

Work

Various Passages

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(GA) Scott Adams, the creator of the cartoon strip “Dilbert,” conducted a survey through his comic strip that he called, “A Highly Unscientific Dilbert Survey.”

A. He asked this question: “If you had a chance to hit your boss in the back of the head with one of the following objects, with no risk of getting caught, which would you use?”

1. Here are the percentages for the respondents’ answers:
 - a. 19 percent – A large bean burrito
 - b. 17 percent – a Nerf ball
 - c. 14 percent – a ripe melon
 - d. 13 percent – Framed certificate of appreciation
 - e. 13 percent – Your last performance review, including the 600-pound filing cabinet you keep it in
 - f. 8 percent – All your coworkers, bound by duct tape and flung from a huge catapult
 - g. 7 percent – a Ford Pinto with a full tank of gas
2. Adams said about these results, “I think the bean burrito won because it would make a really cool sound and would be messy with our without guacamole.”¹
 - a. Adams worked in a cubicle for 17 years before quitting to write “Dilbert,” so I think he’s qualified to conduct such surveys.

(SN) Whether you work in a cubicle, on a tractor, or out of your house – we can all agree that work takes a large amount of our time each week.

A. And because it’s such a priority... many of us struggle with the same questions. Questions like:

1. Why do we work? Meaning, what’s the purpose of it beyond earning a paycheck?
2. And how do figure out what God wants us to do for work?
 - a. This was one of the top two questions that I was asked the most as a college pastor – what does God want me to do for work and how do I find out?
 - i. What’s God’s will for my life in this area of work?
 - b. You can guess the other question, of course – what’s God’s will for who I am supposed to marry?

B. We’re in the series called “God & You” and this morning we’re going to explore these two questions about work this morning.

(S) First, let’s talk about **why we work**.

A. Not having an answer to this question is why work feels empty at times... meaningless... or, why we can’t wait to get away from work... or retire from it someday.

1. Many of us view our work as simply the thing we do in order to make money in order to afford to do the things we really enjoy.
 - a. Abraham Lincoln said, “My father taught me to work, he did not teach me to love it.”²

¹ Adams, Scott. “A Highly Unscientific Dilbert Survey”.

- b. Lane Kirkland said, “If hard work were such a wonderful thing, surely the rich would have kept it all to themselves.”³
2. Behind our groanings about work... our longings to get away from it... is often the deeper question we’re wrestling with: What’s the greater purpose behind these 40, or 60, hours I spend on the job... it’s got be about more than just making a paycheck.
- B. I’d like to head an odd direction with the answer to this question. Jesus answers our question, but it’s with such a simple statement that it is so easily missed. *Flip to Matthew 22:37-40*
1. When Jesus summed up all of God’s law – all of the OT Scripture that communicates God’s commands and desires for His people – Jesus gave us two commands.
- a. In *Verse 40*, Jesus says that, “On these two commandments depend ALL the Law and the Prophets.”
- i. That word “depend” is the word: “hang” – in fact, the active verb of this word means to crucify... or hang upon...
- a) This sentence isn’t using an active voice, it’s using a middle voice – so the word means, “hangs upon, or depends” – but you see the idea that everything can be pinned on these two commands. These two commandments encapsulate or hold up all the OT.
- i) And one is a vertical command... and the other is a horizontal one.
- a. The vertical command is found in *Matthew 22:37*: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”
- i. All of the commands and desires that God spelled out in the OT regarding how a person is to relate with God Himself are perfectly summed up in the idea of loving God with every facet of our being.
- a) So, if you love God with your whole being, you perfectly fulfill the command to “have no other gods before me.”
- b) If you love God with all of you, you perfectly fulfill the command to “not make a carved image, or likeness, or anything on earth and then to not bow down to it.”
- b) If you love God with your entire being, you perfectly fulfill all of the cleansing laws in Leviticus that deal with worshipping God in purity after touching a Leper, or handling an unclean animal, or when you have a bodily discharge.
- ii. This is the vertical aspect of the OT.
- b. But there’s a horizontal aspect, as well. All the hundreds of commands in the OT about how to interact with neighbors... with foreign nations... with family... with their spiritual community... and all of these horizontal commands, Jesus said, can be summed up with His command: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
- i. This means that ALL of our relationships with people and society have one overarching, blanketing, command on them – “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
2. Friends, there is no place in society that this applies more than in our work or vocation.
- a. God cares deeply about how people work. How we interact with one another in the marketplace. What we produce or turn out and how it benefits our greater community and His creation.

