

Work: a blessing or a curse?

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Rod McNair

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Are you finding joy and fulfilment in your work? Does your work have a purpose? Scripture gives vital guidelines to help you make the most of your work, and to understand it as part of God's plan for all humanity.

Millions find their work unfulfilling and purposeless. Does God want us to enjoy work, or just to endure it?

Many people today find themselves in "dead-end" jobs, or in work they feel is purposeless and frustrating. Do you feel your work is taking you down a one-way street? Is it supposed to be that way?

A recent poll conducted by CareerVision.org suggested that only about half of American workers are satisfied with their jobs. British workers expressed similar levels of discontent, according to a report by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Authors James Patterson and Peter Kim report that surveys show as many as 90 percent of workers do not like their work (*The Day America Told the Truth*, p. 155). While some are satisfied and engaged in their work, many others are unhappy. *Why?*

For most people, throughout most of history, the experience of work has not been very pleasurable or even comfortable. Even today, for most of earth's population, work is not a luxury, but rather a "necessary evil" in their *struggle to survive!* As one academic writer explains: "From a historical perspective, the cultural norm placing a positive moral value on doing a good job because work has intrinsic value for its own sake was a relatively recent development... Work, for much of the ancient history of the human race, has been hard and degrading... the Hebrew belief system viewed work as a 'curse devised by God explicitly to punish the disobedience and ingratitude of Adam and Eve'... Numerous scriptures from the Old Testament in fact supported work, not from the stance that there was any joy in it, but from the premise that it was necessary to prevent poverty and destitution" (*Historical Context of the Work Ethic*, Roger Hill, Ph.D.).

Did something happen that *changed* society's view of work? Was work once considered positive and rewarding, where now it is mostly tolerated as a necessary burden at best? The surprising answer is: **Yes!**

The book of Genesis tells us that God worked to create our world—He separated the water from the dry land and created the fish, birds, and land animals. *Six times*, Genesis reports God saying that He looked at the work of His hands and saw it was good! At the end of the week, after His work was done, "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was *very good*" (Genesis 1:31).

God was not distressed by His work; He enjoyed it! He worked for six days, and then rested to enjoy His labor on the seventh day, thus instituting the weekly Sabbath (Genesis 2:1–3).

But God did not want to enjoy the creation process alone; He wanted to share His world and its development with others. One key reason He created human beings was to *share in the joy of His work*. We read: "The Lord God planted a garden

eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed... Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it" (Genesis 2:8, 15).

God wanted Adam and Eve and their descendants to have the pleasing and exciting challenge of tending the Garden of Eden, and ultimately of beautifying the entire earth! But they sinned. They rejected God's truth, His sovereignty over them and His way of life. What was the result?

"Then to Adam [God] said, 'Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': *Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread*" (Genesis 3:17–19).

When Noah was born, his very name was a reminder that mankind toiled in unpleasant work because of Adam and Eve's sin. Upon his birth, his parents remarked, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed" (Genesis 5:29). In Hebrew, the name "Noah" means "rest"—indicating the respite from toil his parents were expecting.

Yes, sin brought terrible consequences to our world! Adam and Eve gave up an ideal job—a wonderful environment with perfect working conditions and great benefits! By sinning, they chose to rebel against God's commands and were driven out of this most hospitable and supportive environment. Billions of human beings have struggled to subsist ever since.

The Industrial Revolution was supposed to bring a better lifestyle, through progress leading to more efficient labour-saving machines. But industrial progress did not really solve the problems of many working people. In fact, history shows that many who toiled in the mills and factories suffered under deplorable conditions. Here is how one writer in 1833 described mill workers in England, and the desperate conditions they endured: "Their complexion is sallow and pallid—with a peculiar flatness of feature, caused by the want of a proper quantity of adipose [fat] substance to cushion out the cheeks... Great numbers of girls and women walking lamely or awkwardly... A spiritless and dejected air, a sprawling and wide action of the legs, and an appearance, taken as a whole, giving the world but 'little assurance of a man,' or if so, 'most sadly cheated of his fair proportions..." ("The Physical Deterioration of the Textile Workers," *The Manufacturing Population of England*, P. Gaskell, pp. 161–162, 202–203).

Children suffered especially in the new mechanized economy, many essentially enslaved. The author continues: "Factory labour is a species of work in some respects singularly unfitted for children. Cooped up in a heated atmosphere, debarred the necessary exercise, remaining in one position for a series of hours, one set or system of muscles alone called into activity, it cannot be wondered at—that its effects are injurious to the physical growth of a child" (*ibid.*).

Though working conditions have greatly improved in the last century and a half, modern slavery in industry still exists today (see "Slavery Makes a Comeback," *Tomorrow's World*, September-October 2006, pp. 26–27). In many countries, workers still suffer under harsh conditions and difficult environments.

