

FAITH AND PRACTICE

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WORK AND VOCATION

Your Work Matters 2

An introduction to this issue of Faith and Practice
Joel S. Gillespie, Managing Editor

Work Through the Ages 4

How vocation has been viewed by the Church through the centuries
John H. Ball, Pastor of Bartow ARP Church, Bartow, FL

The Creation Mandate 12

Going back to the beginning to see why we work
Joel S. Gillespie, Managing Editor, and Pastor of Covenant Fellowship, Greensboro, NC

The Gift of God's Day 25

Putting our work in perspective as we cease from work and remember our God
Glen C. Knecht, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC

The Frustration of Work 35

Advice from the "Teacher" of Ecclesiastes for dealing with the frustrations of work
Mark E. Ross, Associate Pastor for Teaching, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC

Children and Their Work 47

Equipping our children for a lifetime of effective work
Mardi Keyes, Worker and Lecturer at L'Abri Fellowship, Southborough, MA

Working People

Working people tell about their work. See the sidebar to the right
All of the writers reside and work in the Greensboro, NC area

VIGNETTES

White Collar Blues	22
We Should Know Better	32
Reflecting Upon Your Work	43
Creation and Redemption	44

WORKING PEOPLE

County Attorney	9
Police Officer	10
Accountant	20
Mom	23
Engineer	31
Banker	34
Counselor	42
Painter	46

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Your Work Matters

Joel Gillespie

Father, we thank You for this food which You have provided. We thank You for our home, and for all of the many ways You have watched over us this day.

Several times each day my wife and I have cause to pray for and with our children. Many of these prayers are simple and heartfelt prayers of gratitude. We are alive and well, safe, well fed and housed, growing and learning, rich in relationships and friends. God has been merciful and has taken care of and sustained us yet another day.

But how it is that God has taken care of us? The food didn't just plop down from heaven onto our table. Our clothes didn't just miraculously appear on our backs. We were not transported directly from home to office. No! God sustains and cares for and nurtures His creatures usually through secondary means - through the "laws of nature" and the agency of His creatures. That is, He uses His creatures to care for and nourish His creatures. He uses His creatures' work to take care of His creation.

The broccoli we ate tonight was grown by some farmer somewhere and transported by truck drivers to a store, whose employees laid it out in a clean and attractive display, and sold it to me for a reasonable price. Someone built the display, manufactured the cool mist spray that keeps the vegetables moist and fresh, and made and sold the refrigerant that keeps the fruit and veggie department so cold. Some bank loaned money to the owner of the store so he could get his business up and running in my neighborhood, which meant that some banker sat down and talked face to face with some store owner.

The broccoli was heated and cooked in a pot made by someone, and sold by someone to a store where we bought it. Of course, we took a car to the store to buy the pot, and drove safely on good tires made from oil obtained from somewhere. The roads were level, well lit, and safe to travel. The rain washed off the roads into storm drains, keeping us from sliding around

and having an accident. Who wrote the computer program that controlled the traffic lights? Who arranged the contract between the city and the road crew that paved the road? What government official made sure that safety regulations were being met when the road was laid out in the first place? Who made the signs, the light bulbs in the traffic lights, the wire carrying the signals to the switches?

As I ate my broccoli, I was warm and comfortable, as were my wife and kids. Shoes, socks, undergarments, pants, shirts - all came from somewhere, maybe even far away. Our house, heated by a gas furnace, was comfortable and cozy. Who grew the cotton in my jeans? Who dug the iron ore, who made the steel, who cut and bent the steel and wrapped it in insulation for the duct work in my attic? Who loaned the money to the local heating company to start his business? Who made his tools? Who traveled around and sold these tools to the retail outlets that sold the tools to the installer who put in my gas furnace? And what person kept the books for the heating company that sold me my furnace? Who answered the phone when I called, and got me in touch with the sales person? Who kept that office organized and equipped and running smoothly so that I could be well served when I called with an inquiry?

The water I drank tonight with my broccoli came from a nearby lake through a series of concrete and PVC pipes into my house. Someone made sure the water quality was acceptable. Someone somewhere worked hard to make sure the watershed wasn't over-developed, so that my family and I could have clean water to drink.

As we prayed tonight, the thought came to me: Who taught us to pray? Who told us about this God to Whom we give thanks? Who told us about the Lord Jesus Christ, that we could have access to this Creator God, and have peace of heart and mind?

So intricately connected and intertwined are we, that many, if not most of you reading this article have had some role in providing for my needs, and certainly a role in providing for the

Who dug the iron ore, who made the steel, who cut and bent the steel and wrapped it in insulation for the duct work in my attic?

needs of others. God is using your work to take care of His creation. God is including you in His ministry of sustaining and preserving His creation. So when I and many others thanked God tonight, you were included in our thanksgiving. Thank you. Your work matters. It has kept me and my family safe, well fed and clothed, warm and comfortable, just as we prayed.

The Articles That Follow

The theme of this issue of Faith and Practice is that our everyday work matters. There have been times in history when this fact has been better understood than it is today. In "Work Through the Ages," John Ball gives an excellent overview of how the Church has understood work and vocation over the centuries. He introduces the dilemma of "dualism" that has continued over the years to undermine a proper view of work, and calls us back to the historic Biblical and Reformed perspective. The Biblical understanding of work is drawn out in more detail in "The Creation Mandate." Here we see the incredible privilege that is ours in participating with God in His work of sustaining and caring for His creation.

But of course, life is not just working, nor even just working with God. It is also knowing and having relationship with Him. In "The Gift of God's Day," Glen Knecht reminds us that we are called not only to work, but to cease from working as well. Sabbath is a precious gift of God to His creatures, and we are to enter into that gift. In it He protects us from being completely absorbed in and overwhelmed by the task of ruling over the earth, and He calls us back to Himself. For how tiresome work can be! In "The Frustration of Work," Mark Ross shows us that we are not the first to question the value of our work. He takes us back to "the Teacher" of Ecclesiastes, who also struggled with seeing the significance of his labor "under the sun." For a curse has been placed upon our work, and much of what we do does not seem to last. But praise be to God, that in the promise of eternal life in Christ, even the most menial tasks performed as unto the Lord have significance to God and will be rewarded!

If all of this is hard enough for us as adults

to remember and understand, how it also must be so for our children. In "Children and Their Work," Mardi Keyes helps us to see how shifting sociological and demographic patterns have changed the nature of childhood and adolescence in America, and made it more difficult for our children to lay hold of the privilege of work. But she brings practical advice as well as perceptive analysis, so that we can properly train and equip our children to enter into productive work.

Working People

Work is not just something we talk and write about, it's something we do, day after day, year after year. And so in this issue of Faith and Practice we bring to you eight first-hand accounts of real everyday work, performed by real working people. These "Working People" testimonies are found throughout the issue, between the larger articles. I hope you can relate to these writers, all of whom live and work in the Greensboro area, and attend ARP churches there.

Vignettes

Also dispersed through this issue are a few personal reflections from me about work and vocation today.

And I encourage you to take time to reflect upon your own work. How is it that God uses your work - the work itself - to care for and serve others? What are the struggles that you go through in your work, and how do you understand your calling as a Christian in the midst of those struggles? What opportunities does God give you to love and serve others in your workplace? On page 43 you will find the same outline used by the "Working People" writers to prepare their articles. Perhaps writing your own article will help you in what God has called you to do in your work.

On behalf of the Board of Publications, and the Editorial Committee of Faith and Practice, I hope you enjoy this issue on Work and Vocation!

So when I and many others thanked God tonight, you were included in our thanksgiving.

Work Through the Ages

John Ball

A weather-worn tombstone in an obscure English cemetery bears this epitaph:

*Here lies John Wheatley, cobbler.
He cobbled shoes in this village for
forty and five years, unto the Glory of God.*

Repairing shoes for the glory of God? Certainly this is a strange notion, or would have been thought so by many down through the years. Can such mundane work be done for God's glory? Can such a vocation have anything to do with advancing the kingdom of God?

Using the collective genius of the sixteenth century reformers as a "pivot point," this article will summarize medieval views of "vocation" which prevailed on the eve of the Protestant Reformation. The reformers' "better way" will then be laid out in order to show how the convictions of Luther and Calvin in particular might speak to us even today.

Dualism

The prevailing worldview at the dawn of the sixteenth century was one of explicit dualism. By "dualism" we mean that outlook which drives a wedge between the so-called "secular" world of activities and duties, and the "sacred" world of spiritual things and "God's work." In this view, God is quite detached from, and disinterested in, normal human bodily life. There is that which is sacred and thus of infinite value, and that which is mundane and of only fleeting significance. Callings which are sacred, that is, the Christian "offices," are reserved for elite churchmen and withdrawn monastics. Common, or lay believers, those who are viewed as having no special Christian calling to "official" clerical positions of ministry, are relegated to their daily routines. Of course these daily routines might occasionally be interrupted for the more noble activities of spiritual disciplines or attendance at the mass. Intrinsic in this world view is a "great gulf fixed" between the clergy and the laity; between those

with callings from above and those without such a blessing.

The Ancient World

The dualistic view described above, especially as it related to one's work or vocation, was itself a product of the preceding centuries. At the very foundations of Western societal structures was the classical world of Greece and Rome. To the Greeks manual labor was a curse and something below the dignity of a free man. Slaves and artisans toiled so that the elite might devote themselves to higher callings, the "exercise of the mind in art, philosophy and politics."¹ The Roman mind-set continued to propagate such a dichotomy. Indeed, Cicero called both the toil of a hired worker and the trade of the retailer, "sordid."²

Nor was the emerging Christian Church free from dualistic impulses, as evidenced by Gnostic philosophical influences and the relatively early appearance of monasticism. Gnosticism (from the Greek word *gnosis* - "knowledge") taught that the spirit world, the realm of ideas and knowledge, was good and pure. Conversely, the world of matter, the bodily world and things here below, constituted an evil realm (even one created by an evil god) from which we should long to escape. Though the Church eventually repulsed and denounced Gnosticism, the distrust of the physical world and the longing to be removed from it continued to be evident in the withdrawal-oriented mentality of monasticism. Sadly, from almost the beginning, the verdict rendered by Brian Walsh appears to be true: "Christianity has been plagued with dualism."³

The Medieval Devolution

This dualism which underlies the distinction between the sacred and the secular, and between those with "real" callings and those without, became explicit, and we might say "authorized," in the Middle Ages. Monks claimed for themselves the term "religious" which certainly

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implied that others were not. Monastic theology did not speak to the idea of vocation. The butcher, the yeoman farmer, the retailer, all of whom remained in the world, were of little concern to the monks. Indeed, the monks spoke little about "calling," even in regard to themselves, preferring to insist that they had elected the withdrawn lifestyle for themselves as a meritorious gift to God.⁴

In philosophy and theology this dualism, this dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, became institutionalized by "the Doctor of the Church," Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274). In his massive *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas sought to present a synthesis of classical (Aristotelian) and Christian thought. For Aquinas all reality was seen as compartmentalized. Nature and things mundane constituted a substructure for a Christian superstructure. Or stated in another way, grace completes or is added on top (*donum superadditum*) of nature. Therefore, in regard to vocation, some (the "religious") operated in the realm of grace while others merely passed their days toiling in the sphere of nature.⁵

In contrast with the early Gnostics, the Church gave its blessing to everyday life by sacralizing the normal events of life — birth, marriage, and death, for example. But it was only those specially called into the priesthood who could grant these blessings. By solemnizing a marriage, or having a priest bless a new market near the town square, the Church rejected the total dualism of the Gnostics. Nevertheless, the blessings gave indication that it was the "upper story," the world of grace and the Church, which was really significant, which had the power to so bless. The butcher might seek the blessing of the priest, but it was the latter who really had a "first class" calling!

The Renaissance Correction And The Reformational Clarity

Leland Ryken has astutely noted that historians are often so preoccupied with what the Reformation did to revolutionize attitudes about work, that they ignore important corrections which arose during the Renaissance.⁶ Natural beauty, landscapes, and contemporary settings (even if only in the background) began to reappear in Renaissance art, in contrast to the

almost exclusive medieval use of things religious (witness the ever-present halos). So too is a change perceived in how everyday work was viewed by writers, philosophers and theologians.⁷ With the Renaissance, work began to be seen as a noble duty, and craftsmanship began to be celebrated.

With work, as in other things, small seeds that may be discernible in the Renaissance soil, take root and blossom in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Because of the particular influence of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and John Calvin (1509-1564), the medieval division of work into the realms of the sacred and the secular was rejected. Positively, the concept of vocation or calling was developed whereby it was affirmed that God calls people to different tasks in this world and all is to be done for His honor and glory.

A Proper View of Vocation

As is well known, Luther set in bold relief the truth of the "priesthood of all believers." And by his denial of any hierarchy of callings, the foundations for monasticism collapsed in Germany. Noting the diversity of callings, and clearly implying their equivalent legitimacy, Luther affirmed that ministers, magistrates, parents, children, masters and servants are all true "saints" by the embrace of Christ and each must "do his duty in his vocation according to the rule of God's word."⁸ Luther further noted that "every pious husband, servant, maid, or faithful worker must be said to have a station that is excellent, high, and godly." If this proper view of vocation were better known, says Luther, the "monasteries would be done away with."⁹

John Calvin developed even more fully a theology of vocation. Calvin exhorts each person to realize that God appoints for every person his particular way of life. "No task will be so sordid or base (provided you obey your calling in it) that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight."¹⁰ Because God is sovereign over all of life, and because by the cultural mandate we are God's stewards in this world, dignity is attached to all human work.

Luther further noted that "every pious husband, servant, maid, or faithful worker must be said to have a station that is excellent, high, and godly."

The Enlightenment Beclouding

In this historical overview, having arrived at what I have called Reformational "clarity," one might suppose that we have stumbled upon the source of what is often called the "Protestant work ethic." On the contrary, what many today call the Protestant work ethic is actually a secularized perversion that would be distasteful to the Reformers. With the so called "Enlightenment" of the eighteenth century came a gradual removal of the Protestant work ethic from its Christian context. And to this day the "work ethic" is commonly understood as a "creed of personal success."¹¹

Benjamin Franklin's popular proverbial sayings are demonstrative of the Enlightenment perversion of a Biblically rooted concept of vocation which the Reformers had articulated. With the Enlightenment, gone is the aspiration to glorify God in all things. Gone as well is the idea of work as creaturely stewardship. Rather, tenets of human reason, self-sufficiency, a transcendent albeit uninvolved deity, self interest, and expediency all govern thought about work and vocation. In Deism, with which Franklin is usually associated, God exists something as a great watchmaker who has wound his clock and is essentially uninvolved as the days and years of everyday life "tick away." Hard work and thrift might indeed bring one abundance and pleasure, but it is not work done consciously *coram deo*, before the face of God. Calvin had asserted that our faithfulness in our work would shine and be very precious in God's sight. How vastly different is Benjamin Franklin's "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise."

The Weber Thesis

Because this is an historical survey, mention needs to be made of the so-called "Weber Thesis." Max Weber, a professor of economics in Germany, published a two-part study in 1904-1905 which continues to generate great debate today. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*¹² puts forth the notion that Calvinism brings along with it not only a sense of the nobility of every vocation, but also the virtues of thrift, systematic behavior, and high ethics.

Weber never claimed a direct and uncomplicated link between Calvinism and capitalism, though less sophisticated supporters and critics alike thought he had done so. Weber had to sift through the Enlightenment perversion of the "Protestant work ethic" to find the reformers' teaching on vocation. He was successful in at least showing the importance of Calvinism, as a religious movement, to economic development.¹³

Healthy Developments

A few more recent discussions regarding work and vocation are worth noting at this point. In an article entitled "*Recovering Vocation Today*," the late Klaus Bockmuehl asserts that we have not yet fully embraced the Reformational teaching about work.¹⁴ He bemoans the fact that so many evangelicals have a low concept of civil vocation. In a sentence bursting with implication, Bockmuehl affirms: "Sanctification takes place *within* (emphasis mine) one's civil vocation." This means that God's work of sanctification takes place as our callings are carried out faithfully day by day, not as we seek to withdraw.

Bockmuehl feels that we still have a long way to go to capture a proper Biblical view of vocation. Happily, good work has been done in this regard, especially among thinkers in the Reformed tradition. In his Princeton lectures of a century ago, Abraham Kuyper taught that "office" or vocation, properly understood, means that we are "first of all, servants of God; second, we are guardians of our joint humanity (including our own lives); finally, we are also stewards of the manifold riches of the cosmos."¹⁵ For the believer, there is not one area of our lives, whether it be our work, our homes, our activities of leisure, our relationships, our voting, our community or church involvement, in which this profession of faith can be laid aside: "Christ is Lord!"

In a recent discussion of sanctification Gordon Spykman notes that Christians need to realize that God's claim

...embraces all of life, in its total extent and in all its parts. . . . Nothing is beyond the reach of the life-renewing power of

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faith. It touches even the most mundane bread-and-butter, dollars-and-cents issues of daily living.¹⁶

Recent literature on worldviews also has much to say in regard to the proper view of work and calling. Increasingly, dualistic tendencies are being recognized for what they are, and are being laid aside. Our Christian faith being Biblically informed must be brought to bear upon every area of our lives, each being brought under the Lordship of Christ! Reformed reflection on world-view has taken distinctive shape in the twentieth century especially as a result of the work of Dutch scholars like A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck, H. Dooyeweerd, and D.H.T. Vollenhoven.

The desire to come to an "integral" perspective as opposed to a dualistic one is a reflection of reformational thinking. Consider this from a present-day Reformed scholar:

Everything created by God is good and is reclaimed by Jesus Christ. The question is not 'Does this belong to Christ too?' The question is rather, 'What is the most effective manner of bringing reformation and sanctification to this area of our lives?'¹⁷

Judith Shelly shows how this is played out in our lives:

We are here to live in relationship to God and to contribute to His ongoing work of creation and redemption. In some way, our work should be an expression of worship, a means of service and evangelism, and an exercise in stewardship. That encompasses a wide range of vocational choices. A plumber who cheerfully arrives at six o'clock in the morning to fix an overflowing drain, having had his prayer time in the truck on the way, is fulfilling God's qualifications. So is the business executive who manages a department with fairness and effectiveness in order to produce a needed product, while gently sharing his faith with his co-workers.¹⁸

Certainly there is no dualism at work here!

Good thinking about work and vocation is also being done by those in other Christian traditions. Miroslav Volf, writing from within the Pentecostal tradition, has offered an interesting perspective shift. Volf calls for a shift from what he calls a vocational view of work to a charismatic or pneumatological one. He views the former as rooted in the creation order and prefers to establish a theology of work from within the framework of the consummation, i.e., the last days. Whatever we may think of Volf's overall paradigm, we certainly concur when he writes:

Since the whole life of the Christian is by definition a life in the Spirit, work cannot be an exception, whether that work is ecclesiastical or secular. Work in the Spirit is one dimension of the Christian's walk in the Spirit (cf. Romans 8:4; Galatians 5:16ff).¹⁹

In another encouraging development, Christians are not only beginning to think specifically about how their faith relates to their workaday lives, but small groups and classes are viewing video series and studying books like *Your Work Matters To God* and *Christianity In The Workplace*.²⁰

These are hopeful signs indeed.

