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Gleanings

Divine Intervention in Career Development



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"The Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament is, in my opinion, one of the best business books ever published. One passage, in particular, contains a world of business wisdom: 'As a man believes so is he'" (Proverbs 23:7). (<http://www.inc.com/geoffrey-james/5-toxic-beliefs-that-ruin-careers.html>)

So begins an article about career development by Geoffrey James, a sales pundit and columnist for *Inc.* magazine.

His article identified five false beliefs that ruin careers:

1. Myself-worth is based on what others think of me.
2. My past equals my future.
3. My destiny is controlled by the supernatural.
4. My emotions accurately reflect objective reality.
5. My goal is to be perfect or do something perfectly.

My attention was drawn to the third point. Mr. James said:

Some people believe that their status in life—or even their potential as a human being—is determined by luck, fate, or divine intervention. This all-too-common (and ultimately silly) belief robs such people of initiative, making them passive as they wait for their "luck" to change.

What did Mr. James mean by the phrase "luck, fate, or divine intervention"? He didn't offer much guidance, so allow me to offer some thoughts as to how to biblically parse these words.

- *Luck* is used to characterize events that might be favorable or unfavorable but intimates a random universe that operates outside the sovereign control of the Creator, if there is a Creator. This understanding of luck is based on either atheism or deism.
- *Fate* implies that events occur through a determining cause that is totally outside human purview and is therefore disconnected from human choices. Inherent in the word is a fatalistic sense of reality, which is rooted in the belief of an impersonal determining cause.
- *Divine intervention* suggests that God intervenes in the affairs of men. This view assumes a personal God who sovereignly directs his creation.

The understanding of each of these ideas—luck, fate, and divine intervention—is rooted in different views of God.

Because the common view of *luck* is rooted in atheism or deism, a biblical theist, such as myself, would dismiss luck. Luck describes random events—events that are not providentially controlled. Biblically, there are no random events. Proverbs 16:33 (NIV) provides scriptural support for this idea:

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.

In this text, that which seems random is actually under God's sovereign control. If a person believes career success is a matter of luck, then his or her belief is not biblical and consequently in the end will not be efficacious.

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It by *fate* someone means there is an impersonal determining cause driving events, this, too, is not biblical. Note, for example, Isaiah 46:9–11 (NIV):

Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do.

God spoke through the pen of the prophet Isaiah and clearly stated that he has a purposeful plan. There is a beginning and end of the plan that God alone defines and everything that happens in between is under his sovereign control, therefore nothing will thwart his plan. The references to the bird and man (note both are singular) reveal that God's plan is personal and individual. Furthermore, in light of Romans 8:28, we know that God's plan is also benevolent for those who embrace him.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (NIV)

Fate, as commonly defined, is not biblical. So if a person believes that career success is a matter of fate, then that person's belief is unbiblical and will therefore not be efficacious.

As for divine intervention, the prior discussion on fate hopefully made it clear that God does intervene in the affairs of men. But does God's intervention preclude human responsibility? The apostle Peter addressed this point when he described the death of Christ at the hands of the religious leaders:

This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. (Acts 2:23 NIV)

Christ's death was in accordance with God's plan, but this truth did not relieve the religious leaders of culpability. Therefore the Scripture presents both the sovereignty of God and human responsibility as equally true, even though they seem contradictory.

For centuries godly people unsuccessfully sought to reconcile the ideas of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. In the final analysis, God is incomprehensible. Therefore, it is to be expected that there are truths about God's creation that we cannot fully understand.

If we accept the twin truths of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, then divine intervention in the affairs of men does not preclude human responsibility. This means that God can and does engage in directing the affairs of men without nullifying human responsibility.

Unlike luck and fate, the idea of divine intervention is biblical. If a person believes that career success is a matter of divine intervention, then that person's belief is biblical and will be efficacious.

So I agree with Mr. James that believing in luck or fate is toxic for one's career development, but I must disagree with his view of divine intervention.

Divine intervention is a merciful act by a personal, benevolent Creator who seeks to help people make wise choices—choices that align with his will and ways. Specifically, God intervenes in our lives to guide and direct us to play our parts in his plan for the universe. Instead of an impediment, divine intervention, as biblically understood, is a wonderful gift from God to help us find and fulfill our life purpose.

Belief in divine intervention is not silly, as suggested by Mr. James. It is a sound belief that inspires us by facilitating alignment of our careers with God's plan and purpose. Embracing the twin truths of divine sovereignty and human responsibility is part of every believer's call and is an expression of walking by faith not by sight. God always works the events of our lives to invite us to choose wisely, that is, to live according to his will and ways. May we have the grace to receive his help and respond responsibly. And may our career decisions reflect our faith and trust in the sovereign, personal, benevolent Creator, who was most fully revealed through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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