

Work is Worship

Introduction:

In this essay I am going to focus on work; how it is considered to be a curse in modern, secular society and my own belief that doing not only the Father's "work", but also doing it His way, is ultimately our first form of worship. I will be illustrating how this has impacted my own life and what the true meaning of the word "work" is when viewed from a biblical perspective. I will be using my own life experiences to portray the distinction between labouring and worship through work as a condition that stems out of my position as a son. I will illustrate how this perspective can transform everyday tasks into acts of worship, viewing work not merely as a means of earning a living but as a way to express biblical values and principles and also how empowering others through my work becomes worship.

Why is work considered to be a curse?

In the Bible, the story of Creation depicts how God gave life to the earth and everything on it and gave stewardship of it all over to man to tend to His Creation. Then came the fall; after Adam and Eve disobeyed God, He cursed the earth and work became associated with suffering and toil. As is written in Genesis: "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."¹

If we look at life and the world today, specifically in the marketplace, work is viewed as something that people *have* to do to earn a living so that they can provide for themselves and their families. Added to this, the sense of entitlement evident in society today

brings people to the inevitable conclusion that they are deserving of anything and everything their hearts desire and, even more alarming, it is ultimately the government's responsibility to provide for them. They do not want to put in the work for the reward that they feel they are entitled to. This leads to a dependence on the state, rather than a dependence on God. It further results in a lack of work ethic, character building, stewardship skills and knowledge and generational transfer.

I, too, subscribed to the narrative that work is a curse. It was a means to an end – a way to fund my lifestyle of worldly and material pursuits. I have always been a hard worker, somebody who applies myself to the best of my abilities, putting in long hours and applying all my “own” talents and gifts. I was only interested in serving myself and those I deemed worthy of sharing in my hard-won success. After all, I was the one who put in the hard work and was therefore deserving of the rewards. However, no matter how much I put in and got out in return, I never experienced peace or joy out of it, mainly because of my own performance-based mindset. There was never any feeling of fulfilment or real sense of accomplishment; it was just a job I was doing on my own.

The True Meaning of work

It is true that work is the means by which we acquire earthly riches so that we can support ourselves and our families and live our lives on earth. But if we really consider that statement, it only describes a job, which is merely a small part of true work! Work is an everlasting calling; in a biblical sense, work is part of every aspect of everyday life in the sense that our values, principles and morals are all applicable in every moment, even though they are not all applied at the same time or in every situation. God Himself is always working as referenced in John 5 where Jesus tells his disciples “My Father is working until now and I Myself am working.” ²

This does not mean that you must work day and night, but it does mean that you are available to be used by the Holy Spirit in every instance when you are called upon by God. Work is relationally based – either between ourselves and God, or between ourselves and others with God at the centre. Where work becomes worship, is where we apply wisdom by using our God-given gifts and talents in stewarding God’s creation and His people and empowering others by bringing out what God has placed inside of them.³

This will certainly require some form of personal sacrifice. Our work on earth is the training ground for what God has planned for us in eternity. That is not to say that whatever job we have on earth is necessarily the job we will have in Heaven, only that it is the preparation for the skills, ethics, principles and values we will most definitely be applying into eternity. As Dennis Peacocke states in his book *Doing Business God’s Way*: “You are called to discover His management principles of life, relationships, and stewardship in the scriptures; practice them personally and with others; and let the Holy Spirit train you as to their proper use and appropriate applications.”⁴

Jesus is a great example – he was a skilled carpenter and his earthly father, Joseph, played an essential role in teaching and training Jesus in these skills and also imparting spiritually to Him that which can only be done by co-labouring with discipline and a clear understanding and purpose of achieving God’s ultimate will. Joseph must have been a skilled and disciplined person himself in order to impart those characteristic and skills to Jesus from a young age. Joseph was, after all, not Jesus’s biological father but still fulfilled that role which shows tremendous discipline and displays his true character of taking ownership and accountability.⁵ The skills Jesus received were practiced and honed over many years, not for His own enrichment but as preparation and training for His plus minus three and a half years of ministry on the

earth. Jesus, although He is God, was also a man and subject to the same temptations as we all are, therefore he had to be trained and prepared through His labour with Joseph which required personal sacrifice from both parties.

