

GOD
AND THE
WORKING MAN

By
Lesly F. Massey

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Other Books by Lesly F. Massey

Women and the New Testament (McFarland, 1991)

Women in the Church: Moving Toward Equality (McFarland, 2002)

Daughters of God- Subordinates of Men: Women and the Roots of Patriarchy in the New Testament (McFarland, 2015)

PREFACE

I am pleased to make this book available again, and at the start a few things warrant comment and explanation. This material was initially assembled as a workshop for men, for the purpose of encouraging personal reconnection with God and to clarify certain practical elements of the Christian message. By the time it was published in 1983, that objective had shifted to address the specific needs of working men and the relevance of Christian principles to the work arena. The revised version maintains the original 1980s context, as well as my own perspectives at that point in time. It also retains the original illustrations and references, with limited additions.

However, I recognize that a lot has changed in recent years. These days, it is not unusual to see NFL players point upward after scoring a touchdown, to symbolize praise and recognition of God. This would indicate that increased numbers of men are willing to express their faith in a public arena and enthusiastically acknowledge God's presence in all aspects of their lives. Today also there are many photos available of prayer circles among American military personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan. Organizations and ministries such as Promise Keepers,¹ Master's Men,² and Iron Sharpens Iron³, have made a very solid connection with men all over the United States. And numerous large evangelical churches have helped scores of men accept that being a believer in God and a follower of Jesus Christ is something to be proud of, rather than a cause for shame or embarrassment. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has a nation-wide program called Christian Men's Fellowship that offers numerous personal growth and community service programs. These are but a few examples among many.

Since the early 1980s, the feminist movement has gained strength and has made significant progress in promoting gender equality. I am glad to have contributed to that field of

study, as well as the movement, with three books and one published essay that argue against the perpetuation of patriarchy as a social paradigm.

In that regard, it is important to note that *God and The Working Man* is not a sexist or male chauvinist book, any more than the many books about and for women could be considered sexist. The purpose is simply to address fundamental issues, needs, and values from a male perspective, but not to represent or support any degree of male bias in the larger issue of gender roles and gender status.

All that said, I should mention that my personal insights and respect for working men have deepened since the first edition of this book. For a number of years I worked outside the ministry, in areas such as commission based sales and residential remodeling, and for nine years I was employed in the field of vocational training as director of admissions and director of education. During that time I learned a great deal about the challenges and frustrations of the work arena that I wish I had understood before I published the first edition of *God and the Working Man*.

I am thankful to Alvin Jennings of Star Publications who saw merit in this project thirty years ago, and to those who more recently encouraged revision and publication in a new format. This not an academic book, so references are limited and the style is fluid, concise and to the point. All biblical quotations are from the New International Version. The cover is a revised version of the 1983 jacket, which was my own creation. To each and every reader, may this volume assist you in discovering greater depths in your spiritual quest, and may God bless you with wisdom, courage, and abundant joy.

Lesly F. Massey

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, and much of the western world, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries brought a strong focus on the individual. Efforts to elevate human rights have produced a general tendency to categorize individuals into special groups, such as the elderly, handicapped, divorced, homosexual, ethnic minority, and such like. The purpose has been to identify and address both individual and collective needs. Likewise, emphasis has been given to the achievements of individuals who in the past may have been overlooked, or insufficiently recognized, such as neighborhood heroes, law enforcement officers, fire fighters, innovative small business owners, model school teachers, and young people who have overcome negative influences or handicaps to fulfill their personal dreams.

Such human interest trends are paralleled by an awakening of Christian leaders to the vast gorge that often exists between religious ideals and the challenges of real life. While Christians believe that the Bible speaks to both spiritual and physical needs, there are thousands of men and women who have difficulty seeing relevance and making application of biblical texts to their own lives. Even for countless church-goers, the practical aspects of religion are often lost among volumes of ecclesiastical by-laws and theological jargon. Sermons come across as pious platitudes and meaningless homiletic verbiage, some of which shoots over the heads of the congregation while the rest dribbles down from the pulpit like syrup and settles blandly into the carpet. Many go home as empty as they came. Some have given up church altogether. The observation of this unfortunate trend may have prompted the lyrics of the Beatles tune *Eleanor Rigby*: “Father McKenzie, writing a sermon that no one will hear. No one comes near.”

The current decline in church attendance in America and the closure of hundreds of churches each year is both lamentable and disconcerting. Against this trend, many competent clergymen and scholars are churning out books, audios and videos in an effort to breathe life into dying churches and to address the many challenges of contemporary church leadership. The rise of the megachurch gives the false impression of increased interest. Evangelists like Joel Osteen in Houston Texas, T. D. Jakes in Dallas, and Australian Brian Houston of the international Hill Song Church, are proving successful at drawing huge crowds, in part by means of high powered music, elaborate technology and broad application of television and social media. Some use a simulcast video system to provide live messages from the minister to a number of satellite churches. These churches also offer a wide range of programs that address human interests and needs. Such shifts in approach to Christian ministry represent a new dimension of evangelism and an unprecedented effort to relate the Bible and church to a post-modern culture. For many, this is a welcome breeze in the stale air of traditional “churchianity.”

There is one special group, however, which is so large and so common-place that it continues to be overlooked in certain ways. Perhaps it is ignored or pushed aside in favor of more colorful minority groups in need of special attention. But if there ever has been a group with serious problems, a group deserving of attention and encouragement, a group needing assistance in understanding and applying the Christian message in a practical way and to feel the presence of God in their lives, it would be the group called “working men.”

For centuries, the backbone of every advanced culture has been the ordinary worker. From classical Greece to the modern technological west, the common working man has comprised the mainstream of humanity. He has been classified variously as slave, peasant, plebeian, serf, proletariat, and journeyman. But regardless of designation, this plain man has

provided the muscle and skill necessary to advance humanity from hunter-gather societies to our modern international and global high-tech era.

Modern feminists rightly note that history was written by men with a focus on men's interests. So kings, scholars, and holy men were the authoritative figures behind the course of history, while men of lesser rank and significance did most of the work. They mined ore, forged steel, waged war, and then rebuilt city walls after the smoke of battle lifted. Like lumbering plow horses, such men have trudged through the fields of time, devoted to family but obligated to God (or gods), king, and country. Often they received little reward for their efforts, other than the privilege of going home and retaining a portion of their own harvest to feed their families. But over many generations, countless millions of such common working men remain essentially nameless, their bodies laid to rest in forgotten graves, or burned, or abandoned on battlefields to dissolve into the elements of the earth.

In Europe during the late Medieval period there arose what is called "the middle class," resulting from the expansion of trade and development of numerous social structures that allowed the non-elite to attain wealth and power. In the 19th century, this class, also called the bourgeois, underwent enormous expansion into America and other parts of the world as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution. Life among the middle class was measurably better than that of peasants and slaves, but despite their increasing numbers and wealth, they remained a class with little historical significance. In the words of D.H. Lawrence, "how beastly is the bourgeois, especially the male of the species."

