In a national survey of 180,000 American workers, 80 percent indicated a dislike for their jobs. That’s a sad commentary, especially since people who dislike their work are rarely successful at it. It’s a lose-lose situation.

Dobie Gillies once said, “I don’t have anything against work. I just figure, why deprive somebody who really loves it.” In that comment rests a universal challenge: To put excitement and enjoyment into work, we first must be willing to work. The satisfaction, fun, and fulfillment we experience in work are benefits we can give ourselves.

I. A Biblical Overview

Work is not something out of God’s concern. It is a major part of human life that God takes very seriously. Work has intrinsic value—it is inherently worth doing. Why? There are two reasons:

A. God is a Worker.

God first reveals himself in Scripture as a worker. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). God calls this activity work. “By the seventh day, God completed His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done” (Gen. 2:2). God did not stop working after Creation. He continues to work, upholding the creation, meeting the many needs of his creatures, and working out his purposes. And, of course, he accomplished the great work of atonement at the cross.
God is a worker. The fact that God calls what he does work and calls it good means that work must be significant, that it must have intrinsic value.

B. God created people to be his coworkers.

Man was created in the image of God and since God is a worker, man—created in God’s image—must be a worker, too. “The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it” (Gen. 2:15). Man was created not to work for himself, but to work as a coworker with God. Starting in the Garden of Eden, we are partners with God. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes calls work “the gift of God” (Eccl. 3:13). David describes this partnership, assigning dignity and value to man as God’s coworkers. “You made him little less than God and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him lord over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet” (Psa. 8:5-6).

This and other passages of Scripture lend awesome dignity to our work. Created in God’s image, we do something very Godlike when we work. Not only is God’s work significant; human work is significant, too. God ordains work. All legitimate work is an extension of God’s work. Legitimate work is that work that somehow contributes to what God wants done in the world.

C. The Bible does not differentiate between secular and sacred work.

We need to dispense with the idea that work is carved into two categories: secular and sacred. Selling pigs or stocks or real estate or shoes not something outside God’s concern. When Paul stated “Whatever you do” he make no distinction. There is no dichotomy between secular and sacred. We must shelf the idea that secular vocation is a step-child to sacred calling. We must purge our minds of such notions as “full-time Christian service” and “secular careers.”

William Tyndale, burned at the stake for making English translations of the Bible, said, “There is no work better than another to please God; to pour water, to wash dishes, to be a cobbler, or an apostle, all is one.” Martin Luther, the reformer, said, “Household tasks have no appearance or sanctity: and yet these very works in connection with the household are more desirable than all the works of monks and nuns.”

II. The Significance of Work

But sometimes we are not sure that our work, as legitimate and as spiritual as it may be, matters. We question the worth of our work, the significance of our job. For many of us we don’t pause long enough to consider some challenging questions about the worth of our work.

Lee Iacocca writing in Fortune stated, “What do guys like me do who’ve had the world by the string? I got some notoriety . . . and made some money in the car business . . . . Now that chapter has closed, and I don’t think much about cars anymore. You can plan
everything in life, and then the roof caves in on you because you haven’t done enough thinking about who you are and what you should do with the rest of your life.”

For the next few minutes I want to encourage you to think about who you are and what you should do with the rest of your life. When a person’s work consumes 60-80 hours per week, we had better ask ourselves some serious questions.

A. Why do I work?
Some people work for money. They are the living embodiment of the bumper sticker that reads: I owe, I owe, so off to work I go. We need jobs because we need money. We want to make our lives and our families more comfortable. We want to provide the necessities of life. That is a valid reason

Others work for opportunity. Advancement and ambition drive them. Someone once told me, “The reward for a job well done is a better job.” Whether it means moving to another job or obtaining a promotion within one’s present company, many strive toward greater opportunity. Nothing wrong with that.

Respect is another reason people work. Many want the admiration that good jobs bring. Having power and authority on the job and attention from acquaintances and friends at home.

But what happens when the money dries up? What happens when the opportunities halt? What if people don’t like you? What if there is a downturn or downsizing? What then?

Arthur Miller portrays Willy Loman in The Death of a Salesman. Willy is a traveling salesman whose aim in life is to make it big, to have everybody like him, to see his sons follow in his steps. One by one, his dreams are all shattered. First he loses his job. And then he realizes, much to his dismay, that his sons mirror all his insecurities.

Willy finally commits suicide in despair. The play ends by his graveside with his son’s revelation: “He had the wrong dreams . . . He never knew who he was.”

Perhaps Willy never stopped to answer the question as to why he worked?. How can we avoid Willy’s kind of desperation? By asking simply, why do I work? What am I really living for? What is my purpose?

I have a friend that sells pigs to farmers. We have prayed and talked about spiritual life at length. I’ve discovered that nothing motivates my friend to practice his Christianity more than relating what he does all day on the job to what he believes God wants done in the world. For my friend, he believes that selling pigs is the place where God wants him to be right now. It is God’s will for him.