Endnotes

¹ Leland Ryken, *Work And Leisure In Christian Perspective* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1987) p. 64.

² Ryken, p. 65.

³ Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984) p. 107.

⁴ Klaus Bockmuehl, "Recovering Vision Today" in *With Heart, Mind and Strength: The Best of Crux 1979-1989 Volume One* (Langley, B.C.: Credo Publishing, 1994) pp. 88-89.

⁵ Walsh and Middleton, pp. 112-113.

⁶ Ryken, pp. 67-68.

⁷ Consider Albrecht Durer's (1471-1528) masterful works of art "The Hare" (1502), and "The Lobster" (1495), and his sedate "Young

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Woman In Netherlandish Dress" (1521). In Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), the medieval outlook is turned on its head as all work is viewed equally and the "idle" priests and monks are chastised.

⁸ Martin Luther, "Commentary On Galatians," in John Dilleburger (ed.) *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1961) p. 159.

⁹ Martin Luther, *Sermon On the Mount and the Magnificat*, Luther's Work's: American Edition, vol. 21 (Saint Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1963) p. 257.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 10, 6. (Battles edition, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) The careful reader of both Luther and Calvin may be somewhat puzzled by what appears to be a statist attitude whereby each one must realize his calling and his "station" in life and therein be content. In Calvin, vocation is actually termed a "sentry post." Certainly early Protestant conceptions of vocation were and are open for refinement.

¹¹ Ryken, p. 69.

¹² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic And The Spirit Of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

¹³ In 1976 the brilliant French politician and diplomat Alain Peyrefitte wrote his *Le Mal Francais* (English edition, *The Trouble With France*, New York: Alfred Knoff, 1981) in which he reviewed the Weber thesis and saw it evidenced in his own economically troubled country. This is a controversial book indeed.

¹⁴ Bockmuehl, p. 94.

¹⁵ Abraham Kuypers, *Lectures On Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) pp. 19f.

¹⁶ Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm For Doing Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) p. 497.

¹⁷ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics For A Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) p. 94.

¹⁸ Judith A. Shelly, *Not Just A Job: Serving Christ In Your Work* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985) p. 125.

¹⁹ Miroslav, Volf, *Work In The Spirit: Toward A Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford Press, 1991) viii.

²⁰ Dean Coddington and Donald Orvis, *Christianity In The Workplace: Your Faith On The*

Job (Elgin: David C. Cook, 1989); Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (book and video series - Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987).

**Certainly early
Protestant
conceptions of
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County Attorney

Joyce Terres

I am an attorney. It is still amazing to hear that title as a description of who I am. Yet equally important to me in terms of my work and vocation is the title of "mother." I am also wife, daughter, sister, friend, co-worker, and neighbor. But the first two roles consume the greater part of my time, thought, and energy.

Twenty-some years ago, as I graduated from high school, I never imagined that one day I would be an attorney. I grew up in a conservative Christian home. My father worked as an electrical engineer. My mother, who had worked as a registered nurse before having children, raised five girls and one boy while maintaining our home. Apart from my teachers in school, I did not personally know any women who worked outside of the home. It was easy therefore to picture myself as a wife and mother. To see myself as an attorney would have been beyond comprehension during my childhood years.

Attorney, and Mom

A few weeks ago, as I was driving home from my office at 6:45 on a Sunday evening, the full weight of my responsibilities came upon me. My daughter had had surgery three days before. Without hesitation, I had arranged to be with her through her surgery and during her remaining time in the hospital. Instinctively I knew that children want and need their mothers close by in times of sickness and pain. But now, three days later, my mind had turned to my job. I knew that work had accumulated during my absence, and that more work would pile up in the week ahead. I was torn between my desire to meet her needs and my desire to perform well at my job.

It is often difficult to balance these desires. But being a mother makes me a better attorney. And being an attorney makes me a better mother. Several years ago, before my daughter was born, I was the director of a Victim Assistance Program in a district attorney's office. I had been working with a young victim of sexual

abuse, helping to prepare her for testifying in court. I was also talking with her mother, discussing the impact of the situation on both her life and her daughter's life. The mother asked me if I had any children. I said that I did not. Then she looked at me and said, kindly, but pointedly, "then you just cannot understand." I sensed at the time that she was right. Now I know that she was right. If I had never become a mother I would never have known of a love so intense that a child's pain becomes my own, a love that would do about anything to protect a child from harm. Now I know. And this translates into a greater love for those that are weak and vulnerable and oppressed.

It would be hard for me to be a stay-at-home mom. I respect those who are, but I would not be a good mom if I were home all day. Something in me needs to be out in the world. It fulfills a need in me, and enables me to be more rested and content in my mothering. My daughter and I talk about my work, and she learns a lot from me about the world out there. Because of the kind of work I do, my daughter is aware of many of the needs and problems that are in people's lives. Sometimes she has to understand that other people need Mommy more than she needs Mommy. Sometimes her needs during the day require Mommy's attention, as with her surgery. I try to keep it balanced. My husband, of course, helps a lot, making it easier for me to work outside of the home.

Preparing Me

Although I can never fully understand God's ways, I can often see His hand more clearly as I look back on my life. After graduating from college, and then from graduate school, I worked in the human services field with chronically mentally ill adults, with children at risk for delinquency, and with victims of crime. All of these experiences prepared me for the various aspects of my current work.

I work in the legal department of the county government. I am primarily involved as legal counsel for the social services department. This department is mandated to protect abused, neglected, and dependent juveniles and disabled adults. In addition, this department encompasses the child-support enforcement agency which ini-

It is often difficult to balance these desires. But being a mother makes me a better attorney. And being an attorney makes me a better mother.

tiates and enforces child-support orders for thousands of cases.

My days are rarely predictable, and can be categorized as either office days or court days. On office days I spend a tremendous amount of time on the telephone. Sometimes I meet face to face with the social workers to discuss cases and prepare for court. I read professional literature, letters, legal documents, memos, and case records. I prepare orders, motions, briefs, and other legal documents on my computer. I may find myself plunging into the world of taxation, animal control, local government finance, health regulations, etc.

***I perform
"triage" every-
day, deciding
whose case
merits my
attention to-
day, and
whose can be
put off until
another day.***

Revolving Door

I spend about two full days per week in court, and one or two hours here and there on other days. When I am in juvenile and child support court, I present the county's cases to the judge. My child-support days are physically and mentally draining, since I am literally on my feet for hours at a time, presenting case after case in revolving-door fashion, often having well over a hundred cases on the docket in a day. Juvenile court days are more emotionally taxing. There are fewer cases per day, usually no more than forty, but the cases are more complex, and may involve passionate and heated argument over various issues. On other court days I may appear before the Clerk of Court for a hearing in which the county alleges that an individual is incompetent and should have a guardian appointed. Or I may appear before a civil court judge as when a child support case has become entwined with a custody hearing.

My responsibilities are great, and the consequences of my work significant in the lives of many people every day. There is never enough time or energy to do all I think I should do. I often feel like an "emergency room" lawyer: "just patch 'em up and ship 'em out!" I perform "triage" everyday, deciding whose case merits my attention today, and whose can be put off until another day.

Through my job I see the faces of all of the major social problems in our society. I see the ravaging effects of child abuse, domestic violence, substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, and poverty. I see desperate people, lonely people,

sick people, and angry people. I have the opportunity to help protect the lives of many of the weaker people in our society, but also to make the lives of other's more difficult as the court forces them to be accountable for their child support or to lose custody of an abused child. My work is not "fun," although God brings moments of joy into each day.

But I believe this is the work He is calling me right now to do. I believe that at times I am God's light in a dark world. But usually I struggle, day in and day out, just to do the job that is before me as well as I can, with whatever strength and wisdom that God provides.

Police Officer

Joey Barwick

I am a police officer. For 7 1/2 years I have worked primarily in and around a government housing area called "Morningside Homes." We refer to it simply as "The Grove." I also cruise the neighborhoods around "The Grove." In these 7 1/2 years I have been shot at, hit in the nose, slapped across the face, put in a head lock, spit at, and scratched in the face. Lots of different things have been thrown at me like flower pots and quart-sized bottles of beer. My life has been threatened, and the lives of my family members have been threatened. I've been in high-speed car chases, low-speed foot chases, and drug raids. I've rushed into burning houses, done CPR, and patched up bloody people. I have investigated traffic fatalities, homicides, rapes, burglaries, and robberies.

These exciting things seldom happen all at once. There are those long, slow nights when I almost go crazy with boredom. Then there are nights when I'm so busy I don't even get a chance to eat. Most nights are a mixture of the

two, but overall things are more busy than slow. I never know what's going to happen. Between the exciting things there is the paper work, the tedious domestic incidents, traffic accidents, and drunks to deal with.

I work permanent night shift in a patrol car, four days on, four days off, 8:15 p.m. until 6:45 a.m. My car is my office. I can't walk down the hall to the bathroom or to the water fountain. I wear about 15-20 pounds of equipment, including a bullet-proof vest with a metal sheet placed in front. I carry a gun, mace, handcuffs, an asp (police baton), a portable radio, and an extra magazine of ammo. In my car I carry several different forms, reports, and various types of paper work.

Lord, Keep Me Safe Tonight

I hope that people sleep better because I am on patrol all night. They may pray "Lord, keep us safe tonight," and I know that the Lord uses me to answer those prayers. But I have yet to receive a letter of appreciation or commendation from anyone in the area I patrol. They don't complain about me, and they don't go out of their way to thank me. They take me for granted, I guess. Nevertheless, there is satisfaction in a job well done. Being able to back up a fellow officer in a time of need brings satisfaction. But the greatest satisfaction comes from making the big arrest, being at the right place at the right time, catching a burglar when he's in the act, making a big drug bust, pooling information and working as a team to find and catch a wanted person. Like a kid, I guess, I love to catch the bad guys.

When I was a child I never thought of becoming a cop. Law enforcement interested me, but I never thought I'd be a police officer. In my senior year at Appalachian State, I met a Greensboro police officer recruiting for the Greensboro Police Department. I filled out an application and six months later I was working for the Greensboro Police.

At the time I was not walking closely with God. Yet, in retrospect, I see that God maneuvered me right into the place that He wanted me to be. No matter how aggravated I sometimes get with the job, deep down I know I am where I should be, and deep down I love the

work.

I don't talk much about my faith on the job. These days, actions speak louder than words, so I try to keep my ducks in a row and live in a way that shows I am a Christian. I strive to keep in good physical condition, maintain a strong work ethic, control my ego, and maintain a good attitude. Sometimes I don't think I do this so well, but once I regain my focus, I strive hard again to work in a way that pleases God. Many times I will take extra time to talk with people and try to help them work through their problems. Sometimes I refer them to local churches or Christian organizations.

I don't talk down to people, and try to treat everyone with respect. Many people have simply made up their minds about life and I realize I can't change them very much. I try to tell people that they are responsible for their actions. I explain to them that with that responsibility comes the responsibility to find out about God by reading the Bible and attending church, but that they must make up their own minds. Only God can change their outlook. I just hope that He has used me. In the meantime, I keep patrolling the streets, keeping people safe as best as I can, protecting their life and property, while God works in them the bigger and more important things.

But the greatest satisfaction comes from making the big arrest, being at the right place at the right time, catching a burglar when he's in the act, making a big drug bust, working as a team to find and catch a wanted person.

The Creation Mandate

Joel Gillespie

Dear friend,

Thank you for your letter about your job frustrations. I can relate personally to what you are going through. The kinds of experiences you are having I have had as well. You have raised many specific questions that I want to try to address, but know that I do so from the standpoint of one who deals with the issues much as you do.

What I find happening with so many Christians is that they try to deal with work and vocational issues outside of the context of their overall purpose as creatures, and as renewed creatures in Christ. They look at their work from a grid of self-fulfillment, or self-realization, or need for money, or whatever. People try to understand their work frustrations apart from an appreciation for the consequences of the fall of humankind into sin and the subsequent curse upon human experience. There seems to be a lot of false idealism and utopianism when it comes to the fulfillment we hope to derive from our work, and thus little room for dealing well with the realities. So both in regard to the real purpose of work, and in regard to the frustrations of work, over and over I see Christian men and women facing work issues not from a Biblical perspective at all. Thus, I would like to lay a foundation for further discussion by looking at what the first three chapters of Genesis have to say about our work.

Your work cannot be understood apart from understanding who you are as created by God. Do not even try to figure out your situation apart from this. The reason you exist and the reason you work cannot be separated.

You and I as human beings are like other created things - trees, rocks, angels, birds, mountains, planets, moss, etc. We all stand on the same side, the same end of the created order. God made us. As it says in Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." We as human beings are included with everything else in the catch-all phrase, "the heavens and the earth." All of the created order has

been made by God and exists for the same ultimate reason. Since this reason is doxological in that it has to do with our bringing glory and praise to God ("Doxological" derives from "doxa," the Greek root word for glory), it is best stated not in some abstract formula, but in the words of the Psalmist. Psalm 19 comes to mind immediately:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

And how can I go on without quoting Psalm 148:

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens. He has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his saints, of Israel, the people close

Your work cannot be understood apart from understanding who you are as created by God.

to his heart. Praise the LORD.

In this Psalm all of creation is being called to rise up and praise its Creator. The human beings called upon in this Psalm to praise God - the kings, princes, young men, and maidens - come at the end of a long list of created things called forth to praise God. People, like rocks and trees and animals, have the same ultimate purpose.

Created For God's Glory

These Psalms get at that root principle of why we and everything else exist - to bring glory and praise to the God of heaven and earth. As I have said, don't even try to understand yourself or your work apart from this. You cannot. You are made, you are wired, you are created for this purpose. So when we go back and read Genesis 1, the "March of Creation" as I like to call it, we must see ourselves grouped in with the everything else that is made, all sharing ultimately in the same purpose.

Yet, there is something different about us, even in the Genesis account. There is a sense where we stand as creatures in a class by ourselves, apart from the created order, on God's side of the equation as it were. For we see that we are made in the image and likeness of God:

Then God said, "*Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...* So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Gen 1:26-27).

Much has been written about the meaning of the "image of God." Let me say for now that we originally were endowed with certain attributes of rationality, creativity, moral free agency, righteousness, holiness, capacity for relationship, all of which makes us a lot like the God who made us, a kind of "chip off the old block," if you will permit that casual expression. This God-likeness gives us the capacity to know God in relationship, and it also gives us the capacity to act and engage ourselves with respect to the rest of the created order in ways similar to how God Himself does this. Lest we be too tempted to separate our being from our

doing, notice that right after God makes us, He gives us, His image-bearing creatures, a commission in His world:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Gen. 1:26).

And again:

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen. 1:28).

We cannot separate our being from our doing, our being made in a certain way and our acting in a certain way, our being made in God's image, and our commission to have dominion over the created order. Yes, our rationality, creativity, moral free agency, and capacity for relationship, all of these find expression in our direct knowing of God. But we are not made in His image just to stand there like a statue "knowing" Him. Our image-of-Godness also expresses and manifests itself as we relate to the rest of creation, as we rule over it.

So in one sense, man stands on the side of all the rest of creation with reference to the creator God, and in another sense man stands on the side of God in reference to the created order. When we stand on the side of God in relation to the created order, we do not stand as God Himself, but, as His image-bearers standing in for Him, representing Him. He is the owner of the world, and we are managers. He places us in charge of His creation. We are to be to it as He is to it, so far as is possible given our creaturely limitations. We are to fulfill the purpose He had for it as we manage it. In this we work out our image-of-Godness.

Speaking according to the language and terms of the ancient culture through which God has given us the book of Genesis, we are to understand ourselves as viceroys or vice-regents or vassal kings over the dominion of God. That is,

We cannot separate our being from our doing, our being made in a certain way and our acting in a certain way, our being made in God's image, and our commission to have dominion over the created order.

He is the Great King over all the earth. He owns the land, the air, the water, the beasts. He is our King. But we too are kings. We are sub-kings, vassal kings, given the privilege of ruling over His dominion or kingdom in His place. We have rights and privileges in so doing, and we have obligations. He promises continued blessing and fellowship, on the condition that we fulfill our responsibilities as His vice-regents. Thus this arrangement is properly thought of as a covenant between God and mankind, what many scholars now refer to as the Covenant of Creation. Out of His own initiative and by His grace and goodness, He has bonded Himself to us in a covenant relationship, where He has defined the terms, and we have the joy and privilege of being His vassals as we rule over His earth.

We too are to work with Him as He works in and through us to draw and to squeeze out all of the glory that is latent in the created order.

Working With God

But what is meant by "ruling over the earth"? Look at it this way: Our king has placed us over a good, indeed a very good created order, but one which has an almost infinite capacity for bringing even further glory to Him. In this sense our world is not yet complete, not yet as full of praise and glory to God as it can be. We as His viceroys are called to manage and rule over the created order in such a way that we draw out more and more of the potential for beauty and good that is latent in it, that God would be forever more glorified by His world. So we can say that the world is good, indeed very good, but that it is not as fully very good as God has intended it to be.

But we aren't to do this alone. The owner has not left for a far-off country. Our Father is still working. We too are to work with Him as He works in and through us to draw and to squeeze out all of the glory that is latent in the created order. After all, God didn't just wind up the clock and let it run on its own. He is there with every tick. He continues to work in upholding and sustaining His work of creation. Yes God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. But He also keeps it going by His grace, mercy, and power. In so doing He does not leave His creation to fend for itself, but He is involved in caring for it. Doxology erupts again in the Psalms. The King of the earth is

praised not merely for making the world, but also for His intimate involvement in it. Think of Psalm 104, which I will quote in part here:

He makes springs pour water into the ravines; it flows between the mountains. They give water to all the beasts of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. The birds of the air nest by the waters; they sing among the branches. He waters the mountains from his upper chambers; the earth is satisfied by the fruit of his work. He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate - bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart. The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted. There the birds make their nests; the stork has its home in the pine trees. The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the coneys. The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down. You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening. How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number— living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro, and the leviathan, which you formed to frolic there. These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth. May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works.

This ongoing work of caring for His world is cause for praise and glory to be given to the King of the earth. We observe His care, and we praise Him accordingly. But note that God uses secondary means to sustain and uphold His world.