Just after World War II, as a large and powerful middle class emerged and gained more significant respect, there was something of an awakening to the relationship between religion and work. The world Council of Churches in its first assembly in 1948 initiated an extensive

research program which, after three years, resulted in a scholarly book entitled *Work and Vocation*, edited by John Oliver Nelson. In the years that followed, numerous similar conferences were held to discuss and analyze the many ramifications of Christianity and daily work— the YMCA Centennial in 1951, the National Council of Churches Conference in Buffalo, New York in 1952, the Church and Work Congress in Albany, New York in 1955, and others. As a result, a number of fraternities and vocational guilds sprang up in both America and Europe seeking to penetrate the work world with the Gospel. The efforts were noble and clearly well-founded. But by the 1980s it appears that the banner has been trampled underfoot in a relentless advance of technology and obsession with commodities. So, clearly there remains a need to focus attention on the lives of working men, and how to connect religious faith to the work arena. Among the masses of working men in America comparatively few believe that their faith has relevance to their work, and it is doubtful that many find in their work a sense of personal joy and accomplishment.

A working man in today's world is difficult to typify, especially in a free enterprise system where everyone is at liberty to choose a career, regardless of his background. The general distinction between the blue-collar and white-collar worker is inadequate in identifying personal and emotional needs. Occupations have become infinitely diversified and specialized, and there is the added complexity of ethnicity, education, and religious and cultural distinctions. The working man might wear a western Stetson, a hard-hat, or a ball cap. He might go to work in boots, dress shoes, athletic shoes, or flip-flops. He might drive a pick-up, or an eighteen wheeler. He might cruise to work in a Mercedes convertible, or fight for a seat on a crowded subway. He might work in a shop, an office, a store, or out of the back of a van. He may have a flexible work schedule, or he might clock in at seven and out at four. He might read the local newspaper and

the *Wall Street Journal*, or he might keep informed by television and radio. He might read *National Geographic* and *Psychology Today*, or he might prefer *Sports Illustrated* and *Popular Mechanics*. Maybe he is continually on the internet. Maybe he doesn't read at all. He might drink Coors, chew Red Man, or smoke Marlboro, or he may prefer diet Coke and Spearmint gum. His routine might include a stop at Starbucks for a morning cafe latte. He may play tennis, golf, or fantasy football. If his work is not physically taxing in itself, he may jog, swim, or bike for exercise, and as a hobby he might fish, hunt, or garden. Maybe at home he is a chronic couch-potato. His entire lifestyle and all its components are as diverse yet unique as his personality. He is like many other men in some ways, but in others he is one-of-a-kind.

Against all that, there are a few things that can be said with reasonable certainty about the average American working man. He has problems and worries that he doesn't really want to talk about, and he finds it extremely difficult to describe what he thinks about God. The idea of having a meaningful relationship with God may sound appealing, yet somehow it does not totally fit his agenda. The ideals Jesus taught seem far-fetched, and the fulfillment of faith seems illusive at best. If he is married, he carries the added responsibility of supporting a household. Even if his wife works, it is likely that his earning power is greater, and with that he feels pressure. He knows he doesn't do an adequate job of being a dad, and he can never manage the time to complete his wife's honey-do-list for repairs and improvements around the house. He loves her, but he can't always say so in a meaningful way. He shudders at the thought that his marriage might fail and become another divorce statistic, but he just can't accept that it's his fault.

Whether married or single, he worries about the national economy, income tax, job security, retirement, and the threat of terrorism. He resents the requirement of more training or

education to keep his job, and he resents outsourcing to other countries where labor is cheaper. He is disturbed by the rapid pace of life, as well as the rate of change all around. At times he feels like he is being swallowed by technology and new procedures. He often feels threatened and insecure. He is frustrated by intolerable work conditions and unreasonable demands. His whole life seems like a race he cannot win, yet there is no respectable way to bail out. He resents the establishment. He feels that managers are constantly changing the rules in their favor, and he is powerless to do anything about it. He is not paid what he is worth, but he can't find any opportunities that are better. The older he gets, the harder it is to keep pace and the more likely it becomes to be replaced. He knows exactly how it feels to want to tell the boss to "take this job and shove it." But he can't.

In short, the interests of the typical American working man are pretty simple and his ambitions fairly limited. His world consists of family, friends, and co-workers. He likes to watch football on Sunday afternoon, and he dreams of riding a Harley Davidson through the countryside with the breeze of freedom blowing in his face. He wishes no ill upon anyone, but his daily prayers are direct and limited in scope — "God bless this house, me, my wife, and my kids. Help me find a better job. Oh yes, and God bless the USA."

The paradox of all this is that the typical working man is also the typical Christian. He doesn't mind admitting that he is a sinner, with many weaknesses and short-comings, but he doesn't particularly enjoy having that pointed out every time he goes to church. After all, it's a dog-eat-dog world out there, and you have to know how to run with the big dogs so you don't get bit, and sometimes you have to shovel fast to keep from getting buried. What else can he do? He's just trying to make a living, and he hopes the Man Upstairs will understand it all and cut him some slack.

He also knows he doesn't read the Bible much, or any other of those "spiritual" books preachers talk about on Sundays. Sometimes he feels bad that he is not as "in tune" with the Holy Spirit as he could be. But he doesn't really want to talk about it. Besides, who would listen? The minister? No, Pastor Bill lives way up there in the clouds with the angels, and he doesn't really understand life in the real world. Praying doesn't come easy either. It's hard to know what to say, and he feels silly trying to talk to God, even when he's alone. God seems so distant, if He's even out there at all.

This book is written for the ordinary working man. Much of what is said here applies equally to females, and no discrimination is intended in that regard. But the focus here is on men, with their own package of problems, needs and issues. This material is written with the author's desire to help arouse a sleeping giant, to awaken every man who reads it to a new dawn of maturity and spiritual awareness, and to a fresh new experience of serving God on a daily basis in the midst of a predominantly unbelieving and uncaring world. There is hope for every man who wants to be better and do better, but without a doubt he needs a little understanding and a helping-hand.

Chapter Two

A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

It may be hard to imagine God having a favorite among all humans, since we prefer to think that God is impartial and cares about everyone. But in II Samuel, David is called “a man after God’s own heart,” apparently because he was remorseful for wrong doing and he was seen as a man who truly desired to serve and please God. Jesus seems to have been partial to John, son of Zebedee, traditionally identified as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” in the Gospel that bears his name (John 21:20). And Jesus told various parables to illustrate God’s love for someone that others might ignore or cast aside, such as the renegade son who squandered his inheritance, and the lost sheep, and the lost coin (Luke 15:1-31).

