

Lord of the Marketplace



A DRIVING RAIN PELTED ME AS I RAN TO THE front of the building, only to hear that maddening clatter you get when you pull on locked glass doors. Mercifully, an elderly woman moved towards the doors from inside, and in short order had me comfortably settled in the lobby. Like an elegant hostess, she sat with me there, dust rag in hand, and chatted as I waited for a senior manager in the firm to show up for our meeting.

"I clean this office," she said in what I later learned was an East European accent, moving her arm in a sweeping motion to show me the lobby. "What do you do?" I told her a little about my work as a Christian writer (which puzzled and bored her I think), but when I mentioned I was also a chaplain, she perked right up. "I, too, am a Christian." She said it with a certainty and a satisfaction that must surely have pleased God. I waited for her to tell me more, but only silence followed.

"Am I keeping you from your work?" I asked, not wanting to get her in trouble. She shook her head to indicate I wasn't, and then explained that she always finished early, and added, "I like to come down here and watch the people come to work." There was a hint of loneliness to this last statement, an almost wistful whisper of sadness. So I asked her more questions about her story.

At first her answers were brief. It was obvious she was used to short attention spans, people asking questions to be polite but with little interest in the answers. When she realized I was interested, though, she

settled into the role of storyteller with alacrity. I was treated to delicious tidbits of her personal history that had us both smiling.

All the people who were important to her were no longer around. I wasn't made privy to the details of their absence, and my hostess-turned-storyteller had too much dignity to complain. Whether they died or moved away or simply neglected her wasn't part of the tale I had permission to know. Only once, when she was telling me a part of someone else's woes, did I get a glimpse of her own thoughts. Describing that person's loneliness, she said quietly that "...they only want to matter to someone."

It's a phrase I hear repeated about as often in my work as any other, though people seldom say it directly. In a work world that values efficiency and action, that places great emphasis on busyness and productivity, that wrestles to squeeze the most out of every action, one of the byproducts is often loneliness. It's a disease as prevalent in the senior reaches of a firm as it is in the bowels of the operation. It stretches outside the workplace to our families, leaving children feeling this same gnawing emptiness that haunts adults. Always, the sentiment emerges: "I only want to matter to someone."

For most people I meet, telling them they matter to God is not enough. God seems distant and surreal to people who have little or no tangible connections to other human beings. But the reality of a loving God literally leaps out to those whose loneliness and isolation is ended

by mattering to someone here on earth.

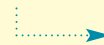
It struck me as I listened to my hostess on that early gray morning that one of the most important ways workplace Christians can serve God is by caring about the people they work with every day, especially those who usually fall below our radar screens.

Among the many majestic things about Jesus during His time on earth was His wonderful ability to notice the lonely, and to reach out to them in warm and intimate ways. “Zaccheus,” Jesus said, “I *must* stay at your house today.” How important that must have made Zaccheus feel! How easy it is for us to love others simply by taking note of them. If we truly wish to honor God at work today,

we do best by honoring those He created who work in the next cubicle or the next office, whether they’re wielding dust rags or the power to hire and fire us.

When my friend the senior manager arrived for our appointment, he greeted my hostess by name and thanked her for taking care of me while I waited. She nodded shyly and smiled, then looked at me and answered, “I didn’t want him to be lonely in this big place.”

I wasn’t.



Scripture Passages

John 4:1-30

John 8:1-11

Matthew 19:16-22

Matthew 6:24

Introduction

We began this journey thirty lessons ago with a study that introduced us to the reason we exist. Everything we taught after that was fine-tuning our service to God. Nothing we taught after that makes us more or less worthy of our relationship with God. We are worthy because Jesus made us worthy.

Being made worthy is something Jesus did for us. Surrendering to Him as Lord is something we do for Him. So we end our journey the way it began, by reminding ourselves that we must always be diligent to fend off those things that would come between us and God; no matter how noble or good or worthwhile they may be.

Join us in this last reminder that the reason we exist is to be in fellowship with God:

In Depth

Read the Scripture passages in one sitting if possible. Having done that, turn to John 3:16-17. Why does Jesus say in these verses that He came to earth?

From the same passage, what did Jesus say He did *not* come to earth to do?

Since the moment Eve and Adam first disobeyed God, sin has been the primary barrier between human beings and their Creator. The purpose of Jesus' incarnation—the reason He became a human being—was to offer Himself as a sacrifice to atone for that sin. In fact, it is often useful when reading about Jesus' encounters with people to ask yourself this question: What barrier is He trying to remove between this person and God?