By these "secondary means," I refer not only to the "laws of nature," which He constantly sustains by His power, but also to us, His vice-regents. Our work is for Him a "secondary means" of taking care of His world. It is precisely at this point that our position as vice-regents, our responsibility to exercise dominion, finds deepest meaning. We stand between God and His created order, cooperating with His ministry of sustaining and preserving His world. He sustains us by His power (in Him we live, and move, and have our being). He also uses us to sustain others, and to sustain His world.

Many Christians struggle with seeing the significance of the work they are called to do. They see their work as a place for witnessing, for character building, for making money to support missionaries and church programs. But they often do not see the significance of the work itself. This is tragic. Anything about your job or your work which contributes to the good of other creatures, which helps care for and sustain them and make their life better, is a participation with God in His ministry of sustaining, preserving, and caring for His world. One thinks of the doctor who heals, the carpenter who builds, the retailer who supplies, the lawyer who defends, the policeman who protects, the accountant who keeps straight, the mechanic who keeps safe, the waiter who serves food, the banker who enables, the janitor who makes beautiful what is dirty and dull.

And I say to you: if God is praised over and over for His work of caring for and sustaining His creation, and if He is at least partly using us to do this, isn't our work therefore incredibly significant? If the work we are to do is a continuation of God's work, it can't be anything else but significant, even that which seems mundane. Much of God's sustaining work is quite literally mundane, that is, of or pertaining to this world, commonplace, and ordinary. All that is everyday, dependable, ordinary, and predictable, like the rising sun and changing seasons, like the provision of food and shelter for His

creatures - He does all of this. This is God's work. How can it be insignificant? And how can our work be insignificant when we participate with Him in His work? Can't you see the glory of this? The Psalmist is carried away by the wonder of our calling:

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

The glory of our position as vice-regents, as rulers over the works of His hands, does not detract from the glory of our King. Not at all! Indeed, it adds to that for which we praise Him. He is to be praised because of His wisdom and majesty in setting us over His world! Every time we do anything that helps or serves another creature in any way, let us remember this psalm.

He Planted a Garden

Now we see all of this well illustrated in Genesis 2. God has placed Adam and Eve in a garden that He Himself has planted. Adam and Eve are to take care of the garden. I suppose that this would involve pruning, composting, cultivating, transplanting, digging, watering, and harvesting. Perhaps Adam and Eve had opportunity to experiment as well (although we don't know how much time they had in the garden), to cross-pollinate or hybridize, play with color schemes, make designs in plantings, all sorts of things which would make the garden ever more beautiful and fruitful. In the garden Adam and

If the work we are to do is a continuation of God's work, it can't be anything else but significant, even that which seems mundane.

Eve had opportunity to spend time with the other creatures. We see Adam exercising dominion by naming and categorizing the animals.

But we also see in this animal-naming exercise the rudimentary beginnings of science. What is science but learning of all the intricacies and interrelationships that exist in the created order? The spirit of exploration and discovery which should motivate the scientific endeavor results in more and more reasons to give praise to Him who made and who sustains the world. So in our work we not only help to sustain the created order, we get to explore it, and draw out its wonders.

Adam and Eve's work was not carried out alone. God did not drop them in the garden and say He would check back later. After the disobedience, in a sad and poignant verse, we get a glimpse into the intimacy that had existed between Adam and Eve and their God in the garden.

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden (Gen. 3:8).

So Adam and Eve were not tending the garden and naming the animals all alone. They did this in the midst of a relationship with their God. They were not driven in their work; there was space in their daily rhythm to enjoy God who walked in the garden with them. They did not make work an idol, or view it apart from their relationship with God. Their joy was in working alongside Him. All the real human joy coming from living and working in Eden was in a sense consummated and fulfilled and wrapped up as this joy was shared with God, as it was experienced in the context of relationship with Him.

Their Children Shall Teach Them

I remember vividly an incident two or three years ago with my four little girls. Spring was in the air, and we were busy getting the garden ready for planting. Everyone was dressed in boots and overalls and we went out to turn and make ready the ten by ten foot zinnia garden.

"Aren't I doing a good job, Dad?" "This is good work, isn't it, Dad?" "Dad, you sure are strong!" "This is going to be really pretty, isn't it, Dad?"

They loved the work - the feel of the soil, the smells of spring that swirled around, the sense of accomplishment at performing a little task. There was joy in having dominion, in being creative, in imagining what the garden would look like, and having a role in bringing that about. But really it wasn't so much just the work itself that they loved. It was doing the work with me! It was as if the love of the work was consummated and completed only in sharing it with their father.

Lying Down On the Job

I remember that I went in for a drink and to make a phone call, and left them to continue on with the digging, which took about fifteen minutes. I looked out the window and two of them were lying down, discouraged and tired, and the other two were arguing over who was doing the best job. One became driven and domineering of the others. But when I returned, we all got back into it. We worked hard turning the hard red clay soil, got good and sweaty, and then all plopped down in a heap. One of the girls ran inside and in a few minutes came out with water for everyone. What a memory!

When I was with them their energy seemed boundless. They worked in reference to me, pleasing me, enjoying me, thriving on my encouragements. When I left, the work itself became the focus. They became competitive. Who was stronger? Who was smarter? Who could dig the fastest? The harmony between them broke down in my absence. They noticed little ailments and tired quickly. One of them became obsessed with the job, wanting, I guess, to prove a point.

My presence with them gave joy and meaning to them as persons, and gave joy and meaning to their work. My presence with them put the work in its place. It showed that the work had meaning relative to me, and not so much just in itself.

And even though we had a specific goal and worked very hard, the time came when we needed to stop. We collapsed together in a pile. We rested. We lay back on the grass and watched

What is science but learning of all the intricacies and interrelationships that exist in the created order?

the clouds and the birds. We were together. Even I didn't want just to work and work and work. As important as getting the zinnia garden planted was, even more important was my relationship with them. So I wanted to relax with them and enjoy them.

Likewise, God planted a garden in Eden. He could have gone on to plant gardens all over the place if all He wanted to do was plant gardens. But Eden provided a safe place, a haven, for His creatures, for Adam and Eve. And then He walked with them in the garden. Eden was not just a place to work, it was an environment for a relationship. The work had its rightful place, but was not everything. Do not forget that the very next day after creating mankind and commissioning them to subdue the earth, God rested, He "sabbathed." We are to follow His pattern of working and resting. Thus, the Sabbath also limits the degree to which the command to subdue the earth binds us as His creatures. Our calling is important, our work is important, but we are to work in fellowship with Him, and then stop altogether to rest and enjoy the world with Him. There is a time to work alongside of Him; there is a time just to be with Him. As important as our work is, it isn't to consume us.

The Fall

Sadly, things didn't continue to work out so well for Adam and Eve. Unfortunately, as you well know, our experience of work was drastically affected by our disobedience in Adam and Eve, and by the judgments which followed. Since we now live and work in the aftermath of humankind's fall, we can only understand our work fully in light of this fall. Many Christians err just here. They have expectations of what their jobs should deliver to them in terms of meaning, reward, or fulfillment, and thus they never come to grips with the way their jobs almost always fail to deliver. They are unsettled, angry, negative, fighting in their hearts against the reality of work in a fallen world.

In Genesis chapter 3, after Adam and Eve disobeyed, we find them hiding from God. Whereas they once labored in joy in His presence, they now hide and find that they must carry on, as it were, in hiding, apart from Him.

Likewise for us, because of our alienation from God, work goes on without reference to Him. This makes our labor fundamentally off-kilter. Since our existence, and therefore our work, is first and foremost to bring glory to God, and to enjoy Him as we do this, the nature of our work must change when that purpose is abandoned. Work comes to be motivated by greed or lust for power or the need for self justification. Whereas before I may have planted a tree to please my Father in heaven, now I do it to please myself, or to have others pleased with my efforts, honoring, loving, and admiring me. Or perhaps I now work to control the supply of food, to succeed in competition with my neighbor, or to develop an implement of war.

I Am Different, So My Working Is Different

Notice that the change in me has changed my working. My work, both in terms of what I do and how and why I do it, remains connected with who and what I am even after the fall. So all of the sins and inner ambiguities and problems that come upon me in my alienation from God radically affect my work. Who I am has changed, and thus the nature of my work has changed with it. Inevitably, I carry who I am into what I do. The two are inseparable.

And naturally, since all the other people out there working have also been radically affected by the fall, our work becomes a place of conflict with them. The relationship between Adam and Eve is forever altered by their disobedience to God. They cast blame; they scapegoat the other. Marriage relationships, and by implication, all human relationships, are cursed. Brokenness between people enters the world. Cain is jealous that Abel's work seems more acceptable to God, and He kills Abel. For each of us, the difficulties and challenges of work have a lot to do with the difficulties and challenges of human relationships. We cannot separate out our work from our relationships. Even the most task-oriented subsistence worker occasionally comes into contact with others. Thus, much of what people struggle with in their jobs is not the job itself at all, it is the people they have to deal with in their jobs. All of the sins that im-

Our calling is important, our work is important, but we are to work in fellowship with Him, and then stop altogether to rest and enjoy the world with Him.

pact relationships thus impact our work.

The Ground Is Cursed

But it is not just us that changed after the fall. Even the ground itself is changed radically by the specific curse placed upon it by God. Notice how this reads in Genesis 3:17-20:

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of 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.'"

God has placed a curse upon the ground. The result is that the ground produces thorns and thistles in addition to the intended plants, which increases the difficulty of the work required to produce the food needed to eat and live. Life and work, work and life, become laborious and miserable, even unto death.

The economy of words used here to describe the curse should not lead us to limit the scope of this curse. Something fundamental has changed in the world. But it is hard to imagine just what has happened. Has God brought into being new forms of plant and animal life which fight back at man? Has the ground become less nutrient-rich and harder to work? Has the constitution of man become so weakened that what was once easy and painless now has become hard and laborious? I suppose that to some degree all of these things have happened. The result is that work is hard and painful. The world is out of whack, with things happening that never would have happened. I think of Murphy's law as entering into existence just here. Something is amiss. Things go awry. Often. Without warning. Just at the wrong time. The unpleasant things keep coming back. Decay is relentless. We turn our backs and the herd has moved to a new feeding ground, the field is covered with weeds, the paint is peeling and water is rotting

the timbers, the food bin is filled with maggots, and of course the dishes always have to be washed. Everything has to be cleaned, and cleaned again, since disease lurks, ready to pounce. Work becomes a never-ending grind. A sense of futility enters into our hearts. A storm arises out of nowhere and destroys the house we have been laboring so hard to build. We invest all of our resources into a business, and after two years the city approves a new highway that cuts off all traffic flow to our store, and we lose everything. Despite all of our efforts, the competition gets the edge, and all we can hope for is to survive until we retire. We put in thirty years for The Company, and we're dropped like hot potatoes when profits decline.

But as if all this weren't enough, death casts its horrible shadow across our work. This affects us in several ways. First, because our physical bodies are subject to decay that leads to death, they are weakened by sickness, by pains and ailments, and by disease. This makes work all the more hard and trying. Second, since we seek to have a sense of accomplishment and to achieve goals in our work, whether righteous or unrighteous goals, we are torn by the reality that our death blocks us off from realizing the fullness of our hopes and dreams. Third, we realize that our work may or may not survive our death. We can do little to assure that what we have so labored to accomplish will not be ignored, reversed, or destroyed after our demise. In no way will we be around to guarantee that our results of our labors will remain.

Banished From the Garden

And finally, just to seal the matter forever, Adam and Eve were banished from the garden of God and cast into a hostile environment. It is in this new, more hostile environment, that we now work. No longer would mankind work ground prepared and planted by God Himself. No more would the garden offer safe haven.

I will admit that this is a pretty gloomy picture. It seems the only colors I have are grays and browns and blacks. But I have wanted you to see just what you are facing. I do not want you to be naive about your work. Yet, despite all of the darkness and gloom which has descended upon our reflection about work, we

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must also realize that there is much color in the picture after all. Remember for a moment the Psalms I have quoted in this letter - Psalms 19 and 104 and 148. Go back and read these again, with this thought in mind: All of these are written after the fall, by writers reflecting on the world as it is post-fall. Despite the fall, despite the change which has come over our world, the world is still a place of wonder and beauty and richness. God still works to sustain and uphold, even after the fall. He still uses us. The original command to work has not been lifted. The original purpose for our work has not changed. We are still called to exercise dominion over the earth as we participate with God in sustaining and preserving His world.

The Creation Mandate Goes On

God Himself takes the initiative and extends mercy to His rebellious creatures, after their rebellion, and despite their sinfulness. "YHWH God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Gen 3:21). Despite the awesome gloom of the curse, God Himself cushions the blow by His mercy and grace. He covers their shame, but He also gives them protection and warmth in their new clothes. And He does this before casting them from the garden. In His grace He equips them for life in a hostile world.

Despite the extent of the curse, mankind is not punished as thoroughly as he might have been. God's mercy still abounds as He shields us from the fullest consequences of our rebellion. The beautiful blue sky still brings joy. The cool breeze at the end of a long day working still feels great. The sense of accomplishment at a job well done still gives us courage to go on.

In spite of our rebellion, the commandment to exercise dominion over the earth is not revoked. Even though we went on after our expulsion from Eden to turn loving dominion into selfish exploitation; even though we made a mess of things as we labored and worked for our own glory; even though we brought hurt to ourselves as we rejected the terms of the Covenant of Creation; nevertheless, God's mercy is extended once again. He promises to do something about the mess. He promises a coming Descendent who will destroy the serpent and the serpent's

work. He promises to set in motion a series of events which will undo our undoing.

Because of our creation commission, work is filled with meaning and purpose. Because of the fall, the fulfilling of this mandate is much more difficult than it would otherwise have been, and can never be fully realized. What we have failed to attain however, has been attained by Jesus. In Him the commandment to exercise dominion over the earth has been and is being fulfilled. With Jesus reigning at the right hand of God, we now have two works of God running parallel, the work of sustaining the world, and the work of redeeming the world. There may seem to be confusion as to what God's agenda is in and with His world. Suffice it to say for now that the work of "making disciples" involves "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." This includes teaching them to obey, and to begin to fulfill, the mandate of creation.

Does God still want us to participate with Him as he cares for His world, even while He is also working to redeem the world? Does God still want us to work to draw out all the glory we can from the world, even though He promises a New Heaven and New Earth? Does He still want us to learn all about His world so that He can be further praised? Yes. Yes. And yes.

The Creation mandate goes on. Our work, our everyday real work, still matters to God.

Sincerely,

Joel

***God's mercy
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fullest conse-
quences of our
rebellion.***

Accountant

Laurie Kernodle

ATS makes a contribution to our everyday lives by supporting our Government's communication needs and providing for our national defense.

I am a "middle manager" in a relatively small business unit within AT&T. This unit, Advanced Technology Systems, represents less than 1/2 of 1% of total AT&T sales, and is primarily a defense contractor. We provide products and engineering services to the U. S. Government and to selected commercial customers. Our products and services cover a range of communication needs, including underwater detection systems and equipment that analyzes the detected signals, units that are supplied to electric power companies to allow remote monitoring and control of power consumption, and personal computer equipment with video and data transmission capabilities for use in long distance learning and telemedicine.

I work in the Finance organization within Advanced Technology Systems (ATS) and have responsibility for a department of twelve people who handle the accounting for fixed assets (i.e., equipment, furniture, computers, buildings, etc.) and for employee expense reimbursements, and who have responsibility for electronic time reporting. We also develop financial policies and procedures for ATS. Our services are provided to "internal" customers; that is, to the engineers, managers, sales force and other organizations who are responsible for designing, building and delivering products to our external customers.

As an example, we advise employees regarding the preparation of expense vouchers and weekly time records, and help individuals resolve pay discrepancies. Monthly we report to managers the amount of depreciation expense they have incurred and the total value they have invested in fixed assets. We provide analyses to managers to assist them in deciding whether it is more economical to buy or to lease a piece of equipment. We research issues and publish procedures that provide guidance on the proper accounting treatment for transactions. In short, we render a variety of services, some of which are routine and some of which are in response to the changing needs of the business unit. By providing financial information and guidance that facilitates decision making, we contribute

to the success of ATS. And, in turn, ATS makes a contribution to our everyday lives by supporting our government's communication needs and providing for our national defense.

In the past few years, our day-to-day activities have been characterized by change and, unfortunately, turmoil. We have upgraded our financial systems and have been faced with pressure and frustration as we worked to install, test and prove out the software and the accounting routines. Because the structure of the business has changed a number of times over the past several years, we have had continually to modify these systems and to restate historical data to insure comparability between years. Additionally, increasing competition has forced us to control costs drastically, resulting in staff reductions and limitations on travel and training, with no offsetting reduction in work load.

To some extent, though, the work is routine and does follow a general pattern. Each month journal entries are prepared and processed, and results are produced, scrutinized and delivered to the managers of the business. Expense reimbursement forms are audited and processed daily and time charging is collected weekly. Policies are created or updated as conditions dictate. But increasingly we seem to find in our daily work life that the only "norm" is that there is no "norm."

Drifting Into Accounting

I would like to be able to say that my accounting profession is one that was carefully and prayerfully chosen. However, that is not the case. I was not a Christian at the time, and I made the decision to enter the accounting field just as I made so many other decisions at that time - based on my own needs, wants, expectations, and a sizable dose of ignorance and misinformation. I drifted into an accounting major by choosing to pursue a business degree and then deciding that I should specialize in accounting in order to have a more marketable skill. My father had been an accountant so it seemed a good model to emulate.

This same loose pattern of decision making continued after I went to work for AT&T. All the other recently hired graduates in Finance were intent on advancing into management and

in establishing a successful career. I, too, adopted this philosophy and virtually "gave myself over" to the job, at some points working sixty to seventy hours a week. I have since come to realize, with maturity and God's generous provision of wisdom, that I am not well suited to management. I am very much detail and task-oriented, and much prefer to be given a problem or an assignment that I can complete on my own. Good managers, in contrast, derive a sense of satisfaction from helping those they manage accomplish their tasks.

Yet this is the place in which I find myself today. There are certainly joys associated with my work, primarily found in the people in my organization. As a whole, they constitute an enjoyable, caring and supportive group. There is much laughter. And I find myself blessed with a number of other Christian "compatriots" among my peers and managers who bring balance, wisdom, and grace to our workplace.

Does It Add Up?

Frustrations stem mostly from the turbulence of our environment and the ever-changing course and direction of not only my immediate organization but the business unit and the company. Many of us feel that our efforts are often futile since it seems we rarely finish a task before it must be undone or redone because the business "charter" has changed once again. This feeling of futility coupled with the stress and strain of repeated downsizing of the organization are our biggest obstacles. Finally, for myself, there has been this same frustration of not sensing that what I do adds value to the organization, and, in addition, a sense that what I do is unimportant in the kingdom of God. I have often experienced a nagging feeling that reporting and deriving and manipulating numbers really doesn't "add up" to much.