A REAL REST IS COMING

God gave us the seventh-day Sabbath—a weekly rest from our labours—to remind us that after 6,000 years of human beings living their own selfish way, a thousand-

year "rest" will soon come, during Jesus Christ's millennial reign on the earth. The New Testament tells us of a rest coming for all the earth: "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it... For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day... For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His" (Hebrews 4:1, 8, 10).

What will that millennial rest be like? Bible prophecy shows it will be a time when the earth is returned to a state like the Garden of Eden (Isaiah 51:1–3). Scripture shows us a coming time when "everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4). In fact, the ground will be so fruitful—and the environment so conducive to supporting human life—that "the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed" (Amos 9:13). We read, "The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1).

Not only will the curse of Adam and Eve be lifted, but the *root cause* of God's curse will be removed—mankind's rebellion and rejection of God's ways and laws.

STATUTES IN THE WORKPLACE

The prophet Ezekiel described life under God's government: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you... I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to **walk in My statutes**, and you will keep My judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

Workplace statutes can save lives and encourage a safe and healthy work environment. In the United States, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, founded in 1971, has administered regulations estimated to have cut workplace fatalities by more than 60 percent, and occupational injury and illness rates by 40 percent (U.S. Department of Labour OSHA website, "OSHA Facts," December 2004).

However, long before OSHA existed, *God established regulations* to provide for a safe and healthy environment. For example: "And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and *does not cover it*, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, the owner of the pit shall make it good" (Exodus 21:33–34). Another statute prescribes a sound construction practice, the need to build railings on roofs to prevent accidents: "When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it" (Deuteronomy 22:8).

In the soon-coming Millennium, under the reign of Jesus Christ, the earth will experience a vibrant, healthy economy. Ample goods and efficient services will be supplied by people busily engaged in their work—and enjoying it, too! As people begin to learn God's view of work, and put His principles of love into practice every day through the indwelling power of His Spirit, they will begin to experience in their work a peace and fulfilment beyond description!

That future time will be exciting and wonderful. But must we wait until Christ's return to start enjoying a happier work environment? Would you like to experience a stronger sense of purpose and excitement in your work and your life today? You can! Consider these basic points to make your work more *blessed*, no matter what you do:

LOOK TO GOD TO PROVIDE FOR YOU

Adam and Eve made the mistake of disobeying God, and seeking fulfillment through their own efforts. The vital first step to finding fulfillment in your work is to learn from the mistake they made, and to accept God as your Lord—your Boss—the true ruler of your life, the One who provides all your needs. If you *really* want to be blessed and happy in your work, begin to look to Him.

Christ taught us: "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?... But *seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness*, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:30–33).

If you are putting God first—doing His will and obeying His commands—He will guide and manage your work and your life. As He told the Israelites: "You shall remember the Lord your God, for *it is He who gives you power to get wealth...* if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish" (Deuteronomy 8:18–19).

God commands us to be thankful (Colossians 3:15). Especially in uncertain economic times, just having food on the table—and a job to provide for it—is something to be thankful for. The Apostle Paul exhorts us: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). The first step to achieving more fulfillment in your work is simply to acknowledge the God who provides it.

BECOME A BETTER EMPLOYEE OR EMPLOYER

How can you have a better work experience? One way is by becoming a better worker! By some estimates, American workers *admit* to goofing off up to 20 percent of the time on the job. Almost half admit to calling in sick when they are well, one in six regularly drink or use drugs on the job, and only one in four say they give their best effort (Patterson, p. 155)! What about you? Are you dedicated to putting in an honest day's work?

Do you find it difficult to get along with others—your co-workers, your employees, or your boss? What if you have an especially *difficult* boss? God shows us how to handle such situations: "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully... when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God" (1 Peter 2:18–20).

Certainly there comes a time when you should stop enduring the abuse of a belligerent boss, and should move on to a new job. But before you rush to leave an unpleasant workplace, make sure you have done all you can to make your present workplace better. Make an effort to find ways to help your boss achieve his or her goals. Seek cooperation rather than confrontation. Remember, "a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). Learning constructive ways to work through conflict lessens your stress level, improves your feeling of well-being and results in a better work experience overall.

If you supervise other people, do you have trouble getting along with them? Take time to learn better ways to encourage and motivate your employees—even the "difficult" ones! Scripture tells managers to give workers what is "just and fair" (Colossians 4:1), and to "give up threatening" (Ephesians 6:9). Fairness, patience, and an honest effort to understand your employees' goals and needs goes a long

way in building workplace morale. God is watching how managers treat others, knowing that He is *their* "Manager" in heaven (v. 9).