So, perhaps it is not far-fetched to consider that there is a special place in the heart of God for the ordinary working man. After all, it seems that he is the most likely to be selected as typical, classic, and quintessentially human— not a king, soldier, scholar, athlete, or movie star. Admittedly, kings and generals feature prominently in history, since much of human history is about warfare and conquest. And of course, the views and observations of many philosophers, historians and sages occupy a large part of written history. Modern feminists have pointed out that history is written by men, about the accomplishments of men, and for the interests of men. Or as worded by Karl Bednarik, “the male has always been the inventor of mankind’s future, the stage director of history.”⁴ And in that process, the role of the common man, along with the views and experiences of women, has been largely ignored or edited out of history.

WORKERS IN ANTIQUITY

Archaeology has yielded considerable evidence of myriad trades and professions in early developed cultures. And biblical literature itself provides many glimpses into the drab and often back-breaking work performed by all manner of laborers and craftsmen in the ancient near east. The Hebrew Bible is a collection of writings still held sacred by modern Jews and Christians alike. Along with the Law of Moses, it includes historical, prophetic, poetic and wisdom literature. The first great patriarch was Abraham, who migrated from Mesopotamia and his descendants eventually occupied the southern portion of the Levant called Canaan, or later Palestine. These writings reveal the connections with and influences upon the Hebrews by those people who inhabited the same region, such as the Phoenicians, Philistines, Syrians, Ammonites, and Moabites, as well as the greater and older cultures in Mesopotamia and Egypt. Initially, the Hebrews were nomadic herdsman living in tents. Later they invaded Canaan and adopted a more settled lifestyle. Their writings, together with other archeological findings, suggest an impressive array of vocations in which untold millions of ordinary men labored all their lives, but whose names are never mentioned. There were farmers, merchants, carpenters, metal craftsmen, stone masons, mariners, fishermen, dock workers, soldiers, hunters, millers, weavers, potters, bakers, butlers, camel herders, caravaneers, architects, writers and accountants.⁵ Saul, before he was anointed the first king of Israel, worked for his father herding donkeys (I Samuel 9). David, the successor to Saul as king, grew up as a shepherd (I Samuel 16). Amos, a prophet in the eighth century BC, was both a shepherd and a tree nurseryman, working specifically with fruit bearing sycamore trees (Amos 7:14). When Solomon set about to construct his own palace and the temple of which his father David had dreamed, he conscripted 70,000 men as carriers, 80,000 as stonecutters, and 3,600 as foremen to oversee their work (II Chron. 8:2). In the same text,

mention is made of many other craftsmen such as engravers, fabric workers, timber cutters, and carpenters whom he contracted from Hiram, King of Tyre. So, it is obvious that the working man's blues have been sung in many languages since the dawn of civilization.

The New Testament was written against the backdrop of the more advanced Greco-Roman world. The various writers provide many references to occupations and trades, some of which still exist today and have changed little over the centuries. Methods of herding sheep in Palestine are the same except for the added assistance of sheep-dogs. Matthew and Zacchaeus, were both publicans, or tax-collectors for the Roman government (Matt. 9:9; Luke 19:2). Peter and his brother Andrew were fishermen, which is still today a significant industry in the region around Lake Gennesaret (Sea of Galilee). James and John were in the same trade, which they learned from their father Zebedee (Mark 1:16, 19). Simon Peter resided in Joppa for a time with a disciple named Simon, who was a tanner (Acts 10:6). Luke, traditionally recognized as the author of Acts and the Gospel that bears his name, was a medical doctor (Col. 4:14). Saul of Tarsus, better known as the Apostle Paul, hand-crafted tents, and at one stage during his ministry partnered with Aquila and his wife Priscilla (Prisca) so that he could practice his trade for self-support (Acts 18:3).

Labor unions existed in the Roman Empire at least as early as the first Christian century. The book of Acts mentions the guild of silversmiths in Ephesus whose members rioted against the Apostles because they saw the message of Jesus Christ as a threat to their business. These craftsmen made silver shrines to the goddess Diana (Artemis) and sold them to the patrons who visited her temple in their city (Acts 19:24). In II Timothy 4:14 mention is made of Alexander who was a copper-smith by trade.

These few examples illustrate that the Gospel message in its earliest form was proclaimed in a working man's world, and it had its roots in an environment teeming with ordinary people. In fact, while we know that many wealthy and influential people accepted Jesus as Messiah in those early years of the church, within a few decades some depicted the movement as a religion of slaves because the vast majority of Christians were of the poor and non-citizen class.

Jesus of Nazareth is without a doubt the best example of divine sympathy for the plight of the working man. Christians believe Jesus to be the son of God, but also human. He was raised in a small town in Galilee called Nazareth, and traditionally is described as the son of Joseph the carpenter (Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3). The Greek term is *tehton*, used commonly for an artisan or craftsman, and in particular a builder who works with wood, in contrast with a metal-worker (*chalkeus*) and the stone-worker or mason, (*lithologos*). So, based on descriptions in the Hebrew bible and other ancient resources, we can assume that Jesus learned to do all the work involved in crafting wood. A carpenter would have known how to fell trees, or at least to purchase wood from a cutter, and then to select the right pieces for specific applications and shape them with a crude axe made of hammered iron. He bored holes with a bow-drill, or awl, and used a simple type of plane, compass, ruler and square to assure accuracy. He would also have used a hammer and nails, and perhaps fashioned yokes and plows, which were in great demand among the local farmers. A carpenter would also have made wooden lock and key sets, framed doors and roofed houses, and made simple items of furniture and sold them locally or carted them to other towns for market.

We can be assured that Jesus fully understood the meaning of hard work. And it should be of great consolation to a working man today, whose hands are rough, nails split and dirty,

knuckles scuffed and scarred, to know that the hands of Jesus had the same rugged appearance. Jesus had the hands of a working man.

But at the same time, Jesus knew from an early age that besides the duty of physical labor, he had a higher purpose and calling. When Jesus was twelve, he was taken by his parents to the Temple in Jerusalem for rites of passage today called *bar mitzva*. Luke provides an account of Jesus lingering behind in the temple complex. His parents left the company of travelers to go back and search for him. They found him conversing with the scholars, who were amazed at his depth of understanding and his questions (Luke 2:41-52). This is written to demonstrate his awareness of a relationship with God that ran deeper than his menial identity as a carpenter. Likewise, every working man today needs to feel himself of great importance in God's world. Beneath the surface of his perhaps rough exterior, there is a man on a mission with a higher calling.

ILLUSION OF A CURSE

Many people think of work as a curse, inflicted upon all humanity as a consequence of Original Sin. The source of this notion is the second story of Creation in the early chapters of Genesis, which describes an original couple named Adam and Eve and their sin of disobedience. The pair subsequently are expelled from the Garden of Eden, and God tells Adam that his life henceforth will be one of toil and hardship. "In the sweat of your face you will eat your bread until you return to the ground" (Gen. 3:17-19). This story also reports that the woman has a pronouncement of hardship in life, which includes being devoted to her husband and having to suffer pain in childbearing.