From a young age, a strong work ethic was instilled in me through my grandparents and parents and I was taught to do things to the best of my abilities and to really apply myself. The skills I learned and the attitude I had towards work brought me tremendous favour from the moment I entered the marketplace and with working hard came financial gain. However, financial gain without the knowledge of proper stewardship and Godly values brought about a lot of pride, ego and selfishness and naturally did not carry the Spirit of God forward. I developed a superiority attitude and any problems and struggles I experienced were never due to any fault of my own – in my mind it was always other people, or God's fault. I was never going to change; everybody else had to shape up or ship out.

In my journey with God over the last few years, I have changed that attitude to one of humility and have learned to put my ego aside and submit to His will for my life and recognise the favour that I have always experienced as the true blessing from my Father that it is. At that point in my life, submitting to the Father, as necessary as it was, was not an easy process. In that process, life still happened; family and financial problems, overcoming drug addiction, personal sacrifices and losses – both real and perceived - all stretched me to what felt like near breaking point. It was a period in my journey that I did not enjoy at all, but I know now that Father through His Spirit was reshaping me to prepare me and start training me for the next phase of His plan for me. Although I had a very strong Christian upbringing, I always saw God as just that – God – and that created a performance-based attitude in me towards Him.

It was only when I received Him as my Father that I accepted my position as His son and allowed Him to change my condition through my position.

Everyday tasks as acts of worship

Work is not just a physical obligation, it is also a spiritual act. Working alone, apart from God, might fill your bank account, but this is not how we store up riches in Heaven. Work cannot be worship if it is not led by the Holy Spirit and God is not in it!

By approaching daily responsibilities intentionally and wholeheartedly, with God in control of the process through His Spirit, ordinary and everyday tasks are transformed into acts of worship. This includes conducting our work with diligence and integrity, caring for family or helping others. Our work becomes worship when we identify that God is involved in that moment and we work with Him to achieve His will and not our own.

The golden rule is that you must be prepared to give away what you want to receive.⁶ “And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”⁷

Conclusion

My work has not become easier or less – in actual fact my responsibilities have grown over the years. For most of my life I have been labouring on my own and I have come to recognise that what is in me that has caused relational breakdown, firstly with God and the Holy Spirit and also with others.

I learned that I had to submit to my Father – not only my heart, but my whole life. I had to allow Him to teach me and train me so that all things that I do in my life honour Him in a way where it leaves me, and also others, changed. “Change happens from the

inside out and the bottom up,”⁸ I have learned that storing up riches in Heaven means doing the spiritual things that glorify God through my work and everyday life. It is using my God-given gifts and talents to display the love, the peace and the joy that come from labouring together with the Father by serving others with values, principles and integrity that bring us into right standing with each other and also with God, ultimately achieving His will together. It is honouring Him with everything - that means spiritually, monetarily, relationally and physically. Both in how we acquire it, and also how we use it.

ENDNOTES

1. *The Holy Bible*, Genesis 3:17-19, New King James Version
2. *The Holy Bible*, John 5:17, New King James Version
3. Peacocke, Dennis (ed) (2014): *Doing Business God's Way*. 2nd edn. (New York: REBUILD)
4. Peacocke, Dennis (ed) (2014): *Doing Business God's Way*. 2nd edn. (New York: REBUILD)
5. Collins, Jim (2001): *Good to Great*. New York: Harper Collins
6. Peacocke, Dennis (2014): *Business Leadership School: BLS200 Manual*.
Teaching notes from: GoStrategic
7. *The Holy Bible*, Colossians 3:23-24, New King James Version
8. Peacocke, Dennis (2014): *Business Leadership School: BLS200 Manual*.
Teaching notes from: GoStrategic

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Collins, Jim (2001): *Good to Great*
New York: Harper Collins
- Collins, Jim and Porras, Jerry I (1994): *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*
New York: Harper Business
- *NKJV Faithlife Illustrated Study Bible* (2018), New King James Version.
Grand Rapids: Zondervan
- Peacocke, Dennis (ed) (2014): *Doing Business God's Way*. 2nd edn.
Santa Rosa: REBUILD