

How Can I Find Satisfaction in My Work?

By Mike Burnham

How do you feel about your job? Are you satisfied or dissatisfied? What are some of the reasons that may cause dissatisfaction? Lack of challenge, an irritating boss or co-worker, extreme pressure to produce, low wages, poor working conditions, poor equipment, lack of respect, conflicts over procedures, lack of a sense of accomplishment, job insecurity, too many hours, conscience-violating policies, conflicts with personal or family life, physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, poor communication, discrimination, harassment, or favoritism.

The problems that so easily come to mind make it painfully obvious that the workplace can be a hotbed of dissatisfaction.

Why? And what can we do about it? Must work be a burden that we have to endure? (Ecclesiastes 2:22,23). Does God care about our jobs? Does our faith in the lord make any difference in the way we work?

Let's look at some of these questions.

First of all, we must realize that work itself is God-ordained and "work is a consequence of creation, not the fall" (Gen. 2:5,15).

The fall has changed work from a joy to a toil, a weariness. The fact of work forming an integral part of the pattern of the divine purpose of man is implied in the fourth commandment, (Exo. 20:9). In many ways Adam and Eve were like employees. But they, unlike us in our everyday employment, had a perfect job, a perfect boss, and perfect co-workers. What went wrong?

The first two laborers violated the only prohibition in the employee handbook (Gen. 2:17). They decided to serve themselves instead of the

Lord. Their action carried tragic consequences for them and every human since. Included among those results were the labor pains associated with childbirth and the pains of laboring for daily survival in a suddenly hostile world, (Gen 3:17-19). What had been a joy became a process filled with pain.

And the "thorns and thistles" were more than simply a problem that farmers would have to face.

Every occupation since then has had its own version of annoying weeds that have hindered work and caused pain. But in redemption, work is again transformed into a means of blessing, done in a new spirit. Contrary to the way we may feel sometimes, work itself is not a curse. When we learn to see it properly, we realize that in almost every job there is a way of working for and with God. A perfect life is not a work-free existence. Work was part of the Lord's blueprint for daily life in paradise.

"HOW CAN I FIND SATISFACTION IN MY WORK?"

There's the old saying, "I like work. I could sit and watch someone do it all day." But most people don't have that luxury. Besides, I doubt that many of us would find fulltime inactivity to be satisfying for very long. A Chinese proverb states, "a man grows most tired while standing still." Our sense of personal worth is closely connected to a feeling that we are accomplishing something purposeful with our lives. Because of that, work and a satisfying life are inseparable.

But unfortunately, work doesn't always give us that sense of satisfaction. What should be personally fulfilling is more often a drain on us physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally.

KNOW WHO YOU'RE WORKING FOR

One of the basic principles of finding satisfaction in work is to "know who you're working for." We're not really working for our supervisor at the store, the office, the factory, the construction site, or any other workplace. "who are we really working for?" ultimately, we are working for the Lord, (Col. 3:23; Eph. 6:6,7). He is the boss's boss, the supervisor's supervisor, the foreman's foreman, the manager's manager. That may be hard to remember as we report to work each day. But if we keep it in mind, our attitude will change.

God cares about our work because our actions on the job reflect our inner character and our level of devotion to him. We were created to reflect God's nature (Gen. 1:26-27), and we were given abilities to use for his glory. Like him, we are workers (John 5:17). Man and woman were created to use their hands and their heads to master the earth and make it productive (Gen. 1:28; 2:15-20). Instead of considering ourselves victims of our circumstances, pawns of our employers, God wants us to be people of action who positively affect our environment instead of being controlled by it.

In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus summarized the commands of God. How does what Jesus said apply to work? Love is the giving of ourselves. It seeks the highest good of another person. To love God with all our heart, soul, and mind involves giving to him everything we have. To love others as ourselves requires that we care as much about the well-being of other people as we do about ourselves.

If we apply that to the work situation, it means that our work should be done primarily for god's glory and that we work with the interests of other people in mind.

WHO DESERVES SERVICE "AS TO THE LORD?"