Recently, though, the Lord has been working to convict me that my job, and all my daily activities, are of value to Him and to the furthering of His kingdom. This is true whether they seem mundane or exciting, or whether they at first glance appear to fall into some quick categorization as worldly or spiritual. This is for me a new mindset. In years past I have tended to view my work life and my Christianity as

somehow distinct, often "leaving" Christ at the entrance each day and "retrieving" Him on the way out again at night. Through various scriptures and the sharing of others, I am coming to understand that this is not true, that it is, in fact, a gross distortion that leads us to compartmentalize our lives and to trivialize our everyday pursuits. Ultimately this false belief will hinder or severely limit the effectiveness of our ministry as a reflection of who God is in and to this world, and to those with whom we come in contact. I am, and all of us are, doing something important and meaningful when we strive to be what He has called us to be where He has called us to be.

Consequently, I find myself convicted that in all of life's activities, large and small, I am called to seek to glorify God. As He commands, "Whether then you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God." So as I work each day I must ask myself, "Do my words and my actions uphold the honor of God, and are they worthy of the name of Christ?" If I am conducting a meeting, giving a performance review, providing instruction on a task, or in a thousand other ways interacting with my employees, peers, and management, I must always be conscious of who I am in Him. My real work is to emulate His love, His care, His patience and His overriding concern for people broken by sin. My driving career ambition must not be to advance nor to attain status and praise for my accomplishments, but rather to exalt the Lord always in all things. This is the challenge to each of us as we move through the day in whatever place we find ourselves.

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White Collar Blues

Joel Gillespie

Veins, arteries, intestines, muscles, bladders, hearts, and lungs thrive with bodily movement and hard pumping blood.

My body was made for motion, not for sitting here all day at my desk. I should be hunting buffalo, walking behind a plow, riding a horse, building a barn, or felling a tree and digging up the stump.

But I'm here. Most of my friends at this moment are in the same position. Sitting. Body systems rebel. Veins, arteries, intestines, muscles, bladders, hearts, and lungs thrive with bodily movement and hard-pumping blood. Sitting here, the whole body just gets clogged up.

Most of my friends cannot afford to do what they would really like to do. The rugged manual labor they desire cannot pay for the mortgage, car, braces, clothes, and college. There is tragedy here. The economic system has us in its claws, and it won't let go.

Vocationally, my brain is pitted against my body. My work is largely mental. I exercise dominion through thought - studying, writing, talking on the phone, praying, doing paper work, conversing at a restaurant. Frankly, I have a great job. But my body gets the short end of the stick.

The paper piles up. It is my enemy. How do I love this enemy? It reproduces at night when I'm gone. One pile becomes two, two becomes four, and the tension builds. I end up carving out an entire day to attack the piles.

"You need more exercise," the doctor says. "Your blood pressure is too high, your cholesterol is too high, your weight is too high."

Fine, doctor. But when? Do I take time from my wife, my kids, or my employer? How do I do it all? How do I fit it all in, doctor?

I don't want the never-ending cycle of antibiotics for prostate infections, laxatives for constipation, aspirin for headaches, and antacids for indigestion.

I don't want to be flabby and sleepy from inactivity. I want to be strong, vigorous, and awake. I want to be energetic and productive.

I don't want to die when I'm fifty-five from

clogged arteries. I don't want to spend my last years undergoing chemotherapy for bowel cancer. I want to see my four daughters grow up. I want to know my grandkids, and maybe even my grandkids' kids. I want to have the wisdom of years. I want to keep learning how to be a good pastor. That is, if being a pastor doesn't kill me.

Why can't exercise be a part of my work? Why do I have to "find the time" to do it? I know. Whining won't help. I'm being a baby. I'm singing the blues, the white collar blues.

I should count my blessings. I have a great job. It really couldn't be better. I am stimulated, challenged, and encouraged. I am appreciated, loved, and valued. I have the rare privilege of actually wanting to attend the church that I pastor. There is no group of people I would rather be with.

But I still don't want to croak from plaque build-up. I still don't want to have the muscle definition of a wet noodle.

Where will I find the time to carve out an hour and a half a day to exercise? I don't have the time. I don't have the time not to. I must. Somehow.

My friend Scot now walks with me four miles every Wednesday over the lunch hour. We get to talk and pray and enjoy the day, and get some exercise to boot. Granted, it's not felling trees and hunting buffalo, but it's a start. I'm working on filling up several other hours of my week with similar activity. I hope it works. It has to.

I need to follow my own counsel. I need to remind myself that I too live in a fallen world. What are paper piles but modern day versions of thorns and thistles? Did I really think God would grant Joel Gillespie a personal exemption from the curse?

Though the system seems to have me by its claws, it has also brought good things my way for which I am very thankful, things like this computer, like the medicine that healed my daughter's bronchitis, like electricity and phones and a warm place on a cold night, like angioplasty...

And maybe we can ride buffalo in the New Heaven and New Earth. I hope so.

Mom

Sydney Fields

Two days ago, Audrey, who is 15 months old, watched her sister Olivia pee-pee on the potty. She tried to climb up for her turn. My husband and I decided to humor her (and ourselves) and placed her on the potty. She grinned, reached for a tissue, wiped perfectly and climbed down only to pee-pee in the hallway. We laughed and took the girls upstairs to bathe them. The naked one promptly pee-peed on the bedroom carpet. We made it to the bath, and got her cleaned up and dry. On the way to her room to be diapered she pee-peed on the hallway carpet. I actually laughed again. This was a good day. Her fun is my work.

Yesterday at lunch, Olivia, who is almost three, drank her milk from a sippy cup, a mixing bowl, a microwave pot and a salad spinner. There are lots of ways to drink milk; she won't be limited by Mommy's lack of creativity. Her fun is her work.

Today Audrey had two shots. Olivia tried to stop the second shot by covering her sister's arm and pleading with the nurse "She doesn't want any more shots." She reluctantly allowed the next shot, but sobbed along with Audrey and kissed the boo-boo afterward. Audrey's pain is her pain. She has learned love, protection, and compassion.

My job is to raise my children to the glory of God. God has chosen to care for their human needs, teach them about Himself, mold them into His likeness, and prepare them for their future service in the world through my work and the work of my husband. This is a daunting and sobering task. This is a profound privilege. It is easy to see my failures, but today I saw some success. I must remind myself not to take credit for it.

It is difficult to tell just what my workday is like, because every day seems so different. The only givens are that there will be tears and there will be laughter and juice. There will always be juice. And my work place? Well it is wherever we happen to be. Home, where we are most often, is an old house that would like as much attention as my children and gets very little. I

am learning to be OK with this. Since I view my house as a reflection of me, it has been depressing to allow it to be messy, dusty, and half-way painted. I wish that I could attend to my house, look after the kids, and do everything else well. But since I can't seem to do all of this, I guess the mess reflects my choice to spend time with and for my family. I am now willing to let others see me as a poor housekeeper if they so choose.

My responsibilities include the obvious: loving and training my children, being a support to my husband, doing most of the cleaning, shopping and cooking. I am also a stepmother to Benjamin, 13, who is with us a couple of weekends a month. This has its own joys and heartaches.

After working for many years, I wanted to be home full time after Olivia was born. But it was clear that we couldn't afford for me to quit my job. Prayerfully, I quit anyway, and waited to see how God would provide for us. I now babysit for two little girls two afternoons a week, and sew window treatments and such in my "spare" time to contribute financially to our family. God brought me both of these opportunities during my first year at home.

There Are Days...

I love my job and desire nothing else when I take time to think it through. However, there are days when I would do anything else. I can't leave the house, I can't take a fifteen-minute break to be alone when I need to, I don't get a lunch hour, I rarely see a project finished, and laundry piles up before the last load is folded!

But the hardest part is knowing how much my work matters. It has caused me great spiritual struggles which are finally resulting in growth. I want desperately to do right and be right for my children today, and not just tomorrow. My children have been the instrument most used by God to bring me to the realization and acceptance that I need Him to get me through what may appear to be a simple daily routine. I, who was once thought to be an organized, capable and good Christian example in both personal and business matters, was brought to my knees and a flood of tears by a four-month old and a two-year old. For this I will always be

I, who was once thought to be an organized, capable and good Christian example in both personal and business matters, was brought to my knees and a flood of tears by a four month old and a two year old.

indebted to them.

On the lighter side, I am often home when a friend calls and needs to talk. I don't have to wear hose or makeup unless I want to. I get to use play dough on rainy days and go to the park when it is nice outside. And I get hugs and kisses all day long.

Keeping two extra children is usually a joy; however there are days when I don't even want to be with my children, much less someone else's. I remind myself that I am providing a service for another mother who works part time, to be at home as much as she can with her children.

The sewing I do in my "spare" time has been bittersweet. It is done while my children sleep which takes away from time I might use to clean, read, or vegetate with my husband. When I sew for others I want it to be perfect since it is a reflection of me outside my four walls. This is one activity in which I can see something begun and completed, and where I can receive thanks, praise, and monetary compensation. Yet I struggle sometimes, wishing I could spend this time working on the list of projects I have for my own home. Thankfully, God uses this to teach me discipline and contentment, things I want to teach my children.

Someone reading this may one day teach our children, employ our children, or be an in-law to our children. I trust that as I do my job to the glory of God, it will make your role in our children's lives a pleasure - or at least a worthwhile challenge. I pray that our children and yours will encourage us to laugh at the mundane, experiment with new ways of doing old things, and be compassionate to one another.

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The Gift of God's Day

Glen Knecht

There are two things that are indispensable for the Christian life. The first is the knowledge of our duty, and the second is the practice of our duty based on that knowledge. We must first have some knowledge of what the duty is and then commit ourselves to the practice of that duty. The Christian life of course includes our work and our labor. It teaches us our duty regarding our work. It also teaches us our duty regarding how we must cease from our work. This is the teaching of Sabbath. Hear this teaching as given in the Fourth Commandment:

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Ex. 20:8-11)

REMEMBER THE INSTITUTION OF THE SABBATH DAY

What God is saying to us in this passage is this: He wants us to be like Him by observing His day. God wants us to resemble Him. One way we do this is by observing His Sabbath. What are we to do to observe His Sabbath? We need to start at the beginning. Think way back to the beginning of history, to the institution of the principle of Sabbath at the creation. God had labored for six days. You may not take those days in Genesis 1 and 2 as a 24-hour period. You may have some other way of approaching that issue. But however you define "day," the text says that God worked for six days. And then it says that He rested the seventh day. God rested? Does God get tired? Of

course not! He works with absolute ease. Then why did He rest? He rested because He knew that His creature, man, needed rest. And here is the most marvelous condescension of God: He condescended to rest to set a pattern for our rest. He did not need to rest. He rested out of love for us, to establish a sequence of six days of work and one day of rest. Thus we see that way back at the beginning of things, the Sabbath Day, the day of rest, is established as a creation mandate. Sabbath is part of the landscape of the beginnings of things, like marriage, like labor, like fruitfulness. The Sabbath is a creation-ordinance institution of God.

God Blesses His Day

About this day, we read that "He blessed it." It is a remarkable thing that out of seven days He chose one day upon which to place His blessing. God has the right to do that. It seems strange to us, especially when we know of some beautiful Tuesdays and some great Saturdays. Doesn't God's blessing rest upon a Wednesday? Yes, of course. God can and does bless any day. But in a peculiar way He has set His blessing, out of love for us, on the Sabbath Day. That is a strange thing, isn't it? I can almost feel this special blessing in the atmosphere of a Sunday. There is a special quality about it. It is the blessing of God.

The blessing of God means that the means of grace that we use - the prayers, the Bible reading, the preaching and listening, and the fellowship and hospitality as well as the other activities of the Lord's Day, are especially effective on this day. We could gather on Tuesday morning at 11:00a.m., but our worship would not have the same effectiveness that it has on the Lord's Day. God has chosen to bless this day. This blessing is illustrated in His giving of the manna, the supernatural food with which He fed the Israelites in the wilderness. The day before the Sabbath there would be a double portion of manna on the ground, and unlike the other days, what was left over would not rot at the end of

Then why did He rest? He rested because He knew that His creature, man, needed rest.

*In the ring of
the week, the
jewel is the
Sabbath Day,
God's gift*

the day. The manna would stay good through the next day, the Sabbath Day. God was doing the Israelites a special favor. On their day of rest the Israelites would not have to go out and collect manna. God protected their rest, He protected the purpose of Sabbath, by His supernatural blessing of the manna. Thus God "hallowed" this day. That is, He made it and He blessed it with His presence, so that in an unusual way, on the Sabbath day, God is present in a way He is not present on the other days. This is a remarkable thing!

In the wording of the Fourth Commandment we see God sanctifying or "making holy" this day. He has set this day apart from common and profane use. He has "cut off" this day. He has designated the day as unto Himself, so that in an unusual way the Sabbath Day is His own day. He set it apart from the others; He sanctified it to be His. It is a little like what happens on Communion Sunday, when the elders gather to prepare the grape juice and the bread for use in communion. They pray over it and sanctify it, thereby setting it apart, and it will never again go back to a common use. They make reverent disposition of it, because it has been sanctified to the Lord. It belongs to Him. That is the truth about the Sabbath day as well. It belongs to God.

God's Example: Working and Resting

By His own example of working and resting, God made the Sabbath. After He had blessed the Sabbath by pouring His own presence into it, after He had sanctified it by separating it out both in quality and in kind from every other day, He gave it to us. Therefore the Sabbath Day is not a burden. The Sabbath Day is a gift from God to the human family, a beautiful gift indeed. Adam and Eve received the gift and kept the Sabbath Day, and their children likewise. And the Sabbath became built into the structure of human life. In the ring of the week, the jewel is the Sabbath Day, God's gift. Whatever you choose to do with Sunday, you must see it as the property of God. It is set apart unto Him; it belongs to Him; it is His day and it is given as a trust to you. It is not yours to do with as you like.

REMEMBER THE OBLIGATION OF THE SABBATH DAY

That is a little background as to the institution of the day. We ask now, "What is my obligation as a Christian to keep the Sabbath Day? Is the Fourth Commandment still binding upon me?" When Adam and Eve received the Sabbath Day, it was written, along with the other commandments, upon their hearts. Because Adam and Eve were innocent from sin, God could write His law within them, and not externally as a word from the outside. Their consciences could read this word from within, and there was no need for the external commandment. But when they rebelled, and when sin and corruption entered into their hearts, into their person, the law of God within was defaced, no longer legible as before. No more could the human conscience clearly read the law of God. So on Sinai God gave the moral law in written and external form through Moses. We call this moral law the "Ten Commandments," of which the Sabbath commandment is the fourth.

These commandments came forth from God as an expression of His love. Don't forget the purpose of the Commandments. They are to be obeyed as a response to the love and grace of God. In the introduction to the commandments, God reminds the people what He has already done for them. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" (Ex. 20:2). He then goes on to speak of His lovingkindness, which He shows "to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:6). Sometimes people would pit the law of God against the love of God. What a terrible rending asunder of what God has joined together! The only way to show love to God is to honor and keep His commandments. The only kind of obedience that God loves is that which comes from a heart of love to God. We should never see the law of God as somehow in opposition to His love. It is the expression of His love. He loves us and shows us how to live. He knows what is best for us. But the law is also an expression of the character of God. That is, the law is a kind of outline of the attributes, the style, and the nature of God. That is why it is permanent and perpetual. That is why it is binding in every age, because

God doesn't change. That is why we obey the commandments, because we love the God who is reflected in the commandments.

A Mighty Underlining

God personally and directly underlined the law in a mighty way. For two days the people washed their garments and prepared themselves in physical and sexual purity so that they would be ready to come close to the mountain of God and receive the commandments. Then, when the hour came, there was thunder and lightning and clouds. There was a voice from heaven and the finger of God appeared and wrote the commandments on tables of stone. No other part of the word of God is directly written, inscribed by His finger, in this way. Then for safekeeping, the actual tablets, inscribed by the finger of God, were put into the Ark of the Covenant to be kept and protected for generations to come.

Of these commandments, the fourth is right at the heart. We see that each commandment guards some great reality. The Third Commandment guards His name; the Second His worship, and the First Commandment His primacy. The Fourth Commandment guards His day. It is a fence around it. The Fourth Commandment is not an appendix that can be lopped off and forgotten; it is at the heart of the commandments! It is for all men everywhere. It is not a little nicety for Christians only; it is a command to all men everywhere, that they would cease from work and give that day to Almighty God through Jesus Christ. It is a commandment for all time. It has never been abrogated. The commandment stands in force.

Sometimes we are apt to say, "I seek by God's grace to keep the other nine commandments, but that fourth one I am not sure about. I really don't know how it is supposed to be carried out." Listen to what James has to say to those who do not keep the commandments:

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become

a lawbreaker (James 2:10-11).

Likewise, even if I had managed to keep the other nine commandments impeccably, yet had disregarded the Fourth Commandment, I would be guilty of breaking all the commandments. Think about this: If Sabbath-keeping has never changed your plans, your intentions, your schedule, and your lifestyle, or if keeping the Fourth Commandment has never been part of your moral life, then you are just as guilty before God as you would be in breaking any or all of the other commandments.

Someone may say, "My heart does not want to keep this commandment. Something in me shies away from it. It sounds legalistic. I want to do what I want to do on that day." I know exactly how you feel; I have the same struggle. The human heart resists the Fourth Commandment. It does not want to make the hard choices, the difficult commitments, the refusals that are necessary to bring its lifestyle and its schedule under the command of God. But when you are up against your inability to keep the law, your disinclination to keep it, your desire to run from it and forget it, God says, "Come to me and I will give you a new heart with which you can keep my statutes. I'll put my Spirit within you if you come and ask me. I will take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh if you repent and seek me." So if your heart doesn't want to obey this commandment, run to Christ who is Lord and ask Him to give you a new heart that you may keep His ordinances and His statutes. He is able and willing to do it.

REMEMBER THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH

But just how do we keep the Sabbath? Has not the ceremonial law been canceled, that Old Covenant Jewish law with its detailed regulations about Sabbath? Are we not in a new and more permissive day? Quite the opposite is true. When we go to the New Testament, we do find that certain specifics of the Old Covenant ceremonial and civil law have been canceled. But we also find that the New Testament interpretation of the Ten Commandments is deeper. The Lord Jesus was not content to say "Thou shalt not kill." He said, "Don't even be angry with

No other part of the word of God is directly written, inscribed by His finger, in this way.

your brother in your heart." In other words, Jesus saw a more potent keeping of the law of God than the Old Testament saints ever saw. So it is not true to say that somehow Sabbath-keeping has been relaxed in New Testament times. It has been deepened! The Lord Jesus has taken the meaning to its very essence.

