

WHY ARE PEOPLE UNHAPPY?

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We hear about many of the problems in the workplace. The primary cause of discontentment, we have concluded, is that we have lost the biblical perspective of work.

Somehow we, as a society, have adopted a secular view of work—a view that allows us to think we can separate our work from our spiritual lives.

This heresy in our thinking has led to most of the misery we see now in the workplace. As in other areas of our lives, when we operate with unsound concepts, we suffer the consequences.

In our early days as a nation, even those who were not devout Christians had a concept of a divine calling in their work. In general, work was seen in a more honorable light—as a way to fulfill one's purpose in life.

Chuck Colson, president of Prison Fellowship, wrote, "God created human beings in His own image and part of being *'in His image'* means that we are workers—like God Himself. That's where that innate, inner drive for work comes from. Work is part of God's nature."

Although at one time work may have been considered a calling, it now seems to be merely a means to an end. Today's workers believe their labor allows them to purchase pleasure, to fulfill materialistic needs, and to build their egos by gaining power and position. The view was very different in early America, when William Perkins preached that "a person's vocation is a certain kind of life ordained by God and imposed on man for the common good."

So, it would be good to begin the career-decision process by taking a look at the errors and the truths that relate to work. If operating under false beliefs is causing so much stress and heartache, then the truth should set us free to find the joy in work that our Creator intended.

Let's look first at some of the errors and the problems they cause.

MATERIALISM (GREED)

Probably the biggest deception regarding work in our society today is the belief that a higher income (more money) can bring happiness. Many adults have jobs and are making adequate money, yet they are not fulfilled. Many say without hesitation that they pursued their present careers because those careers offered prestige and high incomes. Now they see the mistake in making decisions based primarily on income. Money does not provide satisfaction.

We hear movie stars, athletes, and other high income celebrities say the same thing. In an interview with *World Wide Challenge* (Campus Crusade for Christ) magazine, Christopher Parkening, one of the most preeminent virtuosos of the classical guitar said it well:

"The world tells you that success is having a lot of money, being famous and being independent—doing what you want to do, when you want to do it. For years I pursued success in the music field to the point that I was able to retire to a Montana ranch at age 30. My wife and I were living what most would consider the ideal life. But a year after I got everything I wanted, it meant absolutely nothing. I was empty inside.

“During that period of time I became a Christian, and my priorities changed. When I came across the passage in I Corinthians that says, ‘Whatever you do, do all for the glory of God,’ I realized there were only two things I knew how to do. One was fly fish and the other was playing the guitar.

“I went back to playing the guitar, but this time with a different purpose. AS Bach once said, “The aim and final reason of all music is none else but the glory of God.””

PRIDE

A second problem is pride. We are so concerned with what the world might think or say if we happened to get into something that is not a “successful” job or a “good position,” we are ashamed to do what God has created us to do. We then burn ourselves out trying to do jobs we were not naturally designed to do. You can call it going against the grain, not following your bent, or swimming upstream, but the bottom line is that it’s impossible to be excellent for very long when you’re not using the talents and strengths God has given you (see Psalm 139:13).

Many of our clients are in the wrong jobs because of their parents’ pride. As young people, they were pushed into career fields so they could “be somebody” or “amount to something.” To put it plainly, we parents often want to fulfill our own worldly dreams and boost our egos through our children.

Jesus tried to point out to the Pharisees that they were concerned with impressing men with their outward appearances (or reputations). But Jesus was concerned with what was inside—the main problem with the Pharisees. He called them hypocrites because they cleaned the outside of the cup and dish but inside they were full of greed and self-indulgence. He wanted them to clean the inside of the cup and dish (motivation to serve others), and then the outside also would be clean (see Matthew 23:25-26). The Lord made this concept clear to Samuel when He chose to anoint David rather than one of his more handsome brothers. He reminded Samuel that the Lord looks at the heart.

LACK OF TRUST (FAITH)

A third problem that gets us off course in our pursuit of a rewarding career pathway is a lack of real faith; or, said another way: Deep down we really don’t trust that God is sufficient for all our needs. We are driven to achieve success so we can eventually gain control of our circumstances and be independent (protected) from the problems of life. This really reflects a fundamental error in our thinking. There is no security in this world. Achievement, more independence, and control will not help.

Witness the high-ranking executives and famous people who become alcoholics or commit suicide each year. There are no guarantees in this life aside from the promises of God’s Word, which have been sealed through the unconditional love of Christ and the gift of His Holy Spirit. We must walk each day in faith, depending on Him for every breath.

The apostle Paul goes to great lengths to point out the role of faith: *“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him”* (Hebrews 11:6).

The problem is that most of us don’t really trust God to be involved personally in our lives, and we miss out on His perfect plan.

So if we are not able to control the future through achievement, we have two options: wrap ourselves in a cloak of despair, or trust in a personal God who loves us and wants His very best for us. The choice is clear, but it can only be made in faith, and that means returning control of your life to the Author of Life (see Matthew 6:33-34).

IGNORANCE

A final reason for poor career decisions is ignorance. Many of our clients took available jobs just because they never had been taught how to make career decisions. Virtually no one in our society has offered a sound plan for teaching people how to make career choices. Sure, there are a few good books on the subject, but there is a pitiful silence from institutions such as churches, schools, and government. Our experience has been that even most Christians have adopted the world's value about work (materialism, pride, control). Our prayer is that Christians will recognize that a self-centered, materialistic career orientation does not work. It should be clear that any program of career guidance must be built on a solid foundation—a foundation of truth (see I Corinthians 3:10-15).