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Gleanings

The Meaning of Work



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Given the worldwide economic conditions, there is considerable attention focused on the need for more jobs, particularly well-paying jobs. Increasing the number of jobs is viewed by many as the way out of the current economic quagmire. They assume that putting the vast number of unemployed people back to work will produce a more robust economy worldwide, which will produce more economic prosperity. And economic prosperity is the end game for many, if not most, people. Consequently the value of work is commonly viewed in economic terms. This could be called the “pedestrian” view of work.

But is it enough to think of work in simply economic terms? Is there more to the meaning and significance of work than economics?

According to a recent blog by Hugh Whelchel, the venerable John Stott defined work as “the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community and glory to God.” (<http://blog.tifwe.org/presidential-debate-how-both-candidates-missed-the-meaning-of-work/>)

Synthesizing the pedestrian view and Stott’s view of work suggests work provides a way to meet economic needs, brings fulfillment to workers, provides a venue for serving others, benefits the community, and glorifies God.

While all these attributes are laudable and fairly easy to understand, it is the last attribute—glorifying God—that is perhaps the most challenging to comprehend. How exactly does work glorify God?

Many view work as little more than a necessary evil—a means to retirement, that is, to a state where one no longer works. Many people think that retirement means doing their will according to their ways, which is perhaps why work is a major motivator. But if work is mainly a financial engine driving people to retirement, how does it glorify God?

What if work is not simply a way to make money, but is also divinely ordained activity? What if retirement is not the end game of life? What if God created man to work and is indeed glorified when man works according to the will of God?

Furthermore, if work glorifies God, then shouldn’t the Christian community value work? Accordingly, shouldn’t Christian communities support the workplace as a venue to glorify God? If Christian communities viewed work as a means to glorify God, then they would express their support with activities such as teaching about work, writing about the value of work, training people to work, and holding people accountable to work. All this would be done from a biblical worldview.

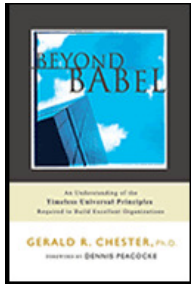
For a number of years, I was a member of a team that brought biblical teaching about work to our local Christian community. We taught numerous classes and workshops on management, leadership, sales, marketing, economics, finance, workplace ethics, and human resources—all from a biblical worldview. We provided personal counseling services to help people find and fulfill their workplace assignments. But sadly there was little interest in learning about work from a biblical worldview.

If my local Christian community is representative of Christians globally, it appears that the Christian community views work as the world does—mainly for its economic value. There is little stress on personal fulfillment, service to others, and the greater good of the community. And there is certainly little understanding of work as a means to glorify God.

According to *Vines Dictionary*, the common word translated *glorify* is *doxazo*, a derivative of the word *doxa*, which means “an opinion.” The word *doxazo* is commonly translated “to magnify, extol, or praise.” We magnify, extol, and praise God when we live, speak, and act in accord with God’s opinion. Since God is the creator of all, then his opinion is not simply one opinion

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among many, rather it is truth—the complete truth about reality. Therefore another way to understand the meaning of *doxazo* is that we glorify God when we live aligned with his will. In other words, work that is aligned with the will of God brings glory to God because it reflects God.

This leads us to the question, how do we perform work according to the will of God?

The term “will of God” refers to God’s specific wish or desire with regard to the events of his creation. God wants the affairs of life to be conducted according to his plan and purpose.

To gain insight into the will of God, consider the Creation Mandate of Genesis 1:26–28, which defines why God made man—namely, to rule his physical universe. Among created beings, man was uniquely created in God’s image and therefore singularly has the capacity to think and act enough like God to be his agents to rule his creation.

Work is one of the primary means by which man is to rule God’s universe. Therefore work is a vehicle by which man obeys the Creation Mandate and therefore obeys the will of God.

There are two ways man obeys the will of God. First, we obey God by doing the work that he has created and assigned us to do—no matter what that work may be. This may seem strange because of the common misperception that God only values work associated with churches or missions.

Martin Luther said, “The works of monks and priests, however holy and arduous they be, do not differ one whit in the sight of God from the works of the rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks, but that all works are measured before God by faith alone.” (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/september/10.37.html>)

Luther’s words reinforce the reality that all licit vocations are valued by God and are a means by which man can glorify God by obeying the Creation Mandate.

The second way that we obey God is by executing his will according to his ways. The “ways of God” refers to the means and methods by which we do what God wants done. More common terminology would be that the ways of God means living according to a biblical worldview.

So to glorify God means that man is to work to fulfill the Creation Mandate by doing the will of God according to the ways of God. In doing this, man also meets his economic needs, brings fulfillment to himself, benefits the larger community, and glorifies God.

This biblical analysis of the meaning, significance, and value of work will hopefully encourage you to think about work as God does and seek to glorify him with your work, that is, to work according to the will and ways of God. If you work this way, you will be a highly valued worker. You will be a respected and influential person in the workplace, which will make God look good (Titus 2:9–10) and therefore bring glory to him.

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Your Need	Training Venue	Information (click below)
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	Strategic Life Alignment Recordings	Recordings Available
	Seminar : Strategic Life Alignment Alumni Event	March 2, 2013, in Canada June 28, 2013, in Dallas
	Webinar : Strategic Life Alignment Alumni Event	August 2013
Training to Fulfill Your Life Purpose	Strategic Life Alignment Alumni Event Recordings	Recordings Available
	Webinar : Keys to Starting a Successful Business	November 5, 12, and 19, 2012
	Seminar : Financial Management: Personal Finance	January 12, 2013, in Hong Kong
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