What did Jesus do with the Sabbath day? He used it to do the works of God. And He changed it. The Lord Jesus took the old Jewish Sabbath with Him into the grave. Remember, by the way, that He began His ministry on the Sabbath day and He closed it on the Sabbath day. How significant! When He rose from the dead He was absent between Sabbaths, as if to emphasize to His disciples that His appearances were to inaugurate a whole new order of Sabbath keeping, the Lord's Day, the day of resurrection. But He took that old Jewish Sabbath with Him into the grave and on Easter morning He brought out the fresh and beautiful and new Lord's Day, and renewed it to us as God's gift in the Fourth Commandment.

Jesus Reveals the Deeper Meaning of Sabbath

If you want a good commentary on Sabbath observance, examine the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the law-keeper "par excellence." He kept the Sabbath perfectly and beautifully. What did He do? He took charge of it. He said, "I am Lord of the Sabbath." And He cleansed away all the distortions that the Pharisees had put around it, all their legalistic rules, and got rid of them all. He got right down to the heart. He made it clean. He took it right back to the Fourth Commandment principles, and He said it is lawful for a man to do good on the Sabbath. Many of His recorded healings were purposely accomplished on the Sabbath, so that He could set a pattern. Jesus got into a lot of trouble with the Pharisees for "working" in this way on the Sabbath:

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making

himself equal with God (John 5:16-18).

Just as the Father's seventh day rest does not mean inactivity, since, as Jesus said, "My Father is always at work, to this very day," so also our seventh day rest does not mean inactivity, sluggishness, or laziness. The Sabbath is a day for doing good, a day for meeting human needs. It is a day when we slow down long enough so that we can walk next to the sick and the elderly and the handicapped and the prisoner, and give them rest. That's where we ought to be: doing the works of the Lord Jesus.

Sabbath-Keeping Principles

With the New Testament deepening of the Sabbath commandment in mind, let us look at a few of the basic principles to keep in mind as we seek to obey the Fourth Commandment. First, for example, there is in the Fourth Commandment a clear mandate to work: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Ex. 20:9). God wants us to labor. He uses our labor to care for His creation. In our labor we are to serve others and meet their creaturely needs. And He allows us to labor so that that we can attend to our own needs. He cares about our needs, and uses our work to meet our needs. But whether we need the paycheck or not is not the point. Working is not an option. God commands us to work.

Second, there is in the Fourth Commandment the principle that we are to cease from work. Sabbath means ceasing, pausing. It means catching our breath. The command to cease from work is every bit as real as the command to work. They go hand in hand. One exists with the other. So we have a pattern of working and ceasing, six days of working, one day of ceasing. In following the pattern of work and cessation, we come to be like God. See the rhythm of His life: six days of labor and a day of rest. And as I bring the body clock of my life into phase with the clock of God, then resemblances of the likeness of God begin to appear in me. As His likeness appears in me, I come to fulfill part of my created purpose, to reflect, to bear the image of God.

Third, we see in the Fourth Commandment the principle of shared Sabbath. We have come to a privatization of our Christianity, in which

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we say, "I simply do what I think is right and other Christians do what they think is right, and everybody lives in his own little world." But Sabbath-keeping is not something I can do alone. Sabbath is something I share with others. Thus it matters to me how you as a fellow Christian keep the Sabbath. Our corporate witness is at stake. Therefore I have to think of the Sabbath not simply as what I do and don't do, but how what I do and don't do impacts others. Do I cause someone to work on the Sabbath Day? Do I take away their Sabbath by asking them to perform services for me? A shared Sabbath means that I don't think only of my schedule and my convenience, but what the impact is of what I am doing upon others. What impact does my working, my shopping, my eating out, my busyness, have on others? Granted, in an emergency I may have to go to the hospital, and the doctor may kindly come to see me, as he should. Jesus healed the sick on the Sabbath, and my doctor comes to see me. But I will still apologize for interrupting his Sabbath. And I certainly will not cause others to have to interrupt their Sabbath for me for frivolous matters, or to make up for my lack of planning.

Sanctifying the Day

God sanctified this day, and we are to sanctify it as well. We must set it apart. How do we set apart the Lord's Day? We renounce our own work and respond to God's work. We stop, take stock, and attend to our relationship with God. This day is for Him, and is for our being restored in our relationship with Him. This is why we worship corporately on this day. But we do not say, "I'll go to worship and then I'll go on and do this thing." That is sacrilege in the eyes of God, because worship comes in a context of whole day. For if our mind is divided between the experience of worship and the activity which comes after, we will not be able to enter into the joy of worship. The whole day is to be set aside so that the worship can come as the full flower in the midst of an entire day given unto God. It is sinful, it is stealing, it is sacrilege for us to take the Lord's Day and use it in sinful or secular activities.

How do we set apart the Lord's Day? We put aside the work of the other six days. We

cease; we stop; we rest. We give ourselves to the conscientious and faithful exercise of worship, as we love and praise God, as we worship Him for who He is and for His love and goodness to us in Christ. And following in the way of Jesus, we serve others. We extend rest to them. We bring refreshment to them.

Our entire week has to be planned differently so that we are ready for the Lord's day. We don't start thinking about it on Sunday morning at 7:00 o'clock. We remember the Sabbath Day on Monday, on Wednesday, on Saturday. On Saturday we do the things that we would normally do on Sunday, so that on Sunday we have a free and clear mind to love others, to be hospitable, to worship God, to rest, and to read, pray, and meditate.

A Family Affair

The Sabbath is a family affair; that is, many a head of household has to have special grace in leading his family through some of the hard decisions Sabbath brings into our lives. A parent may have to say to a youngster, "No, you can't go to that play rehearsal," or "No, you can't go to that soccer game." These are hard things to do. But we are giving the child the precious capacity to be different. Many young people are completely governed by what their peers say. They don't know how to stand alone. The Sabbath observance gives them a chance to be able to stand for Christ in the midst of their things. Many a young person has found the Sabbath to be a parting of the ways. They come right up to the Sabbath and either they go the way of God and follow after Him, or at that point they take a turn, perhaps taking a job or entering into other activities that keep them from the house of the Lord, and that turn gradually leads downhill. I have seen young people in church, interested and active, and then suddenly they get a job in a restaurant on a Sunday, and that is the end of it. How many perils of temptation have snatched away our youth on the Lord's Day when they ought to have been in the house of God with the people of God hearing the Word of God, and instead at that very time, Satan took them and carried them away.

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self-righteousness. How easily we could become proud toward those who haven't yet learned the lessons of Sabbath. We must not become critical of them, but we must ask God to refine and deepen in us the Sabbath beauty that they will become thirsty and say, "What is different about you? How could I have the Christian life that you have?" Becoming thirsty from us they will drink of the water of the Fourth Commandment.

Friends, what a beautiful day Sabbath is! The Jews called it a queen. "The queen is coming," they said. "Let's get ready for the queen." They personified the sweetness and the beauty of the Lord's Day, they loved it so much. It is not a day of gloom. When you think of Sabbath do not think of oppressive, burdensome Sunday rules. I am not talking about that! I am talking about resurrection splendor. It is a day of rest and gladness. It is a day of joy and light for the people of God when it is used as God has given it. When we do so use it, He loves to fill it with such light and color and beauty that Sunday becomes for us a little temporary feast of heaven. That is what God wants it to be for you.

In the Book of Malachi it says that because they did not value the Sabbath, God caused them to forget it altogether. Think of that! Do you want your grandchildren to have a Sunday? Do you want your grandchildren to take a day to rest and worship and to love their families and be hospitable to others? Do you want that for your great-grandchildren? Then I call upon you to give yourself to Christ and to begin to observe the Lord's Day with all your heart and all your being and all your soul.

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Engineer

Mike Basista

I work for a company that makes a superabsorbent polymer used in the manufacture of disposable diapers and other hygiene products. For now, I will sidestep the obvious question of ecology (i.e. landfill questions), since such would require a much more lengthy and technical discussion. I believe that a diaper that can be worn all day without leaking is of great value to parents with many tasks to fulfill in any given day. Compared with the "old" cloth-style diaper with its multiple changes, rubber pants, ammoniated holding pails, washing, and inevitable leaks, it's clear to see that the disposable diaper is a great labor and time saver. I know, since we've tried both on our own children. Because of disposable diapers parents may now have more time to nurture, love, and do things with their children.

Not unlike baking a cake, I am responsible for setting the recipe parameters for making the polymer, then maintaining the process by monitoring and troubleshooting when things go wrong. God has given me the ability to combine the fundamental knowledge of math and chemistry to "order" useless raw materials into a final, useful product. I have always been attracted to very specialized, or "niche" products. Sustaining the production of these unique products requires much on-site thought and attention, and constant tweaking, since the processes are not universal or standardized. The production process is continuous, meaning that it operates 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, which often requires solving problems in the middle of the night.

The division of labor and specialization of tasks required to run our plant mirrors the general division and specialization that exists throughout our industrial-informational society. This specialization provides a good object lesson for understanding the proper functioning of the church. For just as there can be no truly self-sufficient member of society, so can there not be the "go-it-alone," self-sufficient Christian. God made us to function together, each bringing, as individuals, our gifts to serve

the whole. As Paul says, each has a role to play as a distinct member of the body. Unlike a cult, which strives to neutralize the uniqueness of its members, the Christian church has as its ideal the dignity and value of each individual's abilities and gifts. As they serve together in carrying out the mission of the Church, individuals bring their unique and God-given gifts, making the body whole and complete in its functioning. And so it is with those of us who make the polymer.

About half of my time at the plant is spent alone in gathering, analyzing and interpreting data (grunt work) in order to gauge the impact of various process changes on final polymer quality. This is a tricky and challenging task, but it is very rewarding to alter some aspect of the process to arrive at the desired end result of improved quality or higher efficiency.

The other half of my time is split between touring the plant (looking for problems, attempting to anticipate problems before they occur, and interacting with the operators to gather more subjective information on how the plant is operating), and "other stuff," those things which remind me constantly that the world is fallen (bureaucratic paperwork, lazy, insubordinate workers, paperwork, political mini-empires).

The world is fallen, I am fallen, the plant is fallen. It is hard to know how much change to try to bring about. There is that in me that wants to "turn over the money tables." And frankly, my desire as a Christian to reform these "structural" evils conflicts with the fact that my family is depending on me to keep my job. But this is where the rubber meets the road for me as a Christian worker. I know that I need practical everyday wisdom from God as to which battles to pursue at what time. In which if any of these issues would God call me to "die on that hill," disregarding the personal consequences, and in which would He call me to be patient and long-suffering. One thing is certain. God loves me, and is working in me, and will keep me along the path of faithfulness and Christlikeness, granting sufficient grace to meet the challenges of everyday life.

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We Should Know Better

Joel Gillespie

Most people I know spend the majority of their waking hours working. Most Christians I know think that what they do in the majority of their waking hours is more or less a waste of time. They do not see any real value or lasting significance in it. They make comments like "I have been thinking about doing the Lord's work," which means they are thinking of becoming a minister or missionary, or working with a para-church group of some kind. They speak of what they do as "secular" work, and what I do as "spiritual" work. Many people use the word "calling" almost exclusively in terms of calling into the "ministry." They think that I work for God, and that they, well, they just work.

We pastors have done much to promote this truncated view of normal everyday work. I don't think we do this on purpose really. After all, our working lives as pastors are focused around the work of the church. The pressure is upon us to "succeed," to plan and implement programs, to attract volunteer workers, to direct facility changes, and otherwise to grow the church. We find ourselves pushing and pressing people to get involved in church work. We make them think that if they get really serious about God, they will get very busy in church. We do stewardship seminars when we need money to pay for facility additions or to meet budget. Thus we impress upon our parishioners the thought that the heart and soul of Christian service and sanctification is church-oriented activity and commitment. We don't do a very good job connecting up a person's spirituality with his or her work, home life, friendships, or other aspects of their everyday bodily life. We should know better. The result is that many if not most Christians think that what they do most of their waking hours is of little value to God.

The consequences of all this are huge. When we as normal working people think that what we do most of our waking hours is not very

important, we experience a nagging lack of purpose, an unease, and a discontentedness. This negatively affects our view of ourselves as people and as Christians. We feel guilty and discouraged. When getting serious about God means getting busier at church, we just get busier and busier, which makes us more tired and irritable, and which puts added pressure on our families. Since we do not see the significance of what we are doing everyday in our homes, offices, farms, and shops, we don't try as hard there to be Christians, to think about what we are doing from a Christian standpoint, and to act as followers of Christ. Because we disassociate our spirituality from our work, we disassociate our work from our spirituality. We then fall prey to those sins which bear most directly upon our work, i.e., greed and slothfulness, the former which leads to workaholicism, consumerism, and the like, and the latter which leads to shoddiness, complaining, and the spirit of entitlement. We treat others with whom we work with less love and grace than we might, and we forfeit having the impact we are supposed to have on our culture.

Human Culture Matters

Since "culture" has largely to do with the structures and workings of our corporate life as communities and nations, it seems to have to do with "this world." Our work also largely has to do with the structures of "this world," with the created order. Evangelical Christianity in America today has for the most part relegated created-order concerns to a secondary status, and thus, practically speaking, has given up on culture. But since work has to do with the created order, with culture, the attempt to connect up our work with our sense of purpose and calling as God's redeemed creatures has fallen by the wayside. How well the house is built, how well public drinking water gets delivered to homes, how well the kids are taught, how well food is distributed, how well the office books get balanced, etc., has a measure of importance, but this pales compared to getting people saved, being busy at church, teaching Sunday School, and supporting the capital campaign.

As we all know, we were born - a created

We could do a very good job connecting up a person's spirituality with his or her work, home life, friendships, and other aspects of their everyday bodily life.

order event. But we were all messed up and sinful, and had to get reborn - an order of redemption event. Since we were born a mess, of "perishable seed," but reborn into an "imperishable seed," we are tempted to think that the being reborn is more significant than the being born. But why were we reborn? Just to escape from this created-order mess in which we're stuck? Does not our rebirth have anything to do with restoring the purpose of the created order, with restoring the purpose of our being born in the first place? At root of all this is the old heresy of Gnosticism that says created order bodily life doesn't matter, that our spirituality is separated from our everyday experience. And since our everyday work is part of our everyday experience, part of our created-order bodily life, work again just doesn't matter.

Back To Our Roots

We have left behind the classic Reformed and Biblical perspective that grants proper significance to created-order, bodily human life, and to created-order, everyday human vocations. Created-order culture matters to God. All of life is to be lived as service to Christ. The Reformed perspective restores wholeness and unity to our lives as Christians. It brings back into the sphere of what really matters to God most of what we are already doing everyday in our homes, offices, and neighborhoods. This perspective honors everyday life. It reminds us that our sanctification happens out there where we already are in the world, and includes how well and with what attitude we do all that we do.

Remember what Paul told those poor slaves who hungered to be significant to God: "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). And again, in what is perhaps his premier summation of the Christian life, Paul tells us: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of

your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom 12:1-2.) Everything we do in bodily, created-order life, is to be done as a spiritual act of worship or service. We are to rethink how we see everyday life, our minds are to be transformed, and we are to learn how to do God's will in the totality of our bodily working life.

Restoring our work to its proper place of significance will take nothing less than a profound re-examination of who God is, why He made this world in the first place, and why He cares to redeem it out of its rebellion. At issue is nothing less than the glory and honor of God who made the world for His own glory, and who made us to share in His glory. However, a mere intellectual re-examination will not be enough. We desperately need God Himself to open our eyes to the wonder and splendor of His purpose for His world, and to show us how it is that we fit into that purpose. Then our work will have again its proper place in the unfolding of our lives as His redeemed creatures.

Does not our rebirth have anything to do with restoring the purpose of the created order, with restoring the purpose of our being born in the first place?

Banker

Pam Tilley

As I do the recordkeeping for each retirement plan, it is like piecing together an intricate puzzle.

Walk down the hallway of the trust department of my bank, enter the fourth door on the left, and you will find me there at my desk, surrounded by stacks of files and papers. Most likely I am hammering away at my keyboard, writing letters to customers, posting financial data for retirement plans, calculating employees' benefits, or creating reports. Or I may be researching IRS tax guidelines to insure that our retirement plans comply with government regulations. Often I prepare presentations for our corporate customers' employees to explain their retirement plan to them. Since my specialty is 401(k) plans, I have the opportunity to explain the benefits of saving for retirement on a before-tax basis, and to encourage employees to start saving now for their future with small regular contributions.

I am very thankful that the Lord brought me into a profession that so suits my personality. As I do the recordkeeping for each retirement plan, it is like piecing together an intricate puzzle. Coming up with a plan that will work for a corporate client and meet with the endless guidelines and regulations is a problem-solver's dream. My analytical mind loves all the calculating. It loves learning the ins and outs of the computer software. And to think that math was my least favorite subject in school!

Despite the fact that I work in an office far removed from where people are in their day-to-day lives, I know what I do makes a difference for them. I enjoy going out to where they are, in their offices and factories, to explain how their retirement plan works. Even though standing in front of a group of employees can be intimidating, I know that they need to understand their company's benefits, know how to take advantage of saving opportunities, and how to make wise decisions about their retirement. I see myself as helping them to be responsible stewards of God's gifts. God uses me to help Him take care of them as they learn to plan and save for their future.

My career aspirations certainly didn't include working for a bank! When my father, re-

tired from his career in banking and finance, advised me to pursue a college business degree, I firmly told him I would never work in business. I was convinced that I was going to be a teacher of young children. With degrees in education and psychology, teacher certification, and practice teaching experience, I was soon ready to teach. Teaching jobs, however, were scarce. So after doing various things in my first year after college, I found myself pursuing a banking job after all!

Over the past fifteen years, I have learned that work always has stress and frustrations. There are deadlines. Customers are not always happy. There is excessive paper work due to tax law changes. Still, the Lord is always there, and I know that every job I have ever had has been provided by Him.

I am still learning what it means to be Jesus' representative in my job. My performance at work must be worthy not only of my boss's praise, but the Lord's praise as well. If my daily work is to be as unto the Lord, as an offering to Him, it must be done accurately and conscientiously. I must seek to serve the needs of our customers and their employees. But even though I am very task-oriented, I desire to be used by God in my relationships with my co-workers. I must not forget to recognize and appreciate their presence in my life. Yet I need to do this with proper balance. In the past I have observed some Christians who devoted more time ministering to co-workers and friends than attending to their job duties. Although these people had an impact in the lives of many, their employers were short-changed. May the Lord give me the wisdom to walk in a way that pleases Him!

The Frustration of Work

Mark Ross

Only one life,
'Twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ
will last.

I will never forget these words. They were inscribed on a wall plaque in the home where I grew up, hung above the kitchen sink where my mother so often worked. There were five children in my family, and Mom spent a lot of her life at that sink.

Dishes done for Christ? What does that mean? The message of the plaque is surely intended to focus our attention on the things that matter most. It silently rebukes our preoccupation with things that count only for a while and only for this world, and it calls us instead to concentrate on the things that will have lasting significance. But dishes, the never-ending grind of dishes? What lasting significance is there in doing dishes?