Our employer: sometimes this is tough to do. There was an instructor at a company-sponsored first-aid course asked one of the workers, "what's the first thing you would do if you found you had rabies?" the worker immediately answered, "bite my supervisor." the answer, though humorous, reflects how people often view their boss, as an enemy. Developing a good attitude isn't always easy. In Ephesians 6:5-8, Paul told slaves to respect their masters. Paul wasn't condoning slavery, but those people who found themselves in that situation were to serve their masters as if they were serving Christ himself. Paul was addressing slaves, remember, not employees who work somewhere by choice. Yet Paul told them to serve with "fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ. Then Paul added some motivation when he said they should do so, "knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free" (v-8). The ultimate paycheck will come from God.

The poor: Paul gave these instructions in Ephesians 4:28. Also Proverbs 19:17.

Society: we need to work for the spiritual well-being of our boss and co-workers. 1 Thes. 4:11-12 says, "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody." (NIV). The goal of work is not to gain wealth and possessions, but to serve the common good and bring glory to God. Unbelievers need to see that your faith in Christ makes a positive difference in the practical, everyday aspects of your life. When Paul wrote to Titus (2:9,10), he told him that part of the motive workers should have is to "make the teaching about God our savior attractive." "think about it"

WHY DOES GOD WANT YOU TO WORK?

What do you give to god and others when you work? Why is giving to

others more satisfying than serving only yourself? How do you use your money to help the poor? Do your co-workers know that you are a Christian---and are they drawn to Christ because of your life and example?

What about stressful situations on the job? How are Christians to view these difficulties? Paul, in his letter to the Roman believers, mentioned in (5:3-4) that difficulties produce perseverance, character, and hope. A problem on the job, then, is an opportunity to do what is right and become more Godly through it.

Another thing to keep in mind is that it pleases God for us to submit to both good and bad employers, (1 Pet. 2:18-19).

BUT WHAT IF I HATE MY JOB?

Some feel that they are entering a torture chamber every time they report to work. Some jobs are like that, more so because of the kind of people they have to work with than because of the actual work. If you find yourself in a bad work situation, you have two options: 1) if you are "stuck" because of the job market, you need to make the best of a bad situation. No matter how bad our situation we need to please the Lord by our response to inequities, stress, and conflicts. Or 2) if you are able, you should look for another job. Paul addressed slaves and masters in 1 Cor. 7:21-23. He said, "were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you---although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freeman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." (NIV).

Paul told slaves to do what they legally could to escape slavery. But to him, slavery or freedom was not the issue. The issue was a person's relationship to Jesus Christ.

The Bible takes us to a higher level than our immediate supervisor or

the board of directors. Ultimately, we serve the Lord, and no matter how good or bad our job situation, we need to please him.

"THINK ABOUT IT"

What areas of your attitude and behavior need improvement? What problems can you do something about by confronting a co-worker or a manager--in love? What problems are beyond your control?

"KEEP WORK IN IT'S PLACE"

How much of your life is spent working? If you figure an average of 8 hours a day, that's one third of your day. If you sleep 8 hours, then work takes up half the hours your awake. And if you consider commuting time, you need to tack on another hour or so each day. Then how about your preparation time and the "unwinding" afterward? It adds up to a big chunk of your life, doesn't it? It's even more when you include the time away from work that you spend thinking about it. When it's all added up, for many work is their life---at least in the time and attention devoted to it.

"IS THAT BAD?"

The answer to that depends on our needs and our attitude. The real issue is not the hours we put in but the reasons for our actions and the kind of people we are on the job. "when does work get out of control?" When we look at work as our primary source of fulfillment and we squeeze out all other interests in life---pushing our personal life, family, friends, and church into the background---then work has become our God.

The author of Ecclesiastes knew how futile that kind of life can be, (2:11). Trying to find personal fulfillment in one's work is like pursuing a mirage. Once you've reached your goals you find that the expected sense of

satisfaction was just an illusion. Read Eccl. 3:9-13. Although God has put a sense of eternity in our hearts (v-11), we get bogged down in the moment-by-moment activities of life. That can lead to frustration. Satisfaction comes to the person who puts his trust in God's sovereign control and then lives responsibly, recognizing that satisfaction with our work is a "gift of God."

