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The Reason We Exist



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E SAT IN THE AIRPORT TERMINAL FOR NEARLY an hour and talked. Usually in such chance encounters people want to be left alone, so I don't often intrude. This time, though, the older gentlemen seemed troubled, so I opened up the conversation.

Our conversation followed a typical path, and we were talking about what we did for a living almost immediately. He was a senior manager in a retail chain. I watched for the telltale flinch when I told him I was a workplace chaplain and faith/work writer. Even people who consider themselves Christians find it surprising to hear someone say "Christian" when talking about their jobs. In this case, I got the expected flinch, and then he eyed me suspiciously as if he expected me to hand him a tract and start a full-court press on his salvation.

It took a couple of minutes for him to realize I wasn't going to steer the discussion to spiritual matters, and there was a mix of relief and disappointment when I didn't. (To be truthful, usually I only see relief...the disappointment was a bonus.) So he brought it up himself.

"I'm a manager responsible for many people," he said, "but I don't always manage by what's in their best interests. In fact, I was just sitting here thinking most of what I do is about me, and I think my management style reflects it. If a decision makes the firm money, then I look good, and that makes me happy. If my decision hurts some workers, I feel bad about it, but in the end it's all about performance. I'm guessing God wouldn't be very

impressed, would he?"

My response caught him off guard. "Actually, I was just thinking you don't sound very impressed yourself." There was a long pause. Then he gave me a wry smile and a slow nod. "I'm not," he answered back, "but I'm just playing the cards life deals me. One day, though, I'll be in a place where I can control my career and my choices. Then I can worry about the softer side of life."

This time I told him he sounded just like me—living life promising myself "one day I would..."

"Unfortunately," I continued, "when that 'one day' finally came, and I shifted from human resource manager to chaplain, the feelings I experienced were no different than before. What I expected was that the things I did would somehow redeem the things I felt. I was certain when I spent my life doing good deeds, holy activities or more spiritual work, I'd feel fulfilled, and I'd understand why I was created. It never quite works that way. I had to discover the real reason I was created, and it had nothing to do with work or career or calling."

This really caught him off-guard. Nonplussed, he leaned forward and asked in irritated earnestness, "Then what's it all about? Why were you created?"

Now we had something to talk about!

What would you say to him?



Scripture Passages

John 4:1-30

John 8:1-11

Matthew 19:16-22

Introduction

Why were we created? What's the central purpose of our lives, the reason we exist? The answer is easy. Keeping that answer in the center of our consciousness isn't. We were created to be in relationship with God. To fellowship with Him, engage in prayerful conversation, and get to know Him. Contrary to what we're often taught, we were not created to do things for God; we were created to commune with Him.

Maybe that idea conjures up images of monks in monasteries. Or perhaps it makes you think of members of the clergy squirreled away in an office someplace studying the Bible and getting ready for Sunday sermons. It shouldn't. When the Bible talks about a relationship with God, it does so in active terms, the kind of relationship two farmers might have while seeding a field together, or the kind of relationship two golfers have as they play a round of golf. God created us to be in His company as He tends creation, and even gives us a role in the tending of Creation ourselves.

Still, we must always remember no matter how important the work is, it is the relationship with Him that trumps all else.

That's why we begin with this simple statement: The reason you exist is to be in relationship with God. The reason we exist is to be in relationship with God.

Only after we've established that relationship can the things we do in this life have meaning. Only as we engage in and grow in that relationship can we sort through the various opportunities that present themselves and make a useful contribution to Creation. Only in the comforting arms of that relationship can we face the trials common to humans or resist the damaging temptations which destroy so many others.

Eternity is about living forever in the presence of God. For the follower of Jesus Christ, eternity begins the day we accept Him as Savior. The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it like this: "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

In order for our lives to have meaning, we must understand God desires an intimate relationship with each of us. We begin our journey here.

In Depth

Read the Scripture passages listed above in one sitting if possible. Turn to John 3:16-17. Why does Jesus say He came to earth?

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

From 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 sin. His whole earthly life, then, was about removing the barrier that prevented humans from being in relationship with God.

In fact, it is often useful when reading about Jesus' encounters with people to ask ourselves this question: What barrier is He trying to remove between this person and God? That question often unlocks the object lesson in an exchange Scripture records.

With that question in mind, why do you think Jesus treated the Samaritan woman at the well differently from the woman caught in adultery? Notice Jesus waited patiently until the woman at the well had 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 in 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 that Jesus knew everything before she could believe His offer to her. For the man in Matthew 19, possessions appear to be 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're reading this and you aren't a Christian, then sin remains a barrier between you and God. Only by accepting Jesus Christ can you erase that barrier.

For the rest of us—those who call ourselves followers of Christ—there are also many other barriers that keep us from confronting the reality of the sin in our lives and its effect on us. What might some of these barriers be? (For example, many people keep themselves so busy they rarely have time to think about their actions or the resulting consequences.)

Once a person becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, the Bible teaches us that (Romans 8) “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—stress, worries, and busyness, to name just a few. What barriers are most common in your life in preventing you from sensing God's constant presence?

As mentioned earlier, 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 in Christ, not what we do. Why is understanding this concept an important first step for *workplace* Christians?

What barriers exist between you and God? What one step can you take to address one of those barriers this week?

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- We were created to be in fellowship with God, and without that fellowship, life can never be 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 sensing or 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.
- Only in the context of an intimate relationship with the Father can we know the value of our work.