Most of us want our work to be meaningful. We want our work to matter, to count for something. We want our work to have lasting value, to count long beyond the time it takes to do it. The fact is, most of us must spend our time doing things that really will not count for much in the long run, so far as we can see. They are things that, for a variety of reasons, just have to be done; but they are not the stuff of history, and they will not be remembered for long. They may not even be noticed now. And so we hope that sooner or later we will get beyond all this and get down to some really important work. Yet our hopes are often disappointed, and we find ourselves consumed again by urgent and necessary tasks that have no apparent lasting significance. We feel frustrated, or angry at the never-ending burden and grind of our work which doesn't seem to add up to very much.

Now as Christians we instinctively know that there is something wrong when feelings like this dominate our thinking. The Scriptures teach us that whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we should do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). But how are we to do this? How

can we overcome the feeling that what we are doing really doesn't matter very much at all?

The Teacher

One book of the Bible that tackles this problem head-on is the book of Ecclesiastes. The author of Ecclesiastes (let us call him by the name he uses for himself, the "Teacher") knew our problem well, better than we know it ourselves. Hear how he begins his book:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!"
says the Teacher.
"Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless."

Now we know that this is not true. That just can't be the way things are, not in a world made by God. Yet if we are honest, this is just how we often feel about our work, especially when that work involves doing and redoing the same sorts of things over and over again. Housework is like that. Office work is like that. Even the pastorate can be like that.

I well remember that in my early years of ministry I often pined under the weight of tasks that didn't seem to be of any great and lasting importance, but which just had to be done. I was so frustrated with it all that I gave serious thought to getting out of the ministry altogether and going off to teach at some college or seminary, where I could really get down to some important work.

Then I received a letter from a friend who was teaching in a prominent seminary. He too was having a hard time. He was very discouraged at how much of his time had to be spent in committee meetings and administrative duties. At times he was so overwhelmed by these things that it seemed as if teaching had become quite secondary to what he was expected to do. He was starting to think that he should leave the seminary, and go into the pastorate, where, he thought, he could concentrate on really important matters!

But dishes, the never-ending grind of dishes? What lasting significance is there in doing dishes?

Wherever we go, whatever we do, this feeling of the meaninglessness and the insignificance of our work can overtake us. That's what the Teacher of Ecclesiastes found out. He did his best to outrun this sense of meaninglessness, but everywhere he went, it caught up with him. It was as if he tried to outrun meaninglessness by engaging in some great project, but always found it there waiting for him at the end, laughing at him.

His first pursuit was wisdom and learning. If only he understood things better, he thought, he could escape from the endless cycle of life which took every pursuit and turned it into drudgery:

I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a burden God has laid on men (1:13)!

As I read these lines I can't help but think of many people that I met during my years of graduate study, people pursuing advanced degrees in their fields, but often feeling so very empty and confused about the significance of their studies.

The outcome of the Teacher's search was disappointing:

I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind (1:14).

Despite how promising it seemed at the beginning, the pursuit of wisdom and understanding only exacerbated the Teacher's problem. He only came to see more fully the folly of work done under the sun.

Now if wisdom and understanding do not allow us to escape our sense of futility, perhaps pleasure and enjoyment can do so:

I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." ...I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly.... I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives (2:1-3).

So the Teacher acts like a man in a mid-life

crisis, returning to the antics of his teenage years. But it all came to the same result as before. The pursuit of pleasure proved to be hollow.

But perhaps he had stopped too short. After all, these had only been cheap thrills. More expensive pleasures might prove more satisfying and worthwhile. So he pursued things which were both good and pleasurable, things which would give him a sense of accomplishment, and the finer pleasures of life:

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees (2:4-6).

Had he lived today, he would certainly have subscribed to *Architectural Digest*. He cultivated a taste for the finer things of life. And, since life had been good to him, he could afford to take on domestic help so that he could have all the more time for enjoying his things:

I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house (2:7).

He was certainly riding high. Things could not have been better. To top it all off, he had plenty of investments and savings to carry him through indefinitely:

I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces (2:7b,8a).

He also became a patron of the arts. But he did it his way. He did not just go to the concert hall from time to time. He bought himself a choir: "I acquired men and women singers..." (2:8). The Teacher pursued a kind of life of which most of us could only dream. He actually obtained all that he desired. He did not fall short in anything that he attempted, except one thing: he again came up empty. And what a surprising and tragic discovery this was:

Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, ev-

He did his best to outrun this sense of meaninglessness, but everywhere he went, it caught up with him.

everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun (2:11).

Every way he turned, he ultimately came to the same result. It was not just failure that left him empty. It was success also. Most of us consider that the emptiness that plagues us is really due to failure. But with the Teacher it was not that at all. He achieved all that he wanted. Still, at the end of the day, he had to say to himself:

So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind (2:17).

Decay and Frustration

But why all the despair? Just why is it that the Teacher found all of his work under the sun to be meaningless? First of all, he found that whether he acted with wisdom or acted in folly, he would die nonetheless. The same fate overtakes each person, whatever kind of life he leads:

Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless." For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die (2:15-16)!

So whatever he did, whatever he achieved, he would still die, just like the fool.

Second, if he thought to comfort himself with the idea that at least he would have something to leave behind to others, that comfort too evaporated. Since it might well turn out that all his wealth and accomplishment would pass into the hands of a fool, everything might ultimately be lost anyway. What then would be the sum of his life? It seemed that everything was adding up to zero. We all die. Nothing lasts. Nothing endures.

We must be prepared to admit that there is truth to all of this. Because of our fall into sin,

there is a curse upon the works of our hands. Corruption eats away at all that we do. Good crops and beautiful flowers come only by the sweat of our brow. Weeds grow and flourish without any help from us at all. Staving off decay and disintegration, maintaining order and cleanliness, just surviving all of this takes constant vigilance. Plus, it is true, much of what we do actually manage to do fails to last. Circumstances out of our control sweep upon us and bring our projects to ruin. Our own impending death casts a gloomy shadow across our work, since we cannot control what will happen after we die. Because of all of this it is natural that we would, like the Teacher, feel the weight of futility descend upon us.

Moses too felt this way about his work of leading the Israelites through the wilderness and into the promised land. He had been set apart for this mission. This was his calling, his vocation, his job. Psalm 90 (notice and take seriously the title of this psalm: "A Prayer of Moses the man of God") is a prayer that records the depth of his feelings as he faced the futility of his assignment:

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning—though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered. We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. The length of our days is seventy years - or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. Teach us to

It was not just failure that left him empty. It was success also.

So Paul himself was not immune from the principle of decay and frustration that affects our work. He always was concerned that his work not "come to naught."

number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Relent, O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. 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.

The Psalm begins appropriately with the praise of God, acknowledging God as the One in whom the Israelites have lived all their days. Then Moses reflects on the brevity of life as death overtakes everyone. He adds to this thought the idea that the death that overtakes everyone is nothing more and nothing less than the wages of their sin. Because of their sins the Israelites perished in the wilderness. Only two of the 600,000 men who came out of Egypt went on to enter into the promised land. That is an enormous number of deaths for a forty-year period. Think of the number of funerals there would be for a pastor like Moses! As you contemplate the impact of that many deaths, you understand better the sense of urgency, the sense of struggle against despair, so evident in the psalm: "Relent, O LORD! How long will it be?" You also better understand the final petition which Moses makes: "...establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands."

How well I remember the first time that I studied this psalm in depth. I was so puzzled by the way it ended. Why would the writer be asking that God establish the work of his hands? But as I took seriously who the author was, and what the circumstances of his life had been, then I understood his struggle. He had been called to lead this people into the promised land, but there they were wandering in the wilderness, with hundreds of thousands of them dying. Would all of his work count for anything in the end? Would it be of any lasting importance? It is no wonder he had a sense of futility about his work!

We find the principle of decay and frustration affecting even the work of spreading the gospel in the early church. Observe Paul's lament in II Timothy about the state of the church in the regions of his apostolic labors: "You know," he said to Timothy (1:15), "that all who are in Asia turned away from me...." As surprising and as depressing as that sounds to us, for it is not at all the result we would expect of the great apostle's labors, it probably did not surprise Paul. Remember what he said to the elders of the church at Ephesus:

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prisons and hardships are facing me (Acts 20:22f).

He goes on to warn the elders of what they could expect in Ephesus after he left:

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:29f).

So Paul himself was not immune from the principle of decay and frustration that affects our work. He always was concerned that his work not "come to naught."

A Partial Solution

What help has God given to us for dealing with the sense of futility that descends so easily upon our work? The Teacher of Ecclesiastes could find only a partial solution to his problem. Time and again we find him recommending to us a joyful acceptance and enjoyment of the good things which God does give to us along our way in life, yet all the while remembering that they last only for a time. I quote here a few of his recommendations:

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God,

for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? (2:24)

So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him? (3:22)

Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart (5:18-20).

So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun (8:15).

What kind of solution is this? Is the Teacher suggesting that we make pleasure our aim, and let that pleasure just distract us from those gnawing feelings of futility that overtake us? Certainly not. He himself tried that path and came up empty. Is he telling us just to ignore the toilsomeness of our work by playing a positive thinking game, telling ourselves "be happy, be happy" no matter how we really feel? No. As we look closer we see that he is telling us that despite the meaninglessness and futility of work, despite its toilsomeness, there is joy that comes to us as we work, and we are to accept that joy, and embrace the good that is there. These are gifts of God. There is nothing better than a joyful acceptance and enjoyment of the good things which God, from time to time, sometimes more and sometimes less, gives to us in the midst of our work. In the midst of what appears to be meaningless work, God is there bestowing good gifts. We enjoy His gifts, and we enjoy Him. God does not come down and just make our meaningless work meaningful. In the midst of

the futility, we find Him with us, and we enjoy the good that He brings.

We know this is true. Despite the frustrations of our work, joy comes our way nonetheless, usually when we are not looking for it. We feel a sense of accomplishment in a task well done, we enjoy a conversation with a workmate, a cool breeze blows over the sweat on our brow, there is an unexpected pleasure in the task of the moment. These are gifts. We are to embrace them.

Is the Teacher Right?

But is this all there is to our work? Are we left accepting the Teacher's conclusions, that our work is in fact meaningless, but in the midst of the meaninglessness of it we are simply to enjoy the good that is there as a gift from God?

Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom (9:7-10).

The Teacher's advice is that despite the meaninglessness of our work, we are to enjoy it anyway. But is he really right after all about the meaninglessness of our work? Does this passage not betray the fact that his observations about work were just that - observations, observations about the phenomenon of life lived "under the sun," "under heaven," and "on earth?" By these phrases the author speaks of life in this world, a life bounded by our birth and death. Here he is accurate in his assessment of the meaning of life and work where there is no resurrection, where there is no future hope beyond this life.

Yet, the Teacher is certainly not a deist or

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an atheist. If Ecclesiastes resounds with the theme of futility (38 times the Hebrew word is used), it speaks of God yet more (40 times). The world of the Teacher has God in it, and in charge of it. God is sovereign over all things. He gives us the days and years of our lives (5:18, 8:15). He gives gifts which we are to enjoy. And it is God with whom we ultimately must deal. We are to remember and fear our God, for we will answer to Him for all that we do (12:14).

The New Testament Sheds More Light

But the picture is still not complete. It awaits a fuller revelation, a revelation which comes as we open the New Testament. Think for example of how differently Paul looks at death in 1 Corinthians 15 than did Moses in Psalm 90. Death is still an enemy, but it is an enemy whose defeat is now certain. Jesus has seen to that on the cross. We now know that with the believer what is perishable will put on what is imperishable. What is mortal will put on immortality. Death will be swallowed up in victory. So Paul tells us to be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for we know that our labor is not in vain.

Not in vain - what a wonderful thought and strong comfort this is to us as we labor in a world that is "subjected to frustration" (or "futility"), to use Paul's language in Romans 8:20. Yes, this is a world where "moth and rust consume," where "thieves break in and steal" (Matt. 6:19ff). It is a world in which all that we do is infected with corruption. This is as true in so-called "spiritual" work as it is in work that seems so much more "this-world" in nature. Paul found it true of his missionary labors, just as the Teacher of Ecclesiastes found it true of his worldly pursuits.

Yet the appearance of corruption in our labors is not the whole of the story. For there is another world besides this one. It cannot now be seen with the eye, but it can be seen by faith as we take seriously the promises of God concerning the world to come. Indeed, strange as it may seem to us while we live "under the sun," the world to come is more real than this one:

"For what is seen is temporary, but what

is unseen in eternal" (II Cor. 4:18).

The world to come will last forever, not the world which we now see, which we now observe. So the work which we now do in the Lord is not in vain:

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them'" (Rev. 14:13).

Once we have taken on this perspective about life, it turns the most menial of earthly tasks into labors of eternal significance. A cup of cold water given in Christ's name (or a dish washed, a book balanced, a flower planted, a tire sold) will not go without its reward (Matt. 10:42). Whatever we do, whether in word or deed, we do it all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17). Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do it all to the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31). Whatever we do in our present bodily life, we do it as a sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Rom. 12:1). Though we will constantly have to fight off the moths and rust which threaten to destroy our work; though we must constantly fight against the temptation to despair that all our work is in vain; yet by faith we can and must persevere in our tasks, knowing that our work in the Lord is not in vain.

God will reward our work as it is done unto Him. And as the Teacher rightly taught, as we work we have the presence of God and His blessings, for which we can be thankful. Surely His presence is strong enough to keep us going, even when corruption and decay seem to have the upper hand. When we remember that it is our faithfulness in performing each task in His name and unto Him, and not the success of our effort that matters, the presence of decay and corruption have less power to overwhelm. So what if we have to do the dishes over and over, day after day. It is the faithful doing of them, in love, in His name, as a sacrifice unto Him, that gives meaning to the work well beyond the temporary (but real) value of clean dishes in the cupboard. And we find that He gives unexpected joy as we actually do the dishes. This is a gift from Him, a gift which we accept with thanksgiving.

A man once spent much of his adult working life putting together what would have been the best Old Testament Hebrew concordance available. As the years went on and his project neared completion, the Hebrew Bible was computerized, and in a short period of time an exhaustive, computer generated concordance was published. Overnight, this man's life work came to naught.

But was it for naught really? Every dot, every tittle, every painstaking word search done unto the Lord, done as a gift and sacrifice unto Him, would be rewarded in the life to come. Every experience of joy in the lifelong process, received in thankfulness as a gift from God, would find fulfillment in eternity. Every life touched by his loving and faithful service, every bit of glory brought to God, every moment of humble thankfulness, every bit of it would be rewarded on that day when the Father proclaims, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Only one life,
 'Twill soon be past.
Only what's done for Christ
 will last.

As I remember these words from my childhood home, and think of my mother's many years of faithful labors at that sink, I think also of another plaque which someone told me about that also hung above a kitchen sink:

Divine service performed here,
 three times daily.

How true this is, but how hard to remember and believe in a world with so much dust to sweep, so many dishes to be done, and so much that will undo all that we do. Yet if we will return to the promises of God concerning the world to come, leave with Him the things we do not understand about His government of the world today, and accept with joy and thanksgiving what comforts He gives to us now, all the while remembering that they are but temporary in this world, we can go on with our work, face our frustrations, and serve our God with faithfulness and cheer, whatever our difficulties. May it be so with each one of us.

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Mental Health Counselor

Brent Fields

A twenty-seven-year-old woman sits down in front of me. She has come to the local mental health center for counseling. I am her counselor. She has a strangely placid countenance, much like the surface of a calm ocean. And like that ocean, beneath its glassy veneer, the struggle for existence is raging.

She reports having troubled sleep and that her appetite is meager. She is easily startled and often finds herself crying for no apparent reason. She is living with her boyfriend, a good man, she says, when he's sober. Her two daughters, ages ten and twelve, are currently down the hall being assessed by a child psychologist. They, too, are having problems, she says with bowed head.

My client reports that her father began treating her differently, "special," when she was ten years old. He told her that it was "just part of being a good daughter." She suspects that her oldest daughter is also her father's child. When her father realized that she was pregnant, her specialness ended. She left home, she says, at age fifteen and "I just moved in with somebody." She says she has lived with numerous men, has married and divorced twice, and has been struggling since. She has been frantically avoiding sharks, I think.

While she is talking, my mind momentarily drifts. I find myself thinking of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, trying to quench an insatiable thirst with mere well water. I imagine the woman sleep-walking through life, as if in a fog, her mind in shock as the result of her demoralized life. And just then, at that perfect moment, Jesus offers her living water - water that is eternally thirst quenching, wholly satisfying, salvific. My client coughs and I am whisked back to the present. She excuses herself momentarily, asking where she can find the water fountain.

This case presentation is fictional. It is, however, easily a composite of many individuals who

pass through the mental health system. People who are demoralized and stigmatized, often suffering unimaginable psychological pain. They come to the mental health center with a litany of woe - depression, anxiety, various psychotic disorder, suicidal tendencies, etc. Some have been raped or brutalized. Some have been in psychiatric treatment for years. Others come via the legal system for abuses ranging from child abuse/neglect to public drunkenness to violent behavior. People come to the center for counseling and/or medication. They come to talk, to get away from home, to belong. They come to strangers who, too often, are the only people to whom they can trust real conversation.

And we help. We counsel; we medicate; we provide transportation and assistance with daily living. We observe (we think) objectively and respond (we hope) professionally. We talk among ourselves using technical terms, nomenclature of the profession, when referring to our clientele. Words and phrases like symptomatology, etiology, ego strength, trauma, psychoses, parasuicidal behavior, etc., are common. We attempt to qualify and quantify experience in an effort to gauge mental/emotional well-being. I use these words. Sometimes I think they protect me.

There are times I feel a stranger in a strange land, a stranger to my work, and at the worst times, a stranger to my faith. How was Christ so "in" the world but not "of" the world? Theologically, scripturally, the answer is rudimentary: Jesus was perfect, deity in flesh. I know He holds my life and salvation in His hands. I know He works all things for good for those who love Him. Nevertheless, I experience the brokenness of humanity like a sinkhole, and at times I find myself being engulfed by it and wallowing in it. The world tells me to depend upon the miracle of science, the efficacy of government program intervention, and the essential goodness of humanity. In spite of every good intention, I wonder if I'm not draining the ocean with a plastic pail, or worse yet, throwing an anvil to a drowning man. In the world of counseling, of mental health, spirituality is tolerated if discussed as treatment modality or meeting the client where he or she is whatever that means. We are reminded that therapy is about therapeutic alliance and objectively addressing

In spite of every good intention, I wonder if I'm not draining the ocean with a plastic pail, or worse yet, throwing an anvil to a drowning man.

subjective experience. There doesn't seem to be much emphasis on truth.