This text is definitely a description of punishment and consequences of wrong doing, and it carries the full impact of the term “curse” which is also used in connection with the serpent and the ground. But it is here, as in other places in scripture, that the modern reader is compelled to read with discernment. The Bible is indeed the sacred text of all Christians, and the ultimate source of our beliefs and practices. Yet we disagree on many issues of church doctrine and tradition, much stemming from biblical texts. In recent centuries, many Christians have come to see the Bible as not just “inspired” (the meaning of the term is also complex), but without error and authoritative in every way. Thus, the book of Genesis has been read by many as literal history, written by Moses by the direct revelation of God. In reality it is a collection of stories, first compiled no earlier than 1000 BC, during a time when Israel as a monarchy consolidated its traditions and its religious cult centered in the newly constructed Jerusalem temple.

The stories of their origins as a people include two separate and distinct accounts of creation. The second one focused not on the cosmos, but on more specific institutions and systems, such as marriage, family, religious beliefs, gender roles, and work. These stories were used to account for how things came to be as they are, framed according to the social and religious perspectives of the Hebrews in the midst of numerous other cultures. As descendants of Abraham, their roots involved migration from Mesopotamia to northern Syria, then south through the Levant to Egypt, and then back to settle permanently in a region called Canaan. They had transformed from wandering tent-dwellers to a settled culture of farmers, builders, merchants, and soldiers. Genesis, combined with four other works, were called the Torah (Law), or the Books of Moses, and these answered their questions about who they were, where they came from, and how their religion came about.

Admittedly, the Genesis text about Adam and Eve conveys the message that wrong doing and a broken relationship with God have unpleasant consequences. That was the belief and perspective in the era when these stories were compiled. But the primary inference of both creation stories is that work is a natural part of human existence. Even in Eden, the home of Adam and Eve before their disobedience, the man was assigned the task of “dressing and keeping” the garden. So, even in a paradise, work is essential. And the former creation narrative (Gen. 1), which is clearly distinct from the story of Adam and Eve, portrays male and female as the epitome of God’s creation, and they too have responsibilities in managing the world around them. Richardson writes: “That man should work is as much a part of the regular order of things as that the sun should rise or that lions should hunt.”⁶ Therefore, work should not be viewed as a curse imposed on humanity because of someone’s disobedience to God in the distant past. Rather, it is a natural and essential part of human life.

REFLECTION OF GOD

In addition to these considerations, we must also note that very early in biblical history there was a perceived connection between human labor and the nature of God. The Law of Moses depicts the skill of artisans and craftsmen as gifts bestowed by the Creator, and a variation of the divine wisdom sought by kings and magi (Ex. 35:35; Deut. 8:17-18). In the Book of Proverbs, wisdom is clearly linked with an industrious and creative spirit, as opposed to that of the sluggard (Prov. 6:6-9; 20:4). The writer of Ecclesiastes exonerates the ordinary worker from accusations of materialism, because the simple things of life, such as eating, raising a family, partaking of the fruits of his labor, are truly gifts of God (Eccl. 5:18-19; 3:12-13). Ben Sira, writing in the second century BC, discussed labor and the skill of artisans as necessary in the

scheme of society, without which a city could not be inhabited.⁷ And it is interesting to note that he appears to defend common laborers against harassment from scholars and religious leaders, who typically underrated the value and virtue of the ordinary worker.

This attitude among the elite was prevalent in ancient times, although rabbis in Jesus' day saw manual labor as honorable and compatible with wisdom and knowledge. Many of them acquired a trade for self-support, as did Saul of Tarsus. This famous Jewish teacher had been trained at the feet of Gamaliel, and therefore had the prestige of a Harvard graduate of our day, yet he made tents for a living. Therefore many of Paul's contemporaries understood that a trade skill was as much a gift of God as the critical and inquisitive mind of a scholar.

There is, perhaps, a philosophical basis for this view. The Jews believed, as did the early Christian community, that mankind was created in the "image of God." The precise meaning of that is continually debated, although the most common understanding is that a human possesses an eternal soul, or spirit (these terms are imprecise in the Bible), which comes from God and is part of God's essence. However, there is no biblical text that actually says that, and there is reason to conclude that the concept of a human possessing an "immortal soul" was first proposed by the Greek philosophers. Then it was adopted by Christians several centuries after the New Testament works were written, and since that time it has been more or less assumed.

Moreover, it is common to see humanity as like God in various ways, and it would seem that the typical creative nature of humans is a reflection of the divine. We speak of God's participation in a marriage union, and again in the union of a male and female to create another living being. Of course, the ability to procreate is shared by all living creatures. But human parents produce offspring which are in turn "living souls" understood to be in the likeness and image of God. Humans also are commonly thought to be like God in that they are capable of

loving, caring, and sharing, in a manner more significant and intentional than in animals. They are like God in their ingenuity and initiative. They are like God in their perception, rationality and abstract reason. And besides all that, some would say that there is subtle evidence of divinity in the almost global human tendency to be religious, an intuitive yearning to find God and be one with God. As salmon instinctively return to their spawning waters, and as swallows legendarily return to Capistrano, so humans tend to feel an urge to be reunited with their eternal source, whatever they may conceive that source to be.

We lament that we also have another side to our nature that is not like God, the impulses that are the opposite of what Abraham Lincoln called “the better angels of our nature.” The Apostle Paul described this as a warfare in his flesh between the good he ought to do and evil he does while knowing he should not do (Rom. 7:14-25). The Genesis story of the Fall was written to offer an explanation of that duplicity in man. In modern philosophical parlance, that has to do with theodicy, the enigma of evil in a world created by a good God. The book of Job contains one of the earliest philosophical debates as to why bad things happen to good people, if it is true that God blesses and protects those who obey Him.

Yes, all that is highly complex, the subjects of continual debate, and capable of leaving us with headaches just thinking about it. But the simple point is that within the common religious conceptions of human origins and nature, we find an association of the human activity called “work” with the very nature of God. God is often pictured as the architect of the universe, and the skilled craftsman who designed and framed the cosmos. The heavens and the earth are the workmanship of His hands. And Jesus alluded to this innate likeness between himself and God in such terms such as: “My Father works hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17).

So, the point is that deep within the human spirit there may be an inherent motivation to work and to be productive that reflects the nature of the Being who created us. That nature might be willfully stifled in some, or ignored, hence permitting laziness and dissipation. But it is there, nonetheless. Therefore, the human tendency to work is not merely rooted in social expectation, but rather in the nature of the human spirit. We might say that the inclination toward constructive labor and administration was built into mankind from the very beginning.

And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it' (Gen. 1:26, 28).

While these statements are made about humanity, both male and female, the male in ancient cultures emerged as the leader and principal provider. Patriarchy has been a solid social model in all human societies since the dawn of civilization, and therefore the working man stands out as the essential reflection of God's industrious nature.

It should be noted that these observations are not intended to defend patriarchy, which in our present era has come to be recognized as part of the power-based, and therefore unjust, social models that have been passed down from antiquity. That means that the subordination of women falls in the same category of injustice as slavery, exploitation of the weak and vulnerable, class and political dominance, military conquest, racial discrimination, and the subjugation of nations. All of these at some point have been defended based on biblical texts and models. These systems are persistent, but they do not represent what recent generations have described as self-evident truths and superior standards of justice. Nor is it the purpose of this study to defend such social paradigms.

