he was *created* to work. His punishment was that he largely lost his ability to be *fulfilled* by his labor. From now on his **work would take place in a hostile environment, involving painful toil and a nagging sense of futility**. Just as sin has alienated us from one another, so **sin has estranged us from our work**, and it continues to do so.

The result is that **we have divorced God from our work. We think of God the same way we think of the Bible**; it's appropriate for Him to accompany us to church or a Bible study, but we leave Him on the coffee table when we head for the office on Monday morning. He just doesn't seem to belong there. After all, it's *just business*, and what does God care about business?

II. The Bible Calls Work a Gift from God

Work has *never* been chiefly about money. But if work is not about money, what in the world *is* it about? The desire to work—and to *find fulfillment in it*—is a part of our human design. The perfect world would not be a world of pure leisure.

Ecclesiastes 5:18-19 ¹⁸ *Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.* ¹⁹ *Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.*

III. Jesus Modeled What a Good Worker Should Be

Luke 2:52 *And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

Twenty of His 33 years were spent in carpenter's shop. He knew what it meant to work and to work hard.

The former CEO of a major chemical company recently said, *"As you are amassing things, you don't see what you **do** have, you only see what you **don't** have. You only find meaning in things when you place them in context of eternity."*

I had an interesting conversation with my fourteen-year-old, Brooks, a few weeks ago. I asked him about the kids in his Christian school: *Do they care about learning the Bible?* He answered, *"Some do – a lot don't."* Then I asked him if the kids cared about the other subjects – *because all truth is God's truth.* We need to stop this false dichotomy in our thinking about what is "spiritual" and what is "secular." God cares about it all . . . including the way we perform in our job.

So What Type of Attitude Should I Have toward my Job?

I. I Do My Work with Excellence as to the Lord

Colossians 3:22-25 (The Message) *Servants, do what you're told by your earthly masters. And don't just do the minimum that will get you by. Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God, confident that you'll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you're serving is Christ. The sullen servant who does shoddy work will be held responsible. Being Christian doesn't cover up bad work.*

II. I Honor My Boss or Employer

Ephesians 6:5-8 (NIV) ⁵ *Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.* ⁶ *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.* ⁷ *Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men,* ⁸ *because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.*

Shortly before the turn of the century, two friends were hired on the same day by the railroad company. After a number of years, one man was still on the labor crew, repairing track, while the other had been promoted to president of the company. When asked about the difference by his co-workers, the first man said, *“I guess it goes back to the day we were hired. I went to work for an hourly wage, but he went to work for the railroad.”*

III. I Don't Gripe or Complain

Philippians 2:14-15 (NIV) ¹⁴ *Do everything without complaining or arguing,* ¹⁵ *so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.*

A negative spirit is extremely contagious. We become critical, argumentative, sour and short in our responses to others. When things go wrong, we blame others for our situation in life. What results is a negativity spiral where you infect others with a negative attitude and you sabotage your own life.

Blame is a funny thing: Blame never affirms, it always assaults; blame never mends; it always dissolves; blame never unites, it always destroys; blame never smiles, it always frowns; blame never restores, it wounds; blame never solves, it always complicates.

I like the way Chuck Swindoll said it:

The longer I live the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than success, than what other people think or say or do. It is more important than appearances, skill, or giftedness. It will make or break a company, cause a church to soar or sink, be the difference in a happy home or a home of horror. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change the past . . . we cannot change the fact that people will act a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can affect is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.

IV. I Am Content with What I Have

1 Timothy 6:6-9 (NIV) ⁶ *But godliness with contentment is great gain.* ⁷ *For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.* ⁸ *But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.* ⁹ *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.*

Work has run amuck. We think *things* will make us happy. And they won't. God calls us to be content.

Before he died, Malcolm Forbes, billionaire publisher, gave a commencement address to a graduating class eager to hear how they could become wealthy. Instead of meeting their expectations, Forbes simply said, *“As you step into the marketplace, work at something you enjoy. If you enjoy what you do, success will follow.”*

So What Do I Do?

Start thinking rightly about work – respond properly to its challenges – and modeling God’s positive attitude toward your work.

Several years ago, feminists began to encourage a program called *“Take Your Daughter to Work with You.”* They urged businesspeople to create vision in their daughters by taking them along to their places of employment. I would like to challenge you to begin a new program: *“Take Your Father to Work.”* Bring God into your job . . . and see the difference it makes.