A twenty-seven-year-old woman sits down in front of me. She has come to the local mental health center for counseling. I am her counselor. She presents as traumatized and depressed. The psychiatrist will prescribe anti-depressant and anti-anxiety medications. We will discuss treatment process, goals, outcome indications. We will listen, meditate, and encourage.

She asks for directions to the water fountain, reporting that she is thirsty. I would like to tell her about a woman, an old well, and the water offered by a man named Jesus. I would like to tell her about Living Water.

The woman leaves. The receptionist calls. My ten o'clock appointment is waiting.

Dear Lord, have mercy on this woman. Have mercy on me.

ating with God in His ministry of sustaining and upholding the created order, serving the needs of other people. How is God using the thing you do to serve others, to help meet the needs of folks like me.

2. Try to give us a picture of both your workplace and your workday, the rhythm of your day, what your work place is like, whether you spend time mostly alone, on the road, outside, at a desk, etc.

3. What are the main joys of your work, those blessings God drops your way as you work away in what you do?

4. How is it that you ended up doing the work that you do? Was this part of a well thought out "plan," or more of an "accident"? Do you see yourself as well suited for your work?

5. What are some of the frustrations associated with your work? That is, how do you experience the "fallenness" of work? What are some of things about your work which cause you to feel anxious, angry, or insignificant? How do you try to deal with these things?

6. Try to describe what being a Christian means for you in your work. Has this made you think differently about your work, or act differently in your work? How do you connect your Christian faith with what you do most of your work day? Do you have a sense that your work is a central part of your Christian duty and service, or do you tend to see it as secondary to other things?

7. Give a brief picture of the secondary benefits of your work. You may speak about how your work provides for your family's needs, and how it gives you the means to support ministries such as the work of your local church. try to envision how the kingdom of God is advanced through the financial means God provides in your work.

8. Explain how you see yourself in your workplace as an ambassador of Christ. Who are the people that God has led you to pray for in particular? Have you been faithful in this? Are there any ways you see you need to grow or change to be more like Christ in the workplace?

9. Try to reflect on how God is using your work to grow you up into the image of Christ. What do you see as the main sanctification issues you face in your work?

I would like to tell her about a woman, an old well, and the water offered by a man named Jesus.

Your Work

The following is a modified and somewhat enhanced version of the guidelines followed by the writers who contributed the "Working People" articles to this issue of Faith and Practice. Why don't you write an article following these guidelines? It may help you think about your work. Who knows, maybe we can one day publish a book called "Working People!"

1. Just what is it that you do in your work? If you make widgets, tell us what role you have in making the widgets, what widgets are used for, and how I may in some way benefit from the existence of widgets. If you teach, tell us where and what you teach, and why the thing you teach is useful for the people who are getting taught, and how those students are better people, etc. If you are a middle manager or a bureaucrat of some kind, tell us a little about the company or agency and what it does, and what role you have in the scheme of things with that company. Try to explain how you understand your work in terms of its place in cooper-

Creation and Redemption

Joel Gillespie

If only we hadn't disobeyed in the garden there would never have been all this confusion about vocation. We wouldn't be writing articles about the significance of normal everyday human work. We wouldn't be dealing at all with the tension between the physical and the spiritual aspects of reality. We wouldn't sense that there is a difference between "work" and the "work of the Lord." There would be no "dualism" with all its problems. We wouldn't have to write learned tomes about the "order of creation" and "order of redemption." But we did; and thus we do.

In the New Heaven and New Earth there will be complete unity of purpose and life. We will be fully restored human beings, working, worshipping, and loving, with new physical bodies in a new physical reality. There will be no sin in us, and so the physical and spiritual aspects of our being will be fused, as it were, and in perfect unity. We won't be able to tell one from the other. Nothing about our bodily life will take us out of fellowship with our God. There will be no fallen culture, no rebellion, no lust of the flesh. No one will need redeeming, although the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus will be eternally celebrated and praised. Nothing will need restoring. Things will be as they were supposed to be. Jesus will reign as perfect and benevolent monarch over His world. We will work under His kingship. I can't wait.

But we're not there yet. He must yet put all enemies under His feet. For a while longer we must endure the unnatural tensions that exist in our work in a fallen world. The order of creation and the order of redemption must run parallel for a while longer, touching, intersecting, intertwining, and interdepending, yet sadly, because of the ongoing presence of death and sin, not united in perfect unity. Not yet.

Can we say which is of first order or which is more important? I don't think so. In one sense we can imagine the ongoing created order, in-

cluding normal human work, as a kind of subtext or substructure for the order of redemption. We work in order that we can stay alive, in order that others can stay alive, so that the work of redemption in Jesus Christ, that is, the work of proclaiming the gospel, making disciples, being justified, sanctified, and glorified, i.e., being saved, can continue and go on. In this we cooperate with God, who chooses, out of His patience and mercy and forbearance, to keep this fallen world going, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

For this redemption to happen, Jesus had to come into history, which means that there had to be a history into which He could come. Thus God had to order the affairs of history for His purposes, so that in due time, at the right time, the Lord Jesus could come, the kingdom grow and spread, and the gospel go forth unto the nations. For the sake of gospel, the world had to and has to go on.

On the other hand, can we not say that the work of redemption goes on *so that* the world might be restored to its original creation purpose? As we are renewed in Christ and remade into His likeness, our image-of-Godness (though never fully lost) comes to be restored, and we come once again to fulfill our created purpose, exercising loving dominion over the earth for the glory of God. As many come to Christ, our world ceases to suffer so much the curse of God, and itself begins to be restored to its original splendor and majesty and purpose. God comes again to be glorified in all things.

The Lord Jesus therefore came into history in order that God's creation purpose for His creatures could be fulfilled. Jesus is second Adam. He shows us what we were meant to be like. He not only has fulfilled the Law of Moses in the sense of living obediently to all that was commanded, He also has fulfilled the original mandate given to Adam to rule over the earth for the glory of God. In this Jesus has shown us the way. Through the work of redemption God is rebuilding and reclaiming the created order, and will somehow, when Jesus returns, resurrect the earth as a New Earth. Through Jesus He will have His world back again as it was meant to be.

As God carries out both works, sustaining and caring for His world, and restoring His

**Through Jesus
He will have
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meant to be.**

world through the proclamation of the gospel, so do we. Neither work is first or better. Often these two works seem hand in hand. Sometimes they seem distinct. Each can be exhilarating; each can be frustrating. Each can seem fruitful, each can also seem futile.

Because of the truth of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, my normal human work can never be the same, can never be all the work I care about doing, however important and valuable in its own right, however much restored to its creation intent, however much done properly as "unto the Lord." The good news of Jesus must now be proclaimed. Intercessions must be made. Disciples must be made. People must be served and loved, even unto death, for His sake. If I am a faithful servant of Jesus, if I have been raised with Christ, there is a new kind of work I must attend to, that which Paul calls the "work of the Lord," even as I proceed with my normal work. My normal work gives me a relationship context with people who are in need of salvation.

Added Benefits

What I do in my work has value not only in itself as I participate with God in His work of providence, as I worship and glorify Him in my work; my work, the manner and spirit in which I do it, also now has bearing on others who need redeeming. My normal work gives me the financial means to help others proclaim the good news of resurrection here and abroad. My work gives me the financial means to be involved more directly in the process of making disciples, or working with troubled teens, or visiting those in prison, or whatever. My normal work provides me with a training ground for sanctification. Through it the Lord disciplines and molds me and makes me more like His Son.

Both "works" must be attended to. Both are crucially important. Neither is superior. And there are moments, blessed and glorious moments, when we see these works converge as one. Our normal work seems to glorify God, help sustain others, and proclaim the resurrected Jesus all at the same time. We find that for a moment it is as if we are truly whole and complete. The joy zings through us. We are like Jesus

wielding His carpenter's hammer. Our humanity is restored. We feel the joy of good work, like a cool breeze after turning a row of rich sandy loam, and others see the presence of Christ in our faces. It happens. The order of creation and redemption touch for a moment, and are one. Wow!

Because of the truth of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, my normal human work can never be the same, can never be all the work I care about doing.

Painter

Ron Collier

I enjoy taking something that is old and falling apart, and making it look good again.

Who would have ever thought that one day I would end up painting for a living? My brother started me in painting when I was in my late teens. All through college, painting provided a means of partial support. I viewed it at the time as a temporary means of having money when I needed it. I graduated from college with a degree in Business Management, but jobs were hard to come by, and I never connected with the right thing for me. So I kept painting. It started to grow on me. Painting gave me a constant sense of accomplishment. I felt a peace about continuing. God worked things out for me to stay in the painting business. He has kept me from things I wouldn't enjoy and do well, and has opened just the right doors for me along the way.

It's hard to believe that someone could get as much satisfaction from their work as I do. I enjoy taking something that is old and falling apart, and making it look good again. My work brings a lot of joy to home and business owners who are encouraged by the look of their newly painted structure. But sometimes no matter how hard I work on a structure, I can't get it to look the way I think it should. I have learned to do my very best, and to be content with that.

When I paint, God is using me to take care of His creatures. He has called me to be a servant, and to use my gifts and abilities to help and serve others. What I do has value. There's nothing like a good paint job to make a building or home last for years and years.

I love being outside in the fresh air and sunshine. God has been good because He knows how much I like the outdoors. I have a lot of time to be still each day, to meditate upon Him while I work. Songs and hymns come to my mind, as well as passages of Scripture. I know I'm blessed to have this time to think and to pray.

Although my job is very repetitive and physical, God has given me good health and lots of energy. Painting takes a lot of patience. It can be very tedious and cumbersome. The weather doesn't always cooperate. Sometimes

the jobs don't go as I had planned, and people aren't as understanding as I would like. There is a temptation to get angry. But God has used my painting business to teach me patience, to refine me in many ways. He has brought me from being a person of little patience and low self esteem to a person of great patience and sense of pride in his work. He has used painting to teach me to have a servant's heart.

I remind myself that my purpose is to serve others in my work. This helps get me through the hard days. I try to paint as if I'm painting for God. This keeps me honest and purposeful. I know that God can see even what a customer can't see. I believe that God wants me to be the very best at my profession, with money being secondary to quality. He seems to be honoring this attitude. I have had an abundance of work from Day One. In fact, I have never missed a day of work due to a lack of work. He has provided for and taken care of me from the beginning.

I try very hard to be a good witness to God in my work. People watch me. Sometimes they say things that try my patience to the full, and I keep praying that I would please God as I serve them. But He has given me opportunities to be a witness to Him, and I believe I have been.

I consider myself to be very blessed of God. Amen, and thanks be to Him.

Children and Their Work

Mardi Keyes

As a mother, a worker, a counselor to many Christian families, and a Christian thinker, Mardi Keyes has been concerned for some time with the relationship, and non-relationship, between children and work. This article is derived from a lecture which Mardi has shared at L'Abri conferences all over the world.

CHILDREN AND THEIR WORK IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Recently I read Joseph F. Kett's history of Adolescence in America, *Rites of Passage*, which I would recommend to anyone striving to understand the phenomena of modern adolescence.¹ Kett introduces the book by describing some of the changes that have occurred in the relationship of young people to work during our nation's two-hundred-year history. In Kett's words:

Those who measure the success of revolutions by their completeness will judge the revolution which has overtaken American young people in recent decades to be one of the most successful. Compared to their predecessors in 1800 or 1900, young people in the 1970's spend much more time in school, much less at work. They are essentially consumers rather than producers. Their contacts with adults are likely to occur in highly controlled environments such as the classroom, and the adults encountered are usually conveyors of specialized services such as education and guidance. For the most part, young people (today) spend their time in the company of other young people. This pattern of age segregation frequently prevails even when the young people hold jobs.

To observe that youth today are primarily consumers rather than producers is not to deny their economic importance. Indirectly, young people sustain a wide

range of service occupations: teachers, guidance counselors, adolescent psychologists, market research analysts, printers, clothiers, disc jockeys, even policemen and judges. But the economic and social relationship between youth and adults has clearly changed. Further, the change has been abrupt as well as profound. Its roots can be traced back to the late 19th century, when industrialization began to displace young workers, but only since 1945 have vast numbers of American youth experienced the mixture of leisure, affluence, and education that now distinguishes their social position.²

When the Workplace Was the Homeplace

Before industrialization separated the workplace from the homeplace, the family was the central unit of economic production. Men, women, and children all worked together from the homeplace. Much has been written about how this reality applied respectively to men and to women. Suffice it to say that there was not the clear role distinction many people assume today by the twin adages "Man is the breadwinner" and "The woman's place is in the home." In fact, most men and women raised bread and children together from the home.

Children also shared in the necessary economic work of the family. Starting anywhere from five to seven years of age, children began helping with household chores, which included spinning, candle making, food production, caring for animals and younger siblings, gardening, and so on. They worked alongside the other members of the extended family, gradually taking on more and more work responsibility as they got older. Many children were sent out to work for other families, sometimes relatives, where they would do domestic or farm work. Children were absolutely essential to the economic survival of the family; to be childless, or to lose too many children in infancy, was,

Before industrialization separated the workplace from the homeplace, the family was the central unit of economic production.

among other things, an economic disaster. While some children were no doubt overworked, all children grew up knowing that their work was significant and needed.

John Demos points out:

...the transition from childhood to adulthood was relatively smooth, as (the child's) introduction to adult roles began early, and children knew that their work experience, apprenticeship, and training as young people would clearly be relevant to their adult lives. Therefore, as children and teenagers, they did not feel alienated from the adult world of work. They were part of it as productive, contributing members of the household.³

The child's world thus has very little continuity with the adult world of real work, the world for which the child is being prepared.

Starting Early

Indeed, adult responsibilities came early to pre-industrial young people, who were often married and out in the world by the age of fifteen or sixteen. But the Industrial Revolution changed all this for most people. While some farming communities still maintain pre-industrial social patterns, few young people live in agrarian settings today.⁴ The change from an agrarian to an industrial society has involved a long transition period of great upheaval and suffering. This change has not been a kind one for children.

As the industrial revolution progressed, poor children often worked in factories under appalling conditions, many of them making significant contributions to their family's income, especially in immigrant families. As a reaction against this, child labor battles raged from 1870 until the late 1930's. By 1937, many factors, which included legislation prohibiting child labor, compulsory education laws, and the victory of a new "sentimental" definition of childhood, all combined to seal the coffin on the older pre-industrial "useful" child. The child who worked was no more. The modern child had become an expensive consumer rather than an economic asset.⁵

CHILDREN AND THEIR WORK TODAY

Age Segregation and Schooling

By and large, today's children spend most of their time in age-segregated groups, in a child-centered world, away from the "real world" of adult work. The child's world thus has very little continuity with the adult world of real work, the world for which the child is being prepared. Yet, since more schooling is now required for work in the complex, technical modern world, more time is spent preparing for it. So, ironically, children are spending more and more time in a child-centered world which bears less and less resemblance to the adult world for which they are supposedly preparing.

The Experience of Alienation

Instead of a smooth transition from childhood to youth to adult work and other responsibilities, increasing numbers of young people feel alienated from adults and their work. Newsweek puts it very well:

Until the mid-19th century, children labored in the fields alongside their parents. But by the time they were 15, they might marry and go out into the world. Industrialization and compulsory education ultimately deprived them of a role in the family work unit, leaving them in a state of suspension between childhood and adulthood...To (many) teenagers, it has seemed a useless period of waiting. Approaching physical and sexual maturity, they feel capable of doing many of the things adults do. But they are not treated like adults. Instead they must endure a prolonged childhood that is stretched out even more nowadays by the need to attend college - and then possibly graduate school - in order to make one's way in the world. In the family table of organization, they are mainly in charge of menial chores. If teenagers are to stop feeling irrelevant, they need to feel needed, both by the family and by the larger world...Time and time

again, students complain that they feel isolated, unconnected to the larger world...And this detachment occurs at the very time students are deciding who they are and where they fit.⁶

I am a firm believer in the concept of delayed gratification. Kids need to learn how to wait patiently for their labors to pay off. But the motivation needed to make present sacrifices in order to enjoy future rewards is directly related to one's vision of the future. When one's present work seems not to be connected with real and significant work promised down the road, the future seems more like a mere "sweet by and by." The more real and attractive the future looks, the more one experiences aspects of real work in the present, the more willing one will be to make present sacrifices to secure future payoffs. Many kids who drop out of school do so because "the 'sweet by and by' in which they are supposed to reap the benefits of hard work is not real enough (or attractive enough) to warrant concerted effort."⁷

Some kids experience more than just alienation from the adult world and work. They actively rebel against it. The punk subculture, along with much rock and rap music, expresses profound contempt for and judgment against the materialistic, competitive world of work the adult generation has created for the next generation. Christians should sympathize with a good bit of their judgment. The modern consumerist version of the "American Dream" is not the same as the Christian vision of society; but unfortunately, looking at the materialistic values and lifestyles of many Christian adults, young people can not always tell the difference. If our life stories look banal, unattractive, and unheroic to them, it is no wonder they do not want to walk in our footsteps.

Children as Economic Liabilities

As we have seen already, children are no longer economic assets to their families. They are just the opposite - enormous expenses! Increasingly, the "economically useless child" (Zelizer's term) is considered to be an "expensive luxury," and more and more people are deciding that children are a luxury they can quite

happily forego. Zelizer writes:

The total cost of raising a child was estimated in 1980 to average between \$100,000 and \$140,000. In return for such expenses, a child is expected to provide love, smiles, and emotional satisfaction, but no money or labor.⁸

Don't think for a moment that these attitudes don't contribute to a sense of uselessness and self-hatred on the part of children.

A Sentimental View of Children

We still live with the legacy of the overly sentimental view of children that emerged during the child labor controversies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During this time, it became incorrect to expect children to contribute to the family economy.

Even the purpose of household chores was redefined. Chores were for education and character building. For the child to do work because the family needed the work to be done was considered exploitation! An article in the 1934 issue of *Parents Magazine* warned that "one should never give....children cause to suspect us of making use of them to save ourselves work."⁹

These attitudes are clearly still with us. In a recent study of 790 families from Nebraska, researchers asked parents why they asked their children to do chores. Three quarters explained their children's chores as character building. Only 22 parents responded, "I need the help."¹⁰

Is it any wonder that many kids resent such chores, invented for their "benefit" and not designed as meaningful and necessary contributions to the household? Put yourself in their shoes. We certainly resent it if an employer creates unnecessary, token work for us. We have better things to do with our time! Furthermore, character does not result from token work in the way it results from real work that makes a genuine contribution to the family's needs.

There are today some noteworthy exceptions to the sentimentalized, "useless child." Many of the children of poor single parents are being forced to carry adult loads of work responsibility. Their earnings are often essential to the family economy, and they care for

If our life stories look banal, unattractive, and unheroic to them, it is no wonder they do not want to walk in our footsteps.

younger siblings, cook meals and do housework while mother works sometimes more than one job.