² Lincoln, Abraham. <http://www.randomquotes.org/quote/2418-my-father-taught-me-to-work-he-did-not-teach-me-to.html>, acc. 5-25-09.

³ Kirkland, Lane. <http://www.quotesandpoem.com/quotes/showquotes/author/lane-kirkland/127808#>, acc. 5-25-09

- i. There are dozens upon dozens of commands in Scripture that show us God's concern for people and their work.
 - a) Commands like *Exodus 22:5* – “If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed over, or lets his beast loose and it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best in his own field and in his own vineyard.”
 - b) Or, *Leviticus 25:14* – “And if you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another.”
 - c) Or, even an obscure, seemingly odd command like, *Leviticus 25:39* – “If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve you as a slave.”
- ii. These are the three examples, but there are hundreds of places that God spells out His designs and commands for work.

3. Jesus said that all of these designs and commands that God has for you and your vocation are perfectly summed up in the command to “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

- a. What's the deeper purpose of our work, or vocation? What's the purpose of my job or career that is deeper, more important than simply earning a paycheck? It is to love my neighbor as I love myself.

C. This makes work deeply meaningful, for some people. It isn't available for everyone. Only God's children can hold this deeper purpose for work.

1. Now, God uses the saved and the unsaved to provide for His creation. This is the mystery of the Providence of God – that God would provide and direct through the saved and the unsaved alike.
 - a. Yes, Joseph was involved in providing food for the nation of Israel during the famine recorded in Genesis. But so was the Pharaoh. In fact, the Pharaoh was first in charge and it was he who set Joseph over the food storage and distribution.
 - b. Today, the wealthy factory owner that only cares about his bottom line – who doesn't ever go to work thinking about, “Hmmm... how can I love my neighbor today,” still helps produce food... or tennis shoes... or blankets... or cars... that God providentially uses to provide for and direct His people.
 - i. This wealthy factory owner is oblivious to this, perhaps. He might even go home thinking only of how great he was that day... and all the while God has supplied for a thousand needs through this oblivious, foolish man.
2. But the Christian – the one who knows the God of Providence and knows the command to love his neighbor as himself and has the Spirit of this God in him making all things possible – this Christian has the opportunity to walk in purpose and meaning beyond what is possible to the non-Christian.
 - a. And this is not boasting, because it is a gift from God, right?
 - b. But for the Christian, the day becomes not merely an opportunity to make a few bucks... or do a job... but a chance to join God in providing for and loving his neighbor. **Actively** join and enter into the experience with our thoughts and our feelings.
 - i. The McHargues, who grow corn and beans and produce hogs, have a chance to not only love their neighbors by providing food, and employment for others, but by doing it as an act of faith.
 - ii. Lynn Conoway, every morning when he gets up and starts up that van that we see around town has a chance to not only provide a service for people that they can't live without, but he get's to do and feel and experience that he carrying out an act of love toward those people.

iii. My wife, Jamie, or Charisa, or Diane, when they wake up and prepare to educate little minds, they can do it as an expression of Christ's love toward not only the children they're teaching, but also their families, and their greater community.

a) These educators can take a big vision of God's Providential love into the classroom – the vision that God is going to love and supply for the nations someday through these souls that they're teaching.

c. The farm and feedlot, the homes of our customers, the classroom and home school room, these all become primary arenas for Christians to actively obey Jesus by loving others as they love themselves.

i. Oh, how shortsighted and small-visioned is the Christian who works to earn money as his primary reason.

ii. But how divinely inspired is the Christian who wakes up each day and says, "God, help me work so that I may love."

D. Now, this leads into the next question we each must wrestle with – How do we know what God wants us to do for work, or a vocation? Or, how does God want us to spend our time doing each day?

1. This isn't a simple question... so the answer isn't simple either. But, one of the ways we can rightfully simplify it, according to Jesus, is to ask the question of every possibility, "Is this the way God wants me to love my neighbor as myself?"

a. We'll change jobs several times in life... we'll make huge mid-course adjustments on our vocations, at times... we'll live various places, be different ages, have different interests and skills sets...

i. What will NEVER change for us as a Christian is the priority of love. We can and should always be resolved on "How does God want me to spend my time loving my neighbors as myself?"