Rather, the objective is to assist working men to rediscover their value and dignity in the world. Thus generalizing, we conclude that part of the reason men work is because of an inner compulsion to work, build, develop, expand, and manage. And that need or nature finds its cause in the idea that humans, both men and women, are created in the image and likeness of God. Even among primitive hunter-gatherers, there is displayed a drive to enhance, produce, and create, albeit in simple ways. Living in a more advanced and competitive society naturally enflames that basic motivation in both men and women. So, adding intense social influences to the hints of “divine design,” working men have ample reason to conclude that they do not work simply because of the need to pay bills, but because they need to work. It is in their nature and their very souls. We work, because God our heavenly Father works.

In many cultures, some level of work within the family and community continues until death. In recent western societies, most men are engaged in a vocation or career for forty to fifty years, and then they retire. Some might find an explanation for that in the first Genesis creation story, where God rested after six days of fashioning the cosmos. That is the seventh day, which came to be honored by Hebrews as a day of rest in their seven-day week. But we typically do not think of God as abandoning His creation and retreating to a resort in some remote corner of Heaven. Instead, we think of God as continually active in the finite cosmos, and within the lives of mankind, although to what extent and in what manner is yet another point of debate and disagreement. Some suggest that if we do not believe in direct divine providence and occasional divine intervention, we make God an absentee landlord who has essentially abandoned his creation to run itself.

It is interesting that after retirement, many working men suffer certain “withdrawal symptoms” that hasten death. American culture tends to nurture dreams of financial

independence and early retirement in order to spend the remainder of life basking in the sun and living it up. But as often as not, retirees are frustrated, bored and empty, because they are no longer productive. They feel the need to work. Some try to satisfy that need by volunteering at a hospital, church, or a local zoo. Others go back to work, perhaps at a lesser pace and with fewer demands. But it all stems from a deep inexplicable proclivity for doing something meaningful and rewarding, rather than just existing and passing time.

Although I cannot recall the title, I remember a movie staged in the depression years when jobs were scarce. It stuck in my mind, because my father had told me about his own experiences when the government provided jobs through the Works Progress Administration. The main character in that film pleaded with a particular manager for a job, not to prevent starvation but mostly for the sake of his need to do something. He said, "If I don't find some kind of work to do, I think I'll go crazy."

There are today many people who are remnants of primitive cultures, and reside within or near the roar of social and technological advancement. Among these are healthy men who have lapsed into poverty and depression because of the absence of productivity. Modernity has brushed them aside. Alcoholism and moral degeneracy are rife among Native Americans, old and young, who struggle for survival on reservations where land can neither be farmed, ranched or hunted. Their traditional means of livelihood has been destroyed and their value systems replaced. In such an environment, an otherwise honorable man becomes disillusioned and sinks into bitter despair. His spirit withers and his mind degenerates. A man cannot sit idle and do nothing. He must work.

DIVINE ORDINANCE

There are exceptions to every rule, and in every society there are those who do not follow fixed patterns and do not fit the norm. Because work is an institution upon which a society depends for its stability, some means must be established to deal with misfits. If behavior is criminal, society finds methods of dealing with the violator, sometimes harsh. But in the case of derelicts and drop-outs who refuse to work (or perhaps are deemed incapable of work), the western world has felt obliged to carry them by means of social welfare. The ramifications of this approach are complex, and clearly there are no easy solutions. But from the standpoint of the man who works hard for a living, some degree of bitterness and resentment toward the parasitic elements of his society is understandable. While he may take pride in his natural inclination to work and be productive, he does not feel comfortable with a system that seems to exploit his productivity, while condoning the laziness of others.

It is here that we discover another dimension to the basis of work as an institution. Work is a moral obligation and a divine ordinance. Both the Old and New Testaments speak about the perpetual problem of sluggards, loafers, parasites and sloths. The Law of Moses included precepts which required work of all able bodied men and women. The Fourth Commandment prescribes a Sabbath Rest upon the presumption of six days of hard work.

Likewise, New Testament writers stress the obligation to work on the basis of the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Speaking from a thoroughly patriarchal culture, they teach that a man has a duty to provide adequate support for his family: "If any provide not for his own he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8). The Apostle Paul makes it clear that while the Christian community reaches out in compassion to the poor and helpless, it has no

obligation to carry someone who is lazy and will not pull his own weight financially! “If any will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10).

Looking at this from a modern perspective, a working man should not think of his job as merely a means of self-expression, or ego-gratification, but a duty to God, family and country. Spirituality and religious endeavor are not segregated from routine vocational pursuits, but in fact embrace and include them. Therefore, a working man finds a measure of divine praise in his honest toil, first because it prevents his becoming a beggar in the streets, and second because it provides for those who are dependent upon him. Third, his willingness to work and earn a wage contributes to and supports the entire social infrastructure. That is pleasing to God.

Every working man should believe that God is aware of his personal struggles. We believe God to be compassionate and understanding, and His ears are open to the prayers of all. God is, in a limited sense, the working man’s senior partner, his Boss-in-the-sky. The work which he faces grudgingly at times is not a curse, but a great blessing, an opportunity to express the divine nature within him, and a responsibility for which he must give account. Like the servants in Jesus’ famous Parable of the Talents, each one has been given a measure of silver, and when the Master returns he will examine each worker to determine how well he invested, developed, and marketed his assets (Matt. 25:14-30). While God is a compassionate and understanding Boss, he is also demanding and expects everyone to do his best.

The last few lines of George Eliot’s poem *Stradivarius* speak with great precision concerning a working man’s partnership with the Almighty, and herein is a summary of the matter:

I say, not God Himself can make man’s best
 Without best men to help Him. ’Tis God gives skill,
 But not without men’s hands. He could not
 Make Antonio Stradivari’s violins without Antonio.⁸

Chapter Three

BRIDGING THE GAP

As a young minister I somehow imagined that I had all the answers. And maybe most ministers start off like that. We stride into the heat of battle with more courage and confidence than common sense. And how quickly we tumble from our sacred pedestal when we discover the challenges that are faced by our congregants on a daily basis, and our textbook answers and canned sermons sadly miss the mark. Our best aimed homilies are sometimes like arrows shot into stone walls. Someone once said that Samson killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, and thousands of church-goers have been misled, offended, or put to sleep with essentially the same weapon. The issues of real life are often much tougher than the straw-men that get whacked down with the sword of the spirit in a seminary classroom or a church pulpit.

I had my “rude awakening” during an encounter with a church member whom I labeled “Big Bad John.” He came to church only occasionally, and on one such Sunday he approached me and said he’d like to talk if I was willing to come to his house. I told him I was happy to do that. When I arrived, his wife Martha greeted me at the door. She was a gracious Christian lady whom I had already credited with the patience of Job and the faith of the Virgin Mary. Her friends at church told me she had suffered her husband’s foul-mouth and ill-temper for thirty years. So she was truly a saint, and in the eyes of some he was the devil-incarnate. She escorted me through the house to the den, and with a smile and a beckoning motion she whispered “go on in, he’s expecting you.”

