

Society's Needs and a Worker's Calling



JIM SAT IN HIS OFFICE AND TRIED TO ABSORB his conversation with Jack during breakfast that morning.

Jack was a respected obstetrician, and he and Jim had been friends and golfing buddies since Jim's arrival in this coastal town. The two discovered their common Christian faith, and a fast friendship formed. Though they didn't meet regularly on matters of faith, they often had breakfast together to talk about their jobs and the pressures their careers put on their faith.

However, this morning's breakfast was different. Jim's mind raced as he recalled Jack's words: "I'm thinking of leaving my practice to go into the pastoral ministry." The rest of the breakfast was spent talking through the statement, as Jack expressed a desire for Jim to offer his opinion.

Back at his desk, Jim couldn't stop thinking about it. Jack was clearly one of the most visible Christians in a community that was not particularly warm to believers. As a long-time physician in the town, he enjoyed a powerful status in part because he delivered many of the babies born there. Among the other doctors in the town, Jack was the man many of them turned to for advice when their own lives became tangled. Even his patients found themselves seeking his advice on non-medical matters. Jack was frequently at the bedside of his patients offering words of comfort, and was often drawn to other patients' bedsides as well. It was not uncommon to see Jack in the middle of an emergency room crisis, offering comfort and

support to family members and praying with them when they allowed it.

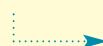
Jack's church recognized his gifts and made it possible for him as a lay person to offer certain sacraments of the church in his duties as a physician. Clearly Jack loved this role as a spiritual caregiver; he found it a welcome respite from the demands of delivering babies and caring for expectant mothers. Lately, though, a number of circumstances were prodding him into considering the move from laity to clergy. The constant threat of malpractice suits in complicated birthing situations was a huge stress—and a huge fiscal cost when factoring in malpractice insurance. The very threat of a suit often cut him off from patients when they most needed him to be vulnerable and responsive to their emotional turmoil.

Also, the erratic arrival of babies in a small town meant Jack was away from his family at odd hours, and he frequently found himself tired even when he was with them.

All that was enough, but even more pressing for him was a sense of "needing to do more for God." "I take care of their physical problems, but I don't feel like I'm having much of an eternal impact. It just seems the physical problems will always be there and I'm spooning water out of the ocean."

This wasn't just a crisis of conscience for Jack; he really wanted Jim's advice.

How would you advise Jack?



Scripture Passages

Proverbs 3:6

Exodus 31:1-11

In Depth

Read the following Scripture passages. What do they say about God's view of our jobs?

– Proverbs 3:6

– Exodus 31:1-11

God doesn't call people to merely mark time. From the moment He created us, He's been busy matching our gifts and skills with the needs of the people in His Creation and the needs of Creation itself. Every worker's call must take into account the needs of the society where they work.

Every Christian is called to full-time service to God. The places where we serve will look different, but the principles that guide us are absolute, eternal and practical—even in places where God isn't always welcome.

This means working Christians ought to have a template that helps them assess the value of the work they're presently doing.

As a reminder, this set of studies is aimed at giving us the tools to stop climbing the ladder of success and to begin to influence, perhaps even shape, the corners of the culture where God calls us to serve. Our first lesson in this set tinkered with our views on competition. This study aims to expand the idea that God cares about how we do our work into an understanding that God cares about what work we do. To accomplish this task, we want to take a different approach than we've taken before: we're going to ask you to assess your own views of God and work by answering some "yes" or "no" questions.

Answer the following questions about your present job (circle Yes or No):

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| Yes | No | Did I consider God in the course of picking this job? |
| Yes | No | Does the product or service I produce in my job offer value to the culture that's consistent with God's moral principles? |
| Yes | No | Does the way I provide those products or services offer value to the culture that's consistent with God's moral principles? |
| Yes | No | Is the marketing of those products and services consistent with God's moral principles? |
| Yes | No | Does my management of the budget areas I'm responsible for reflect principles of stewardship? |
| Yes | No | Am I making decisions that reflect concern for the long-term well-being of the investors, owners, customers, and employees where I serve? |
| Yes | No | Are the workers, coworkers and customers I'm responsible for being treated with dignity? |
| Yes | No | Are the workers, coworkers and customers I'm responsible for being treated with equity? |
| Yes | No | Are the workers, coworkers and customers I'm responsible for being treated with justice and, where possible, with mercy? |
| Yes | No | Am I resolving conflict at work in ways that honor God? |
| Yes | No | Am I differentiating between mistakes (the natural result of trial and error/research and development processes) and negligence (the unnatural result of not being diligent in our labors)? |
| Yes | No | Do I refrain from criticizing customers, coworkers and employees to others (gossip)? |
| Yes | No | Do I exhibit forgiveness? |
| Yes | No | Are the expectations of my job enabling me to meet the other requirements God gives me in life? |
| Yes | No | Do my expectations of my workers enable them to meet the other requirements God gives them? |
| Yes | No | Do my memorandums, reports, conversations, discussions, and other communications reflect a commitment to honesty always? |
| Yes | No | Do I pass on information that might be useful to others in my company even if it may give them an advantage in promotion or influence? |
| Yes | No | Do my natural conversations at work reflect the nature and depth of my relationship with Jesus Christ and to God? |
| Yes | No | Do I refrain from retaliation and from seeking revenge against customers, coworkers and competitors? |
| Yes | No | When the opportunity presents itself, do I know my coworkers well enough to describe my faith in terms they can understand? |
| Yes | No | Am I willing to sacrifice gain in my own career if it produces an outcome that serves others in my work culture more effectively? |

If you answered "No" to any of the questions above, you probably have identified an area of your work that isn't surrendered to God. You also probably have identified an area of your life where God wants to be working through you, or wants you to change. In the

coming weeks we encourage you to seek out resources that can help you move from “no” to “yes” in each of those categories.

We recommend these steps to help you:

1. Start with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you how to make your work useful to God.
2. Learn to read and study the Bible yourself. God gave us Scripture, and then He gave us the Holy Spirit to help us understand it. You don't need to know the Greek or Hebrew of a text to understand its meaning in your life.
3. Take advantage of and contribute to the resources of the local church. The church exists, among other things, to equip us to be salt and light to our culture. Let the church equip you for all of life by becoming active in the life of the Body of Christ.
4. Join a Bible study that has a workplace focus; or consider starting one if you have difficulty finding one. While we are delighted to have you use these materials, there are many other writers producing specialized materials that may be more useful to you in a particular area.
5. Seek a spiritual mentor—someone in the workplace who already has a solid, working knowledge of the Bible. They will not only be useful to you in your work questions, but they can also measure their answers against the truths of Scripture.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- We are called to serve God in every area of our lives, and that includes work.
- The church is the primary place we go to be equipped to be useful to God in our culture.
- God wants to work in the places where we work, and in the lives of the people with whom we work.
- God wants to work through us in the places where we work, and He wants to work through us in the lives of the people with whom we work.
- Whether we're inside or outside the walls of a church, our work is our ministry.