2. And when we ask this question, we are best positioned to proceed in a God-centered, biblical way.

a. And we soon find that certain work or positions cannot be vocations God calls His people to.

i. It would be difficult for a person fixated on obeying Christ by loving his neighbor to become a drug dealer, or the owner or worker in a company putting out products that harm people, or to make money in illegal, underhanded dealings... to be a cheat or a swindler.

ii. Likewise, does someone who is rich and doesn't contribute... someone who doesn't need to produce or provide anything of value to community, and chooses not to... someone who plays with their wealth in non-productive, or helpful ways... is that person able to say that their time is going toward "loving her neighbor as she loves herself?"

a) Gene Edward Veith Jr. writes in his book, *God at Work*,⁴ "Being a member of the 'idle rich' is no vocation, unless the wealth is used somehow, through productive investment or philanthropy, to be of benefit to someone else."⁴

b. Again, you can see how, when "Loving our neighbor as we love ourselves" is the measuring stick, some options we might choose lose their viability.

⁴ Gene Edward Veith Jr., *God at Work; Your Christian Vocation in All of Life*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), page 66.

C. But what about the gazillion options that *are* viable options? That would, hypothetically, give us an opportunity to worship God and love our neighbor?

1. This is where it must be said that there is no simple, one-size-fits-all answer to this question. In fact, the answer lays in the fact that one-size-**does-not**-fit-all.

a. Even in this room there is such diversity in age, in ethnicity, in experiences, in interests, in abilities.

i. And God uses this variety to bless and provide for His world in so many mysterious ways that it's too wonderful to comprehend.

a) Where would we be if God didn't call some to be... electricians, entertainers, bankers, Vets, doctors, plumbers, grocers, farmers, artists, musicians... and on and on and on.

2. So where do you fit in God's vast and mysterious work of providing and directing all of creation – you need to talk with Him about that. Prayer and communion with Christ is the starting point... the race itself... and the finish line of finding that answer.

a. But we also need to consider what God has done and is doing today.

i) Consider who we are... what we enjoy... what we're good at... what God has given us sufficient motivation to do... what we have a vision for and see how it loves others... what family we're born into... what geographic area God has put us in...

b. God's mysterious and vast providence doesn't just span creation out there... it spans creation right there (point at a person), and here (point at myself). God has made you who you are.

i. You didn't choose your family.

ii. You didn't choose the time-period you were born into.

iii. You didn't choose your sex.

iv. You didn't choose your ethnicity

v. You didn't choose your physical and natural abilities

vi. And I would even suggest that you didn't choose your affections and motivations...

c. I say that to reiterate that God has had a plan for you long before you starting trying to discover it.

i. He's the Lord of each person and He has designs for you to walk in.

a) *1 Samuel 2:7-8* says: "The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and on them He has set the world."

c. So if you're wondering what He wants you to do for work, let me encourage you to talk with Him about it.

i. But consider how He's made you and where He's put you.

4. Which means that for most of us here today – I would almost say all of us – the place to start is with what you're doing right now.

a. Do some prayerful, God-centered, assessing of how you're spending your time right now – last week, this upcoming week.

i. For many of us, I'm guessing, you're in the center of God's will doing exactly what He wants you to do and He's providing, sovereignly providing for His creation through you.

a) And many of you love what you're doing. And many of you are aware of how your work or vocation is one of your main avenues to love your neighbor as yourself.

i) For many of us today, my hope is that this message is a shot in the arm, encouraging you to get back out there into what you're already doing and love people with all the energy and joy you can.

5. But there might be a few that need to repent. Our vocation, or work, or time-commitments are of no earthly good. They're not productive, or helpful.

a. In fact, perhaps they're hurtful to others or our society.

i. It is going to be impossible to work at those positions with a clear conscience and a sense of worship toward Christ and love toward your neighbor.

b. Some here today may need to do an about face, spend a bit of time in confession, and then start praying about what God does want you to do to serve and love others through a different vocation.

(Close) Friends, there is nothing more enjoyable than seeing a man or woman or young person loving their neighbors through their work.

A. We see much of this already in our community – let me pray for us that we excel still more.

I Thessalonians 4:11-12