There he sat, “Big Bad John,” tilted back in his recliner watching TV and cleaning his fingernails with an Old Timer pocket knife. He greeted me with “Hey, whacha say, preacher?!” He didn’t get up, but he invited me to sit down with a sweeping motion of his knife in the direction of the sofa. So, I scooted a stack of newspapers out of the way and eased down, pensively. He was engrossed in an interview with Tom Landry about coaching strategy, now that the Cowboys had made the play-offs as a wild card. I did not absorb much of the interview. I was trying to anticipate what would come next, expecting a tedious evening filled with hard luck tales about clawing his way up from the bottom. So, while I waited, I let my eyes drift around the room to pick up what I might learn about him. It was truly a “man cave” with an exquisite gun case in the corner, an elk mount over the hearth (I lost count of the points at ten), and a wood and leather bar at the other end of the den, reflected in a panel of mirror tiles on the wall. For the first time I noticed a Doberman Pincer lying at the end of the bar. He remained quiet, but eyed me suspiciously while resting his muzzle on John’s work boots.

When the Landry interview was over, John reached across to the side table and switched off the television with a lazy push of the remote button. Then with a long sigh, he folded his hands behind his neck. Looking broodingly toward the ceiling, he began his story. The essence of it was something like this:

Now, Preacher, I’ve visited your church a few times, and I watch some of the television ministers now and then. And for the life of me, I really don’t think you guys know what it’s like out there in the real world. You talk about how a believer needs to turn his back on sin, when all you know about sin is what you read in the papers. You have a list of sins in the Bible, but you really don’t understand what the rest of us bastards face out there on the job every day, and the kind of bull shit we have to wade through just to make a living. I have men working for me that don’t give a damn about the Golden Rule or going the extra mile, or any of those “holier than thou” ideas you preach about. Those men live and work on the ragged edge. One stupid son-of-a-bitch nearly killed a whole crew the other day just because he didn’t pay attention to what I told him. So I had to jerk him down off a track loader and whip his ass in front of everybody. How else can I make it clear? Should I talk like Jesus? “It’s alright, my son. Go and be stupid no more.”

From there John complained about crooked business practices, abuse of privileges by employees, federal taxes and workers' compensation, and on and on. Then he shifted to his memories of Korea, and he dragged me through some of the atrocities he witnessed while on two tours of duty with the Army Corps of Engineers. He raised some philosophical questions, like the origin of evil in a world created by a benevolent and good God, and he made what I considered to be some rather ingenious observations for a guy who had never read Tillich, Niebuhr, or Kierkegaard. Then he concluded:

I know you can't give a quick snappy answer to all this. I don't expect you to. But what I'm trying to say is that church just doesn't seem to connect with the problems of real life. You always use big words that nobody understands, and you tell us that God cares about His people and hears every prayer. But we still have the same old crap to deal with come Monday morning. God may be reaching down in love, but I'll be damned if I can see it anywhere. There seems to be a wall between heaven and the job site, between God and the working man, and I can't see how going to church on Sundays will make me and God old buddies.

That evening with Big Bad John was an eye-opener, and from that time forward I had a deeper respect for the challenge it must be for any working man to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. The gap between things of God and the lives of many men was greater than I had realized.

THE ORIGIN OF RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY

Religion has always been a tool of control and exploitation, part of the power-down structure of most social systems in the past. In the New Testament we have ample evidence of that in the priests and Pharisees who found a way to be rid of Jesus by manipulating the people and the Roman authorities. In many ancient cultures the illusion of magic and contact with spirits gave shamans both power and prestige. In Acts 13 attention is given to a Jewish prophet and sorcerer named Elymas bar-Yeshua, whose sphere of influence was threatened by the

ministry of Paul and Barnabas. Something similar involves the sons of Sceva in Acts 19 who went around the country driving out evil spirits, and when they learned about Jesus, the Lord and Messiah preached by Paul, they tried to use his name to enhance their own market. So, from antiquity, a combination of fear, taboos, and various types of incantation have served as implements of power in the social hierarchy, especially where holy men worked in close relationship to kings.

We would like to think that Christianity is above all that, but very early in the history of the church there developed a disparity between leaders and common people, driven by the principle of power and control. Such was resisted in the first century church. The Apostle Paul, in fact, despite his claim of apostolic authority, maintained a familial relationship with Christians wherever he had preached. Greetings in one of his letters indicate closeness to his converts which he compared to that of a nursemaid, or a mother caring for her children (I Thess. 1:7). In various New Testament texts there is mention of church leadership roles, including teachers, elders, deacons, and prophets, all chosen from among the people. With those roles came the potential for power abuse. Jesus warned the earliest disciples against the desire for power and authority over others. "It may be that way among the nations," Jesus taught, "but do not allow it to be so among you" (Mark 10:43). Later, similar warnings came from various New Testament writers as well (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 1 Pet. 5:3).

Unfortunately, the commonality which was a hallmark in the early church gave way to a special priesthood with authority beyond teaching and shepherding. Over time the concept of sacraments developed, the administration of which was strictly limited to priests, each acting as the vicar of God in the local church. Sacraments include baptism, communion, marriage, and of special significance the absolution of sin. From this power-based trend, there developed the

distinction between clergy (religious officials formally trained and ordained) and the laity (the ordinary people). In many churches, the apparent gap between God and ordinary people is maintained by the distinction between clergy and laity.

LOSS OF RESPECT

It should come as no surprise that many people who were raised in a church-going environment have come to think that church is a rather dull and meaningless exercise with virtually no relevance to their daily lives, particularly the work place. Some say they quit trying to read the Bible because there are too many “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt nots,” too many “begats,” too many references to God’s wrath against evil, followed by stories of adultery, incest, and murder committed by the people of God, and too little that directly relates to their own lives. It seems that the Bible and the common people are two continents, continually drifting farther apart.

Along with these shifts, the level of respect commanded by church ministers has diminished somewhat also. There is a perception among many that church ministers are lazy loafers who live off the donations of others and spend comparatively little time working. A truck driver teased his pastor about sleeping until nine in the morning and doing very little all week long, other than a couple of hospital visits and writing a sermon. He said “Pastor, you get a pretty good salary for one day’s work.” In seminary, one of my professors said flatly to a class, which consisted of prospective ministers from several denominations, “The ministry is one of the few professions where you can do as much or as little as you choose, and still keep a job.” It is possible that many ministers work harder at creating the illusion of hard work than they might if they actually worked hard. W. H. Elliott, writing in the 1930s, recounts a conversation with a

housepainter who considered the clergy to be parasites, sucking blood from the ignorant and gullible and offering no service in the world truly worthy of respect. Elliott defended his calling as kindly as possible with the reply, “Even parsons must live.” His critic answered “I see no need.”⁹

Various surveys conducted in the United States and abroad reveal that public opinion of the clergy is far from complimentary. While male ministers are ranked high for persuasiveness and influence on social trends, they are at the same time ranked very low, along with hairdressers and male models, in terms of masculinity and authoritative leadership. This indicates that many people think of male ministers as effeminate weaklings with little aptitude in such fields as sports, mechanics, and construction. And because the majority of Christians still cling to patriarchy as a model for gender roles and status, many view female ministers as “butch feminists” who overstep their proper bounds.