With that question in mind, why do you think Jesus treated the Samaritan woman at the well different from the woman caught in adultery? Notice that Jesus waited patiently until the woman at the well told him all about her sin, but He never once asked the woman caught in adultery to describe for Him the details of her sin. In forming your answer, consider the barriers these women might have to approaching God.

What barrier was Jesus addressing in His discussion with the rich young man in Matthew 19?

So we see Jesus treating each person in a unique fashion. For one woman shame was the barrier between her and God, while the other needed to know Jesus knew everything before she could believe His offer to her. With the man in Matthew 19 the self-sufficiency of possessions were what kept him from God. In every instance, the prime directive is to get the person to a place where nothing is between them and God.

If you aren't a Christian, then sin remains a barrier between you and God. Only by

accepting the free gift of Jesus Christ can you erase that barrier. But for many of us there are also barriers to confronting even the reality of the sin in our lives and its effect on our eternities that degrade the quality of our relationship. What might some of these barriers be? (For example, many people keep themselves so busy they rarely have to think about it.)

Once a person becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, however, the Bible teaches us in Romans 8 that “nothing can separate us from the love of God.” While this is an eternal truth, there are plenty of things that can distract us from being aware of His presence—like stress, worries, and busyness, to name just a few. What barriers are most common in your life that prevent you from sensing God’s constant presence?

The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith describes the reason for our existence this way: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” What does this mean in terms of why we exist?

We do not exist to work, though we are supposed to work. We do not exist to fall in love and get married and have families, though those are also gifts from God. We do not even exist to do good deeds or to tell others about Jesus, as important as those things are to a growing Christian. No, the reason we exist is to be in relationship with God, and to be in fellowship with Him in all the areas and activities of our lives. Our primary value is who we are, not what we do.

Why is understanding that an important first step for workplace Christians?

What barriers to relationship exist in your life today?

Read Matthew 6:24.

As we've learned through these studies together, success isn't measured by temporal standards or in the metrics of man. Success is measured on an eternal basis, and it's determined by God. Here, then, is God's view of success in His economy.

OUTLINE FOR SUCCESS IN GOD'S ECONOMY

1. Don't look for work to do for you what only God can do.
 - a. We were not created to work, we were created to be in relationship with God. (Work is merely one of the ways we express our love for God.)
 - b. We are not valued by God for what we do, but who we are—His children.
 - c. We are not rewarded for what we do, but why we do it.

2. Look for opportunities for sacrifice and service instead of significance and success.
 - a. If relationship trumps activity in God's economy (and it does! Matt. 22:32-36), then:
 - (i) Serving God trumps serving self; and
 - (ii) Gratitude, obedience and faithfulness become templates for choosing work (Romans 12:1-2; Matt. 6:33; Gal. 2:20; Phil 1:21-22).
 - b. If relationship trumps activity, then serving others also trumps serving self.

3. Expect turmoil and trial this side of heaven.
 - a. Jesus didn't come to bring peace, but salvation.
 - b. Jesus promises His followers hard times short term (but solid long-term results).
 - c. Jesus wasn't accepted in this world 2000 years ago, and He isn't accepted as He brings His message in person through you today.
 - d. We should expect to be rejected in a world that rejects Him.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.” – Jesus, in Matthew 7:24-27

“He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.” – Jesus, in Matthew 10:39

Surrender.

Complete surrender to Him, because that's what He really wants from me.

And you.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- We were created to be in fellowship with God, and without that fellowship, life can never feel fully in synch.
- Anything that separates us from God causes friction in our spiritual lives, but also has fallout in our physical lives. Until we are Christians, sin separates us from God. After we become Christians, nothing separates us from God's love (Romans 8:35-39), but many things can prevent us from enjoying His fellowship. These include, but are not limited to: busyness; selfish ambition; thirst for power, influence or riches; and even too much work.
- No labor on our part makes us worthy of a relationship with God, so no career should ever so consume our being that it distracts us from God or degrades our relationship with Him.
- Only in the context of an intimate relationship with the Father can we know the value of our work.
- We must make Jesus Lord of our lives, or else the things that distract us become our lord.
- Our lives must confess to all who know us that Jesus is Lord of everything...including the marketplace.