The Prevalence of Spoiled Kids Today

Huge numbers of kids today have never been expected to contribute any work to the family. Jerald Bachman describes these kids as hooked on a "premature affluence" they have done nothing to attain.¹¹ Even in dual-income fast-track families, children are not being asked to pitch in at home where they could help alleviate some of the double burden their mothers are bearing. The multiple stresses of their two track life style

among large numbers of young people. But how can we expect our children to "have a sense of values," "take responsibility," and "stand on their own two feet," if we have never taught them to do these things, if we have paid all their bills and catered to all their whims, never expecting responsibility from them?

Adolescent Consumerism

Lots of high school kids have jobs when they are not in school. But according to Newsweek, for most of them, work has become almost exclusively an opportunity for immediate gratification.¹⁴

By the 1980's, 3 out of 4 high school seniors were working an average of 18 hours a week. In 1988, about 7.7 million, or about one third of 14 to 19-year-olds held jobs. These jobs, often in fast-food chains, are rarely challenging, and earnings (anywhere from \$200 a month to \$200 a week) are immediately spent on the equipment necessary for membership in the youth culture.¹⁵

For most of these kids, their basic living expenses are carried by parents, so all of their earnings can be used to indulge in "premature affluence." Tony Campolo argues, rightly, I think, that

...our consumer-oriented young people...don't buy the things they do simply because they desire the gratification of physical appetites. On the contrary, our teenage consumers buy what they do because of the deep spiritual hungers of their hearts and souls. They buy certain goods because they long for the love that those who possess the things are supposed to enjoy. They want clothes because the media manipulate them into thinking that their sexual identities will be firmly established and that they will be validated as human beings if they wear the right clothes...they...have become alienated from what they really need. Instead, they have chosen to become persons who have to buy the things they really don't need.¹⁶

In Biblical terminology, Campolo is describing the captivity of idolatry. Unfortunately, many of the alarmed adult generation are work-

On the contrary, our teenage consumers buy what they do because of the deep spiritual hungers of their hearts and souls.

...leave few parents the time to hold children accountable. Good parenting above all, takes time. Rather than yielding more responsible children, one result of the scarcity of parental time...is that many of today's latchkey and day-care boys and girls are being spoiled rotten, and may grow up to be even less caring spouses than their inconsiderate fathers.¹²

Newsweek, in their Special Issue on The 21st Century Family, puts it this way:

Something happened on the way to the 21st century: American youth, in a sharp reversal of historical trends, are taking longer to grow up. As the 20th century winds down, more young Americans are enrolled in college, but fewer are graduating, and they are taking longer to get their degrees. They take longer to establish careers, too, and longer yet to marry. Many, unable or unwilling to pay for housing, return to the nest, or are slow to leave it. They postpone choices and spurn long-term commitments. Life's on hold; adulthood can wait.¹³

The issue of work is only one aspect of a huge and complex spiritual crisis in America today. Many things have contributed to the growing patterns of immaturity, irresponsibility and avoidance of commitment we are seeing

ing from within the same idol systems of materialism and consumerism. Their complaints about their kids often reflect their own consumeristic value system. If only the kids would delay gratification long enough to complete their education, they would be able to buy a Mercedes instead of a used Nissan!

There are wonderful exceptions to the depressing picture I've been painting! Many young Americans defy the norm. They work hard and arrive at adulthood ready to nurture the next generation. Many of these young people have strong family systems where activity, work and responsibility are valued. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner, a significant number of them are from refugee families, and have known suffering in their own lives and in the lives of those about whom they know and care.¹⁷ Writes Urie Bronfenbrenner:

For the majority, passage through adolescence to maturity will remain a slow one....Ultimately, it is a question of cultural values. What the young see enshrined in the media and malls of America are, after all, the values adults put there: Consumerism, narcissism and the instant gratification of desire. When those change, so will American youth.¹⁸

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF WORK

The mention of the consumerism and the materialistic value system of our culture leads quite naturally to a discussion of Biblical values and the worldview that supports them.

The Biblical worldview gives a unique base for meaningful work. Ernest Becker, writing as an existentialist philosopher-psychologist, has understood this better than many Christians. He argues that for those who believe in a Creator and an unseen world:

...anyone can achieve even in the smallest daily tasks that sense of cosmic heroism that is the highest ambition of man, (because) if one is a servant of divine powers, everything one does is heroic, if it is done as part of the consecration of one's life to those powers. In this way meaning can be extended up to the highest level, to the

cosmic, eternal level.¹⁹

Becker goes on to argue that modern philosophical materialism (loss of belief in God and the unseen world) has brought about a crisis with middle-class and upper-class youth as they try to understand themselves within the social and economic structure of the Western world. It is a "crisis of belief in the vitality of the hero-systems that are offered by contemporary materialist society. The young no longer feel heroic in doing as their elders did, and that's that."²⁰ The accumulation and manipulation of material gadgets simply does not fulfill the human need for heroism. Becker, a non-Christian, chastises the Christian church for having been co-opted by materialism, and in the process, throwing away its heritage, which, he admits wistfully, provides a unique basis for the dignity and heroism of all human work.

So let us now turn our attention to this heritage. Several Biblical principles give a framework for understanding children and their work. The first is the dual nature of the child as image of God and as sinner. Created in God's image, each child is to grow in the exercise of accountable dominion in the world. God's mandate to Adam and Eve to fill the earth and rule over it, to exercise dominion and take care of the earth, is the creational foundation for human work. Work, in the broad sense of taking initiative, taking care of, acting creatively and productively and competently in the world, is both a human responsibility and a human need. We have a responsibility and a need to make a difference in the world.

Not only are children made in God's image, they like adults are also sinners. Like adults they are subject to both laziness and greed, the latter which leads to workaholicism and exploitation, the former to poverty and a sense of entitlement. Children need adults to teach and to model good attitudes toward work and leisure. At times, "discipline" (training that is future oriented) may be necessary. For example, holding a child accountable to finish a job according to a reasonable standard teaches the child not to succumb to laziness.

The second Biblical principle bearing on the subject of children and work has to do with the actual nature of work itself. When dealing with

Many of these young people have strong family systems where activity, work and responsibility are valued.

Through carefully thought out incremental steps, we move them toward increasing responsibility and freedom.

children we must teach them that all work is good and has dignity unless there is actual sin involved in it. This means we must resist false work hierarchies, whether Christian hierarchies which define some work as sacred or spiritual and, therefore, higher than so-called secular work; or worldly hierarchies which judge the value of work competitively, on the basis of its market or prestige value.

God calls each of us to a particular complex of responsibilities on the basis of our gifts and the needs around us. The nature of our calling may change throughout our life story, but realizing we have a vocation from God the Creator gives a profound sense of the cosmic, heroic significance to whatever we are doing, whether farming, manufacturing, computing, teaching, or any of the many other things we may be doing in our work. Even young people working part-time can have a sense that God is calling them at that point in their lives to part-time work. Even through this kind of work - whether flipping hamburgers, selling shoes in a department store, baby-sitting, mowing lawns, house-painting, and so on - young people can understand that they are sharing in the God-given purposes of work: to provide for our own and other's human needs, to provide a sense of meaning and fulfillment to bodily human life, and to glorify God in all that we do.

The Hard Truth About Work

A third principle we must teach our children about work is that all work is effected by the Fall. Our work is sometimes difficult and laborious. Often we work hard for little sense of reward. Frustration is a part of everyone's work. There is no perfect workplace. And because we are fallen, we can easily get work out of balance. God has called all people to a certain rhythm of work and rest, six days work and one day of rest. We need both. Children need both. Children need to see parents living and working in harmony with these creational rhythms. How easily work itself becomes an idol, the source of our identity and meaning, or as the means of gaining things we value more than God, such as money, power, or prestige. Significantly, Jesus frequently warned that pre-occupation with work could be a stumbling

block to following Him wholeheartedly. But laziness or idleness is another kind of imbalance. How easily we can find ourselves stepping back from our responsibility to work and labor six days in order that we might provide for our needs and the needs of others.

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR PARENTS

It is parents who have the primary responsibility to teach their children how to work. As Paul writes in Eph. 6:4, "Bring up (nurture) your children in the training and instruction of the Lord." This nurturing, of course, includes teaching about the Bible's view of work. But it must also include modeling a godly attitude toward work. Our responsibility as parents involves training our children to work. Through carefully thought out incremental steps, we move them toward increasing responsibility and freedom, holding them accountable, and praising them for their real contribution to the family division of labor. In the past, when the family was the basic economic unit and the workplace and the homeplace were the same place, this process of training children to work happened quite automatically and unselfconsciously. But now it takes more thought. Since for most people home life and work life do not overlap very much, it will take a conscious creative effort to involve children in work. Bear in mind that our goal for our children is the smoothest possible transition from childhood to adult life and work responsibility.

With this goal in mind, I'd now like to make some practical suggestions for making "work" a normal and meaningful part of children's lives. I'll speak about work in the home, paid work outside the home, and volunteer service in the community. Some of these suggestions have come from my own experience of raising three sons. I realize that we have had an advantageous social structure, in that my husband and I have both worked from home in something of an extended family community, far more like the pre-industrial socio-economic structure than is the case for most of you. It takes a lot of low-tech, labor-intensive physical work to run L'Abri, the sort of work in which one can quite

naturally involve children. Nevertheless, I trust some of these suggestions will prove helpful to you.

Work in the Home

As soon as young children are physically able, they should be involved in the work of caring for a home. Let them know that this is real and valuable work, not play or token work. Children can learn to pick up their things, do errands, help hang, fold and sort laundry. They can learn to help in the kitchen, peeling carrots, washing vegetables, kneading bread and forming it into loaves, washing dishes, and cleaning bedrooms and bathrooms. If there is a garden, even very young children can be taught to help by picking and snapping beans, digging little holes for transplants, and weeding the big obvious weeds. Children can help stack wood for a fireplace or woodstove, and when old enough, can chop down trees and split wood.

The first work young children learn to do is usually done alongside a parent. They see that the work is real work, work that Mom or Dad would have to do alone if they didn't have children to help. And they also learn a lot about how to do the work, and what attitude to have while working, by observing Mom or Dad. Dick and I have friends in Seattle who are involved in a tape ministry. After hearing me speak about these things, they enlisted their young children's help in putting cassette tapes into cases and labeling them. The children were thrilled to help, precisely because they knew it was real work, and a genuine contribution to the family.

If you are a perfectionist, you may feel intolerant of the less than perfect job your young children may do. Resist the perfectionism and show them warm appreciation for the job done. Don't go over it later yourself to improve upon it, or you will communicate that the child's work was "no-good" or just token work and not really needed. If a job is really too carelessly done, and you can reasonably expect a better job, then have the child do it again. But keep perspective. Teaching children about work is only one of the many things we are to teach them. My husband Dick is wonderful in this respect, frequently reminding me that our relationship with our children is far more impor-

tant than how tidy their rooms are. Our children are made for relationships as well as for work.

Obviously, as you begin including your child in the work of the home, it will take much more time showing your child how to do something than doing it yourself. But it is worth the effort, both for you and your child. The time will come, sooner than you realize, when the child will be able to handle a job on his own, freeing you to do something else. One summer, we asked our two older boys (then 19 and 17) to prepare dinner for the family one night a week. They were responsible for planning, cooking, and serving the meal. Since they ran a house-painting business during the day, dinner was usually later than usual, but that was fine. Their work freed me to do something else, and they learned something about cooking, what I call one of the basic survival skills that everyone should know something about!

I suspect that some parents, particularly mothers, may feel uncomfortable about this. But God does not call us to be our children's maids, and it is not exploiting them to expect them to make a contribution to the family division of labor. A sentimental view of the child is wrong in insisting that parents who love their children will never demand work from them. In fact, one might argue the reverse. Taking the time and effort to teach children to work is evidence of one's love and commitment to them as persons, made in God's image, persons who will one day need to support themselves and nurture the next generation.

As soon as children are old enough, involve them in making decisions about the family's division of labor. They are significant members of the family and should have a say in who does which tasks. This way they develop a greater sense of ownership for a particular task, and cannot complain that they have no say in what they do.

Many middle class and affluent families today have hired out all of the domestic work of the sort I have been describing. It is worth considering getting some of it back. If you are blessed with such affluence that your kid's work contribution has become totally superfluous, then that is one good reason to change your lifestyle and commitments. Perhaps one parent

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maids.***

can pull back on work hours so that the home can become a place of work, hospitality and ministry for the entire family.

Paid Work Outside the Home

As soon as children are old enough, it is very good for them to look for paid job opportunities, preferably outside of the immediate family. For many kids, the only available jobs are minimum wage, fast food jobs or retail store check-out and sales jobs. If so, we can encourage them with a positive view of the dignity of all honest work. At the same time, the local church and community can contribute significant employment opportunity to young people. As in the past when families used to take in other people's children, apprentice them to a trade, or have them work in the home or on the farm, people today can provide paid work for other people's teenagers. Consider employing them part time in your business, or give them lawn, gardening, or maintenance work at your home. Our children have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity over several years of working for a family friend who runs a small restaurant upholstery business. They have also done baby-sitting, lawn work and landscaping for neighbors, starting at about age eleven.

Where unemployment is a serious problem the church can have a powerful role in actually creating jobs. Church members with capital and business experience can loan money and provide expertise to enable young people to start small businesses. Church basements can become production sites. Two English friends of mine wrote a wonderful book entitled *4,000,000 Reasons to Care*.²¹ This book is filled with much practical advice, as well as a call to Christians to make costly commitments to love our brothers and sisters who are suffering from the debilitating effects of unemployment.

When our boys were old enough to have full-time summer jobs, we asked them to put a substantial proportion of their summer earnings toward their school fees. They have done this willingly (if not always gleefully!) since they knew that their contribution was necessary to keep them in the schools they liked. The rest of the money was completely their own. Like other teenagers, they have bought radios, compact disc

players, and mountain bikes.

For some teenagers, starting a business is a great thing. Our two older boys started a house-painting business which has expanded each summer. They have learned a lot of things about work and business that they would never have learned any other way, and have really enjoyed the responsibility. Again, a substantial percentage of their earnings went toward college fees.

Volunteer Service In the Community

This is one of the most neglected youth activities today; sadly, this is true almost as much in our churches as in the world in general. Jesus calls His followers to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoners, open their homes to the poor, and deliver the oppressed from injustice. And yet, when we read the youth activities often listed on our church bulletins, this is what we will find: Thursday nite - pizza and movies; Friday nite - "shop til you drop;" Saturday nite - talent show; and next week - Halloween dance!

With such an exclusive emphasis on entertainment and leisure activities, many of our churches are reinforcing the secular culture's false and destructive definition of adolescence as a period of life set apart for self-indulgence and a preoccupation with sexual maturation and social life. If we create a structure that fosters these values and emphases, we should not be surprised if our teens act accordingly. Nor should we be surprised that adolescence is extending itself well into the twenties and even thirties for some people. Constant entertainment encourages a resistance to growing up and taking on adult responsibilities. This cheats our young people by squandering what is a precious and unique time in their lives - a time when they are old enough to be thinking and deciding about some of life's most serious issues, without yet being burdened with the adult responsibilities of supporting themselves and a family. We do them a grave injustice when we treat them as if all they can handle is a social life.

I am not suggesting that our churches abolish all entertainment and fun-oriented activities, but that we balance these with other things, such as service-oriented work, and serious discussions

Church members with capital and business experience can loan money and provide expertise to enable young people to start small businesses.

about life. Where else will our young people discuss political, social, environmental and ethical issues, issues about which they will have to be making important decisions as they mature into adults and enter the adult world of work. Our children can handle more than pizza and movies.

Tony Campolo has taken groups of young people to Third World countries and to inner-city American ghettos where they have served the poor in practical, sacrificial ways. He speaks of his students:

...discovering a need they never knew existed in them. They discover that at the core of their personalities they crave to do things for others and to give away what they have. They learn what very few people in our consumer-oriented society have the privilege of learning in a lifetime. They learn that it's more blessed to give than to receive. They learn that getting the things society has seduced them into wanting satisfies only artificially created needs. And they learn that this is a very cheap substitute for satisfying the essential and very real need to give oneself away in service to others in the name of Christ.²²

Likewise we can take teenagers to feed the homeless, visit elderly shut-ins, clean house for a single mother, visit those in prison, and help build houses for the poor. In no area of work and life is modeling by adults more important than in this area of sacrificial service to the needy. In this we teach our children that we work not just to indulge ourselves and attend to our needs, but to help others as well.

This paper has centered on the relationship of children to work, but has obviously touched on broader issues as well. It is my hope that some of these ideas will encourage you, and be of practical help to you, in the awesome job of giving your children a positive vision and experience of responsible youth. In all our efforts, individually and corporately, we need to walk in personal integrity ourselves, if our children are to want to grow up as productive, responsible, working adults, loving God, being willing and able themselves to nurture the next generation.

May God give us grace for this.

Endnotes

¹ Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage* (New York: Basic Books, Harper Torchbooks, 1977).

² Kett, pp. 3-4.

³ John Demos, *Past, Present and Personal: The Family and The Life Course in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) p. 97.

⁴ Anthony Campolo, *Growing Up in America* (Grand Rapids: Youth Specialties, Zondervan, 19) p. 165. Only 4.5% of young people live in agrarian settings today, compared with 70% in 1890.

⁵ Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). The entire book develops the idea of the shift in understanding the "value" children.

⁶ Newsweek, *Special Edition*, "The New Teens," (Summer/Fall 1990) pp. 15-16.

⁷ Campolo, p. 36.

⁸ Zelizer, p. 3.

⁹ Zelizer, p. 99.

¹⁰ Zelizer, pp. 3-4.

¹¹ Jerald Bachman, as quoted by Newsweek, *Special Edition on the 21st Century Family in the 90's*, (Winter/Spring, 1990) p. 57.

¹² In a N.Y. Times book review of Arlie Hochschild's, *The Second Shift*, (N.Y. Times, June 25, 1989) p.26.

¹³ Newsweek, *21st Century Family*, p. 54.

¹⁴ Newsweek, *The New Teens*

¹⁵ Newsweek, *The 21st Century Family*, p. 57.

¹⁶ Campola, p. 27.

¹⁷ Urie Bronfenbrenner, as quoted by Newsweek, *The 21st Century Family*, p. 60.

¹⁸ Newsweek, *The 21st Century Family*, p. 60.

¹⁹ Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, (New York: The Free Press, Macmillan, 1971) p. 124.

²⁰ Becker, p. 126.

²¹ Peter Elsom and David Porter, *4,000,000 Reasons to Care: How Your Church Can Help the Unemployed*, (Augsbury, BUCKS: Hazell, Watson, and Viney, for MARC Europe, a division of World Vision, 1995).

²² Campola, pp. 27-28.

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