Everything in this life and world is vanity until a person recognizes God's hand in everything and receives it as a gift from God to use for his glory and man's good in preparing him for glory. Proverbs 23:4 tells us---don't wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. If we fail to show restraint, we burn ourselves out--and for what purpose? The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us of the emptiness and of wealth, (Eccl. 5:12-16). It is one's relationship with God and his people that is more important than any lesser concept of success.

"DO WE WORK TO PROVIDE FOR OUR NEEDS?"

If we are getting too wrapped up in our work, we may be forgetting that ultimately it is the Lord who supplies our needs, not our own efforts. Hard work does not always equal success. In fact, though there is a place for hard work, the Lord is the one who blesses our efforts, it is a gift from God.

In Matthew 6, Jesus told his followers not to fret about what they would eat or drink, but to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; "then" God would supply their needs. Too often we get things backwards. We pursue the things of life first, thinking that we are the masters of our destinies, the sole providers of what we need to survive. And even though we may give thanks at mealtimes for god's provision, it is all too easy to take the credit ourselves. This is not to say that we should just sit back and wait for God to drop what we need into our laps. God expects us to work. Paul told the believers in Thessalonica that a person who isn't

willing to work shouldn't be given food, (2 Thes. 3:7-10).

"WHAT AREAS OF LIFE NEED OUR ATTENTION?"

There are five basic areas that deserve our time: 1) our personal life. We need to set aside special times during the week when we can rest, reflect, and put life in perspective.

2) our family; there should be time allotted to each member of the family as well as the family as a whole.

3) Our church life; here, as in our family, time should be allotted for each member or each members family as well as the church as a whole. Not weekly (there aren't enough hours) but two or three times a month get together with a church member or family, even if it's just going out for lunch or coffee.

4) Our work; work takes up most of our time. Don't let it take up more than is necessary. Work tends to expand to fill the time we allot to it. Also guard your emotional energy....God never intended for work to become psychological slavery.

5) Our community life; take time to cultivate interests and new friends. It's in our community life that we will find people to witness to.

"THINK ABOUT IT"

Why do you work? Have you given attention to all five areas of life? Would you consider yourself a workaholic, a balanced person, or someone who needs to put more effort into life?

"WORK"

Physical or mental activity directed toward the accomplishment of a

task; the labor by which a person earns his livelihood.

Man as created was intended to work. One of his primary tasks in the Garden of Eden was to "till [work] the ground" <Gen. 2:5>. Although work was ordained by God as a blessing, it became a curse as a result of the FALL <Gen. 3:17-19>. Man would now have to work for his food and much of his produce would be frustration.

The Book of Ecclesiastes teaches that work, no matter how noble and diligently pursued, is rendered meaningless in a world cursed at the Fall <Eccl. 4:4>. Work in a fallen world is frequently reduced to exploitation and oppression. Nevertheless, through redemption, work finds meaning.

God ordained that six days be spent in work with one day of rest <Ex. 20:9>. The people of God in the Old Testament are frequently encountered performing works in service to God, for instance, in the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness <Exodus 26> and the Temple <1 Chr. 28:10>.

Much of the WISDOM LITERATURE of the Old Testament praises hard work <Prov. 14:23; 31:27>, while it condemns and ridicules laziness <Prov. 6:6-11; 21:25>.

The same attitude is found in the New Testament. Paul and his associates worked <1 Cor. 4:12; 9:6>, and they expected other believers to work and earn their own support <2 Thes. 3:10>.

In the Bible God's mighty acts are called works. Creation <Ps. 8:3,6; 19:1; 102:25>, redemptive acts in history like the Exodus <Judg. 2:7,10>, and even wrath <Is. 28:21> are referred to as God's work. Jesus Christ's work was given to Him by His Father. His task was to accomplish redemption for man on the Cross <John 4:34; 5:36; 9:4; 10:38; 15:24; 17:4>. Also see WORKS. (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary) (Copyright (C) 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)