An additional problem is that over the past several years religious leaders have suffered a severe loss of credibility due to scandals. Television and the film industry have contributed to this trend by portraying priests and church ministers as pious and hypocritical bigots, given to lust, greed, and gluttony. Just as often they are portrayed as raving lunatics, driven by the delusion of divine calling, and seeing themselves as the agents of judgment upon a wicked society. In the few cases where clergymen appear both moral and rational, they are also simple-minded and a century behind times.

While none of these images accurately characterize ministers as a whole, they represent an unfortunate perception fed by the failings of a few. God-hucksters and door-to-door peddlers of religious propaganda have left a bad taste in the mouths of millions, and the negative publicity has erected barriers against the whole concept of Christian evangelism. Added to that is the

constant exposure of religious charlatans and fake miracle workers who have become wealthy by exploiting the weak, poor, and gullible, using the illusions of special anointing, Holy Spirit baptism, tongue speaking, and miraculous healing as symbols of connection with God.

The blame cannot be laid exclusively on the shoulders of the clergy. Like a democracy, so the church must be constantly reminded that leadership is properly “of the people, by the people and for the people.” Nor can we ignore the unfortunate willingness on the part of some church people to be dominated and exploited. I once challenged a faith healer after watching him perform three nights in a row. I had recognized several individuals who came back repeatedly to be cured of the same maladies. And I had learned something of his techniques in books about hypnosis and the power of suggestion. So, I asked how he justified taking contributions from people based on healings that were not genuine. He said: “If God did not want them sheared, He would not have made them sheep.”

The same is true of many television ministers, whose tools of the trade include the manipulation of biblical texts, counterfeit spirituality, mushy sentimentalism, and outrageous anecdotes about God’s rewards for those who donate generously. Likewise, cults that prey on the instability and impressionability of youth are further examples of the exploitation of religion for personal power and wealth, and contribute to the loss of credibility of religion in general. Such things would not happen if “the people” refused to allow it.

We also have to note that many working men feel that they are conned into giving money to what is called “the Lord’s work,” when in reality the bulk of their “tithes and offerings” cover salaries of church staff, and also property payments, utilities and maintenance. Very little of the enormous sums donated annually by church members actually goes toward true missions or local benevolence.

All this is said to explain why the concept of “going to church” has become rather negative in the eyes of many. I recall a cartoon depicting a church assembly in which the minister was in a towering pulpit, so far above the congregation that his facial features were scarcely discernable. The artist made it clear that he was preaching vigorously, but no one could hear. The obvious point was that people have trouble relating to church. Ministers, because they have been elevated to a high and distant station above the common man, become so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good.

The concept portrayed by various New Testament spokesmen is that the church is the body of Christ, the people. No matter where they gather, whether two thousand or only two, the people are the church. However, over time the concept of church has shifted to a physical building where people gather on sacred occasions for sacred purposes. Churches, in other words, have become much the equivalent of ancient temples, or more specifically the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. It was a place where the people believed the Spirit of God descended to meet with them, to receive their offerings, by the ministrations of the priests. Likewise, today the church is not defined as “the people,” but a physical structure, a holy shrine, with an altar, a steeple, and iconography that symbolize the various aspects of their religious tradition. The concept of serving God has thus shifted from the sacrifice of one’s being in daily conduct to rituals and symbols on a special occasion and at a special place. Church ministers and leaders have taken on the role of the priest, as in ancient cults, each becoming a mediator between God and the people, and holding sacred powers not available to the common man.

Truth is often difficult to face, and people sometimes prefer fables, or soothing lies, like the wicked queen and her mirror on the wall. The easiest product to sell is something that people already want and have their minds made up to have. Thus, in religion it is easy to gain a

following when you preach what people want to hear. The same principle works well in politics. So, in conjunction with these issues there is another tendency among common people that contributes to the gap between themselves and God. We might call it sacerdotal laziness. This has to do with a tendency to delegate religious duties, whether prayers, sacrifices, and holy rituals, to a small group who do what they do before the gods on behalf of the people. Thus, the people can live their own lives, making a living, raising families, eating, drinking, and enjoying themselves, while the sacred servants represent their needs to the gods on their behalf. The religious practices in ancient cultures, such as Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, all suggest that this arrangement worked well for everyone.

There appears to be an element of this mentality among the ancient Hebrews as well. In Exodus 19-20, Moses prepares the people to meet Yahweh God and hear his commands. But the mountain is covered with thick smoke and the earth quakes, and when God speaks the people retreat in fear. They tell Moses “you go up and meet with God and then come down and tell us what He says, but we don’t want to go near lest we die.” So this was an official relegation of leadership to someone who would be mediator between themselves and God. Subsequently, instructions were received for the construction of a tabernacle, as well as a special priesthood to perform a variety of rituals on behalf of the people. Added to that was a host of dietary and cleansing rules to maintain purity before the Lord God. And should anyone be defiled by contacting a corpse, or eating with unwashed hands, the priesthood was available to perform cleansing rites.

This elaborate cult was still being practiced when Jesus was born. Eight days after his birth Jesus was circumcised, then Joseph and Mary took him to the Temple in Jerusalem, where purification rites were conducted for the baby and the mother (Luke 2:21-22). Thus, ancient

Judaism followed a religion much like those of surrounding cultures, with a temple, offerings and rituals, and a priesthood who served on behalf of the people.

This is not the practice of early Christians. The earliest records indicate that every believer serves God as a priest, in the temple of his own body, in which the Spirit of God dwells (I Cor. 3:16; I Pet. 2:9, Rom. 12:1). The apostles taught that Jesus Christ is the one and only High Priest, opening a channel of direct and personal communication with God for every believer, who can approach God boldly with his or her own needs (Heb. 4:16). The idea of a special priesthood or clergy class representing the people in any sort of mediatorial or vicarious way is a later development, and a reversion to the forms and traditions in ancient cults.

