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## **Your Job... Curse, Career, or Calling?**

By Stephen Lim

Beep! Beep! Beep! Monday's alarm signals another week of work. Do you eagerly jump out of bed, or roll over with a groan? Suppose the awards team from Publisher's Clearing House knocks at your door and announces that you have won \$200,000 a year for life. Would you keep going to work? It depends on whether you consider your job a curse, career or calling.

### **Your Job as Curse**

A Gallup survey found that 34 percent of workers ages 18 to 29 would quit their jobs if they could. Among those ages 30 to 49, 44 percent would resign. These individuals see their work as a necessary evil to support themselves and their families, and they live for 5:00 p.m. and the weekend.

Work was not meant to be a curse, but a gift. Besides meeting our needs, God intended work to provide a creative and satisfying way for us to use the abilities he has given us. Our fallen nature has corrupted work, however, as it has every area of human life. Consequently, work often brings boredom, stress and exploitation.

Lack of job security adds anxiety. Jen received a watch from her company for 20 years of service. A few weeks later, the company replaced her with an entry-level worker at lower pay. Today, nearly half of all workers in the United States are being hired on a "contingent" basis—meaning no benefits or assurance of continued employment. No wonder *Time* magazine calls our era "the age of the disposable worker."

### **Your Job as Career**

Others embrace their jobs as part of a career that provides what they want in life. Benefits include increasing possessions, financial security and status. Most importantly, through their careers they can achieve the success by which they define their self-worth. This view encourages a positive attitude toward our jobs. The more we give to our work, the more fulfillment we gain.

But this outlook holds dangers. First, we are tempted to let our careers control us in order to achieve the good life. Our job can determine where we live, when we move, how many hours we work and how much time we give to family and to serving God. This usurps God's lordship of our lives.

Mike Holmgren once served as an assistant coach for the San Francisco 49ers football team. After the 49ers won the Super Bowl, two other teams offered him their head coaching position. Since his twin daughters were juniors in high school, Holmgren felt it unwise to uproot his family. Though he didn't know when another opportunity would arise, he chose to stay put for two more years. As a Christian, he did not want career success to control his decisions.

Another danger of careerism is unbalanced living and the neglect of our families or personal and spiritual nurture. Best-selling business author Tom Peters writes, "We are frequently asked if it is possible to 'have it all'—a full and satisfying personal life and a full and satisfying, hardworking professional one. One answer is: No. The price of excellence is time, energy, attention and focus."

Most people view their jobs as either a curse or a career. Christians have a better option.

### **Your Job as Calling**

When we serve God, we do not work just to make a living or primarily to achieve success. Instead, our jobs become arenas for honoring him and accomplishing his purposes. Seeing our job as God's calling dignifies it. The work itself may still be menial and wearisome, but through our attitudes and actions we honor God.

**Excellence.** Suppose we are underpaid and unappreciated, and our job has no future. Shouldn't we just get by with the least effort? Not as Christians. Whatever we do, we offer it as an act of worship to God, who is worthy of our best. The apostle Paul instructs, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.... It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23-24).

**Integrity.** Dave worked as an electronics technician for a company that repaired equipment for other businesses. He tested equipment for accuracy before returning it to customers. One day his supervisor told him, "We're running behind schedule. Why don't you just sign off on this one so we can get to other projects?" As a Christian, Dave declined.

In a poll by Industry Week magazine, 25 percent of workers said that during the previous year their supervisors had asked them to do something dishonest. Of these, 64 percent felt that the alternative was to lose their job.

As employees, we also face the common temptations to stretch breaks, use company time to handle personal business and call in "sick" when we're not. Or we may embellish facts to make a sale.

Jesus tells us, "Let your light men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16). In the work world, maintaining integrity is difficult. It requires spiritual commitment, prayer, the support and counsel of other believers and sometimes the sacrifice of a raise, promotion or even the job itself.

**Compassion.** Regardless of what we do, our work can make a difference in the lives of others. Part of our income should be devoted to helping the materially and spiritually needy. The Bible instructs each Christian to do honest work, "that he may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28).

**Loving Our Neighbor.** The neighbors that God calls us to love (Matthew 22:39) include those who occupy the desks or work spaces around us. We bless them with a friendly and thoughtful

spirit. In turbulent times calm and good cheer ease the tension. For those with problems, we can offer encouragement, a listening ear and practical help.

***Sharing the Good News.*** Author Jacques Ellul states, "The only place theological truth reaches the world is through action of the lay people in the marketplace." Because of the time we spend there, work is the most strategic sphere for relating with unbelievers. Without infringing on company time, through caring relationships we discover others' needs—whether for peace of mind, fulfillment, healing for brokenness or eternal life. We can share how Jesus meets those needs.

In a fallen world, no job satisfies completely. Ours may be mostly fulfilling or only minimally so. When we sense God's calling, it doesn't matter. For through our jobs we honor him and accomplish his purposes.