The apostle Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men” (Col. 3:23). Notice Paul says, “Whatever you do”—even
selling pigs. Paul does not say what spiritual work you do, or church work you do, or religious work you do. But, whatever you do.

The key to finding purpose and meaning to your job is connecting what you do all day with what you think God wants you doing. In fact, you will never find ultimate meaning in your work—or in your relationship with God until you do. Is your work God’s will for your life? Are you in the place where God wants you to be?

How do you know if you are in God’s will, that your work is what God wants you to be doing? That’s the next question.

B. For whom am I working?
Are you working for a boss, your spouse, your family, or yourself? Or, are you working for God? If God is a worker and he calls us to be coworkers with him, then our work must be for him. The apostle Paul agreed. “Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men” (Col. 3:23). All our work should be done for God. If not, we are wasting our lives. When we know that we are working for God, that our efforts bring us pleasure and honors God, then we are in God’s will, doing the right job.

Who should we be working for? There’s only one right answer to that question.

Only work—be it a carpenter or an accountant, a manager or a salesman—for God is eternal. It has been said, “Only one life, ’twill soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” This means overhauling a car or leading a Bible study are eternally significant if they are done in the name of Christ.

If that is true, the opposite will be true as well. That which is not done for Christ is infinitely futile.

*Chariots of Fire*, the fact-based, Oscar-winning movie, depicted the quest of Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddell to win gold medals in the 1924 Olympics, a feat they both accomplished. The difference between Abrahams and Liddell was transparent: Everything Abrahams did was for himself, while everything Liddel did was for the glory of God.

Eric’s sister, Jennie, mistook her brother’s love of running for rebellion against God, and pressed him to return to the mission field in China, where they both were born and their parents lived. One day his sister was upset because he had missed a mission meeting, so Eric decided to have a talk with her. They walked to a grassy spot overlooking the Scottish highlands. Clutching her arms, trying to explain his calling to run, he said, “Jennie, Jennie. You’ve got to understand. I believe God made me for a purpose—for China. But he also made me fast!—and when I run, I feel his pleasure!”

This stands in sharp contrast to a scene later in the movie, one hour before the final race of Harold Abrahams. While his trainer gave him a rub-down, he lamented to his best
friend. “I’m twenty-four and I’ve never known contentment. I’m forever in pursuit, and I don’t even know what it is I’m chasing.”

Both men won a gold medal, but one won his medal for himself, while the other won his medal for God.

“Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men” (Col. 3:23). Our ultimate boss is Jesus Christ. He’s the one we need to please. Our work is to be for his glory.

And when we work for his glory, we want to give all of our best to the work.

C. Can you give all of your heart to your work?

Colin Powell, former Secretary of State, learned a valuable lesson about work early in his life. While working at the Teamsters Hall on soft drink delivery trucks, Powell accepted a job as a porter at a Pepsi bottling plant, not knowing what a porter actually did. The first day on this new job, the future Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of State was given a mop. He was determined to be the best mopper at the plant. At the end of the summer, the foreman watched Powell work during the summer and complimented him on his hard work. The foreman offered him a better job for the next summer. Powell could have had a different attitude toward his menial job as a porter, but he was determined to do the best job even if he was not working at the best job. The lesson he learned was this: “All work is honorable. Always do your best, because someone is watching.”

We may not have the most glamorous or the best paying job in the world, but we can still give that job the best we have to offer. If we are coworkers with God, and God does his best, then we too must do our best. Paul reminds us, “Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord—you serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23,24). When we serve our employer well we serve the Lord well. He can use us in our position just as he used Joseph as Potiphar’s overseer and Pharaoh’s prime minister, Daniel as the king’s advisor, and Nehemiah as cupbearer to a king.

Working with all our heart means being the sort of employee who knows what it is to work for the King.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “If you are called to be a street sweeper, seep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, ‘here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.’”

Why do we work with all our heart, giving our best? Because, as Colin Powell learned, someone is watching. And that someone is God, who rewards our efforts.

D. Is it worth it?
Paul tells us that those who do their work faithfully, recognizing that ultimately we serve the Lord, will “receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord” (Col. 3:24). As far as God is concerned, a slave’s labor in the wheat fields, when done in faithful submission to God, is as worthy of a crown as was Paul’s preaching at Rome. It is something for which he, too, will receive a reward.

This thought challenges and comforts me. As a Christian I receive not only a paycheck but also the promise of a heavenly reward far greater than any salary.

Often I hear from people who complain about their poor salaries and benefits. They often seek another job. It often hits me when talking to such people that no matter how little or how much I was paid today, it was nothing compared with the coming reward from God.

When we work for ourselves or for others, we have nothing beyond a paycheck and the material goods it can buy. These cannot ultimately satisfy. But for believers the thoughts of standing one day before Jesus and hearing him say, “His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave! You were faithful over a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Share your master's joy!'” (Matt. 25:23) drives us on. That will be far greater than any Oscar, Pulitzer, Nobel, or Grammy prize that the world offers.

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