

Where Do You Want Me, God?

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ALICE WAS THE ONLY PERSON NOT ALREADY IN the conference room to celebrate Alice's retirement. Janet found her sitting in her office, staring out the window. A wall full of photos and plaques told part of her tale of success; the size and location of Alice's office told the rest.

"Sad?" Janet asked.

"Yes," Alice responded, "but probably not for the reason you think."

Janet looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

Alice sighed and spun her chair around to face Janet. "I just realized I spent my whole life doing the wrong thing. Now it's over."

Janet studied her friend's face, even more puzzled. For years, the two of them had worked together; Alice as a senior vice-president, Janet as an HR department manager. Their friendship extended beyond the office,

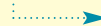
with their families enjoying vacations together. Alice and Jack, who weren't able to have children, were godparents to Janet and Antonio's two daughters. Alice taught the workplace Bible study she and Janet had started years ago.

Never, in all those moments, had Alice ever wondered about the work she was doing. Janet stood in the doorway, not knowing what to say next.

Alice broke the silence. "Well, let's not keep them waiting." She brightened up and walked past Janet towards the conference room. "I should have been a doctor." Alice muttered as she headed down the row of cubicles. "Now it's too late."

She opened the doors to shouts and balloons, leaving Janet trailing behind her wondering what to say.

What would you tell Alice?



Scripture Passages

Romans 12:1-8

Galatians 2:20

Philippians 1:21

Introduction

With this study we begin our final steps in moving from being workers whose careers dictate life to us, to a place where we acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord of the marketplace. We call this finding our place of service by shifting from self-absorbed workers to a Christ-centered calling.

Our first study has two goals: First, to remind us that we serve God wherever He places us, inside or outside the walls of the church. Second, we must understand our life is a life of sacrifice—a surrender to accomplishing His purposes instead of ours or someone else's.

NOTE: As we begin to make this final paradigm shift in the series, particularly as we begin to talk about service and sacrifice, it's important to remind ourselves that our value comes not from the work we do, but from our relationship with God. The reason we exist, remember, is to be in relationship with Him. (See lesson one, "The Reason We Exist.") Everything we do is an expression of that relationship, or a testimony to its impact on our lives, or a service rendered to God; but none of those actions make us more or less worthy to be in His presence. It is the righteousness of Christ alone that makes us worthy to be in the presence of God, and nothing we do can add to or detract from that value once we've accepted Christ as our Savior.

In Depth

Read Romans 12:1-2. If these verses had been only for you, what do you think Paul is telling you?

How has your work life stacked up against these instructions from Paul?

What do you think a "living sacrifice" might look like in your workplace? In your answer, list some of the things you might expect a "living sacrifice" to do for Christ in your present job?

Now read Galatians 2:20. What is Paul saying here, and what relevance does it have for us as we make choices about the role our work plays in our lives...or the roles we allow our work to play in our relationship with God?

Read Philippians 1:21. What does Paul mean by this statement? How does your view of life compare with Paul's thought here? What's the difference between your view and Paul's, if any?

Knowing where God wants us begins with being willing to be used anywhere, in any way, at any cost. In lesson 24 ("Christian Workers as Social Architects") we learned we are "bought with a price" (I Corinthians 6:20) and that this transaction is not an employment agreement. We aren't hired to do a job for God, we are now owned by God. He now has the right to use us as He sees fit in order to accomplish His purposes. We either choose to go willingly, to go kicking or screaming, or in some cases, to go nowhere and end up useless.

In Lesson 16 ("God Told Me"), we learned what God wants most from us is a faithful heart, a willingness to be used by Him. For most of us, this desire to be faithful to God, to be used by Him, is the only prerequisite to choosing where we serve Him. Having met this standard we're free to express our love for Him by serving others in the places we work, and by serving Him as ambassadors. The trick is to remember our careers are ways to serve Him and others, and not places to satisfy our wants, egos and desires. The former glorifies God, the latter distracts us from our relationship with Him. In lesson 16, we used a passage (Genesis 13:5-9) from the life of Abraham to illustrate this point.

In many cases, others among us get no choice. God has a specific plan for using us, and He's going to use us that way whether we like it or not. Again, we can go willingly and experience the joy of being used by God, or we can go kicking or screaming, robbed of that joy. Either way, we're going to be used...like Jonah, there's no escape for people in this category.

But used where? Especially if we're free to choose, what guidelines do we use for choosing? Read Romans 12:3-8. What do you learn from this passage?

The picture of God in our culture isn't one digital photograph, but rather it's a jigsaw puzzle made up of hundreds of thousands of Christians with differing gifts, talents and skills, each of which contributes to the culture's view of God. While most people make the mistake of applying Romans 12 to the church only, there's no indication Paul had in mind only the church when he described the different gifts we each bring to the table of life.

We, then, must sort out and cultivate the gifts we have, and they include physical talents and abilities as much as the so-called "spiritual gifts" many of us have heard about. We should explore our spiritual gifts as well as our talents, but with an eye toward applying them in the workplace as well as the church.

Where God wants us is next to Him; in an intimate personal relationship with Him that's fed by a careful reading of His word in order to know Him more fully. What He wants us to do while we're in that relationship is revealed only in the context of that relationship.

All else, as Solomon learned and wrote in Ecclesiastes, "is vanity."

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- As we must remind ourselves again and again, we exist to be in relationship with God. It is not what we do that makes us worthy to be in His presence, but who we are: His children, restored through the work of Christ.
- We are bought with a price, and after that purchase God expects us to make our lives a "living sacrifice" to Him.
- A willingness to be used by God anywhere, in any fashion, at any cost, pleases and glorifies Him.
- Most of us will be free to choose where to serve God so long as our heart's desire is to serve Him and not ourselves.
- Others among us have our places picked and our tasks assigned by God, and we have no choice in the matter. This is more rare than most Christians assume.
- When free to choose, we should examine both our spiritual gifts and our skills and talents, and look for ways to serve others and not ourselves.