APPROACH WORK WITH PASSION AND ZEAL

What is your passion? Baseball promoter Mike Veeck believes passion in the workplace is crucial for being happy and content: "Most of us allow life to beat us up and then down. We fall into routines, especially at work, and over time we sleepwalk through much of our lives, especially at work. It's time to shake ourselves out of this mediocre existence..." (*Fun Is Good: How to Create Joy and Passion in Your Workplace and Career*, p. 6). Passion and zeal should not be confused with being a *workaholic*. The goal is not to overdo—it is to do something you love and feel is important. Participating in something you care deeply about will bring excitement to your work, and will unleash your creativity.

Veeck explains what he is looking for when he interviews potential employees: "When I conduct interviews, I look for passion, and I can tell within 2 minutes if a person has it... Someone with the most impressive background won't fit if he or she doesn't have passion. At the same time, someone with a modest resume might be a perfect fit" (*ibid.*, p. 5).

It is rare to find work that exactly fits your passion in life. But finding *something* you can become excited about will greatly increase your enjoyment of work. This principle applies beyond the workplace. Though some today are quick to demean a woman's role of homemaker as described in Scripture (Titus 2:5), the truth is that managing a household offers a woman opportunities for exploring her own *passions* in decorating and design, cooking, sewing, health and nutrition, budgeting, child development, and many other areas. Author Alexandra Stoddard says: "The test of a true vocation, someone once said, is the love of the drudgery it involves... When we do our work with commitment and dedication, we take pride in everything we do, when we are eager and passionate about getting it done right, every single thing we do is important..." (*Gracious Living in a New World*, p. 126).

King Solomon of ancient Israel gave this sage advice long ago: "Whatever you do, *do well*, for in death, where you are going, there is no working or planning, or knowing, or understanding" (Ecclesiastes 9:10, *Living Bible*). Doing our work—whatever our work—with passion and zeal, increases our motivation, drive, and our enjoyment of the task.

IF YOU WANT TO ENJOY YOUR WORK—ENJOY YOUR WORK!

Bible prophecy describes Jesus Christ's millennial reign as a time when the whole world will experience joy and gladness (Isaiah 35:1–2, 10). God is a joyful God, and His Spirit is likened to the "oil of joy" (Isaiah 61:3). Many people today trudge through their work with a heavy heart, burdened down by stresses and pressures. But Jesus promised relief and "rest" for those who come to Him (Matthew 11:28–30). Are you experiencing that "rest"—allowing Jesus Christ to help carry your load, and to lift you up when you are down?

Most of us know someone who has a contagiously sunny personality, and we have seen how a cheerful word or spontaneous laughter can break the ice of tension or stress at just the right moment. Long ago, Solomon was inspired to write: "A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken" (Proverbs 15:13).

To have true success in work—and in life—people need to *enjoy what they are doing*. Consider: "I want things to be peaceful and happy because that's the environment that makes me most creative... People have a driving need to be happy, and it's a tough act to pull off if it's not genuine" (Veeck, p. 21).

Can you smile easily and bring a bit of lightness to an otherwise heavy situation? Can you laugh at yourself, and not take yourself too seriously? By becoming someone who not only works with zeal and passion, but with *joy*, you can have a far better work experience, and help others be more productive as well.

UNDERSTAND FOR WHOM YOU REALLY WORK

To a true Christian, even the most difficult and dead-end job can *be filled with purpose and significance*—if we remember for whom we are really working! Paul explained: "Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, *as to Christ*; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" ([Ephesians 6:5–6](#)). Your work can take on greater significance when you realize that you are not merely working for human beings, but to please God!

Our lives today are a training ground for something much greater. Adam and Eve were given the opportunity to work for God—the same opportunity true Christians are given today! God is looking for people He can use in the soon-coming Millennium who are obedient to Him, who work hard, who love others and have a passion and enjoyment of life!

Do you consider your work to be menial, endless, or worthless? Do you feel you have no real opportunities? God uses the smallest experiences to teach true Christians lessons they will use in big ways in the future. Christ explained this in the parable of the talents: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them... After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were *faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things*. Enter into the joy of your lord'" ([Matthew 25:14; 19–21](#)).

God is training today's Christians to rule with Him—to assist Him in running a global society. The prerequisite for working with Christ in His Kingdom is not that we achieve wealth and status in this life; rather, we must learn *character and obedience to God, love for our fellow human beings, and total faith in His Son*, in whatever opportunities God now gives us.

So, make the most of every work opportunity you have—with zeal, passion, joy and love. Do not squander an opportunity to let your work now prepare you to work for God in His Kingdom ([Matthew 25:24–28](#))!

Is your work a curse? It does not need to be! With God's help, we can all experience the joys of working—*God's way*—now, and prepare for profound, fulfilling, and meaningful work in God's Kingdom.