THE WIDENING GAP

The rise of asceticism in the early church enhanced the distinction between clergy and laity.¹⁰ At first the church rejected the teachings of the Gnostics and Marcionites, who urged escape from the present world into a life of privation and abasement. But a second monastic movement arose in the fourth century, and it was embraced by the church as a source of special service as well as providing an icon of total dedication. With time, the monastic life came to be considered elevated and superior to that of ordinary working men. The garb typical of medieval monks was retained into later centuries and became a symbol of the clergy. Between 1000 AD and the Council of Trent in 1545 AD, a number of practices were fixed as church tradition, such as the cup in Holy Communion being withdrawn from the laity, and celibacy required for the priesthood (1079 AD). In 1229 AD, the Bible actually appeared on the papal index of books forbidden to lay Christians. At that time, possession of a complete Bible was not as common as it would quickly become after Gutenberg's printing press, and in 1455 AD copies of the Bible

were printed, bound, and made available for purchase. Still, it was tragic that reading and pondering biblical texts was withheld from common people. During all these centuries, Christianity was developing into a highly complex religious tradition, and the central church administration was in control of great wealth and political power. Various rules and doctrines were a mechanism of controlling people, even the offer of indulgences and forgiveness for sin in return for financial gifts to the church. Under Constantine in the fourth century, the church and state, the Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church, were amalgamated into one body. The common man was thus ruled by the church, rather than being embraced by and ministered to by the church, of which he was a valued member.

Of course, still another factor that contributed to a gap between church and laity was the development of highly complex theological terminology, mostly rooted in Latin and Greek. This was countered to some degree by the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. The boldness of Martin Luther's Ninety-Five Theses challenged the church's treatment of the poor. Reformers also took the Bible away from church control and gave it to the common Christian. What has come to be called the Protestant Work Ethic opened the door for the later Industrial Revolution and western capitalism. But what might have been gained was thwarted to a degree by German rationalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the Bible became the target of higher criticism and academic scholasticism. Once again, the ordinary working man was left out in the cold, with little grasp of the complex issues and concepts under debate.

The American frontier was a fertile environment for fresh thinking and religious practice, which led to the various phases of what is called the Great Spiritual Awakening. But this was both positive and negative for the common man. It reconnected ordinary people with the Bible and Christian faith, and sparked a vigorous spirit of evangelism that resulted in the establishment

of thousands of new churches, from Pennsylvania and Kentucky southward and westward. But it also created diversity in doctrine, and numerous new church denominations, such as the Christian Church and churches of Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons), various Pentecostal groups, Christian Science, the Seventh Day Adventists, and eventually the Jehovah's Witnesses (Watchtower Society). Their disagreement and loss of association with each other affected many common people negatively, giving them reason not to believe at all.

PLAIN FOLKS FAITH

There can be no doubt that Jesus intended for his message of Good News to go out to everyone, the common people in particular. When he announced his ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth, he chose words that described the needs of the common masses rather than the wealthy and religious elite.

The New Testament was not written in complicated theological language, but in koine Greek, which was the common language of the whole Mediterranean region. It has been described as the language of the foot soldiers. And the terminology used by Paul, Luke, and other writers was almost totally that which was already in use and understood by all. The word for "church" was the common Greek term for "assembly," or "gathering," and the word translated "redemption" was a common term for buying back a possession that had been taken away to cover a debt. The word "disciple" referred to a learner or follower. Few New Testament words were complicated, nor were the concepts difficult to grasp. Much was derived from or adapted from the Hebrew Bible, with some significant new applications. It was not the intention of Jesus, nor that of his followers, to teach what only scholars and linguists could grasp. The

entire New Testament is a message of hope, love, and grace, with practical lessons about how to live in a complex and often harsh world.

Of course, today biblical scholars and clerics debate the meaning and application of many biblical texts. And while arguments rage over church doctrine, many ordinary working men sit at home with a beer and a TV guide, disgusted with Christianity and religion as a whole. Or maybe they go to church, but they sit with teeth gritted at some of the things said, and they go home empty, feeling that God is a million miles away.

Paul assured his listeners in Athens that all people have more in common than we imagine, and God welcomes us all. He said that God has made of one blood all nations of men, that they should seek the Lord, to perhaps touch and find Him, although indeed He is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:26-27).

As ancient prophets cried “peace, peace!” when there was no peace, so Christians today sing “We are one in the spirit, we are one in the Lord,” when in fact there is no unity. Christianity is a large religious system fragmented into hundreds of incompatible pieces. And like Humpty Dumpty, there is no putting them together again. The differences are too great. No one can believe in free choice and predestination at the same time. No one can believe in eternal damnation for the wicked and universal salvation at the same time. No one can believe in the equality of women and subordination of women at the same time. No one can believe that God welcomes all, and at the same time believe that certain people must be shunned and excluded from church fellowship because of prior offenses, marital status, sexual orientation, or political convictions.

God has not abandoned the working man, despite the evidence that many issues, beliefs, and structures of human origin have caused a roadblock. We have every reason to think that God

is especially compassionate and empathetic for the plight of the working man, and longs for a reunion. Leslie Parrot, speaking of the 1960s and 70s in America, said that our age has seen the common people break forth from the wallpaper of their subcultures, and into equality with the elite, the scholastic and the pious.¹¹ If that was true then, it is a continuing trend. The western world has experienced even greater degrees of independence and freedom to choose one's own way, beliefs, objectives, and mode of life. Therefore, the working man must stop thinking of himself as common, stupid, sinful, and unspiritual. He has everything he needs to be all he chooses to be. He is part of a social revolution that has literally set him free to reach for the stars.

So, for any man who feels unworthy, it is time to pull yourself up by the boot straps and walk tall like the man God created you to be. The gap between you and God may seem real, caused by many factors, but it's only an illusion. You are free to approach God's throne of grace with boldness. You are welcome there. God is already reaching out to you.

Chapter Four

TAKING GOD TO WORK

Lawrence Jacks, writing in the 1920s, described the irony of little church-centered towns giving way to modern industrialism. As he scanned the rooftops, the church steeples seemed so few amidst thousands of smoking chimneys, some small atop private dwellings and others towering above factory roofs. Smoke from both homes and industries had settled on the church steeples, and they appeared as silent lifeless monuments to the ritual of a bygone era, swallowed by the machinery of progress. In reality, it was neither industrialism nor enlightenment that threatened Christianity at that time, but traditionalism.

Perhaps the reformers of the sixteenth century observed a similar contrast between the pomp and ceremony characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church and the routine lives of ordinary men and women. Cathedrals and chapels were seen as bastilles of tradition, holy places where God and His specially appointed clergy resided. But all the mysteries of salvation were locked up behind doors, along with physical treasures possessed by the church, and there they were kept out of reach, guarded by priests and angels. Ordinary people had little part in it, except to attend confession and Mass, and obtain the blessing of a priest, or bishop, on special days. But behind those walls, secure from the pollutions of the world, cloistered priests perpetuated ancient ritual, almost oblivious to the changes in society or the needs of their parishioners.

Martin Luther observed that the dignity of day-to-day work in the dirt and grime was actually minimized and scorned by Catholic clergy. He reacted to this, contending that not only is God served and honored by priestly devotion, but also by the occupations and routine chores of ordinary people. In fact, he believed that the Gospel calls men and women out of the world,

not to monastic seclusion but to devoted and responsible service in daily life, praising and honoring God through the medium of secular work. John Calvin picked up Luther's banner and added his own convictions, insisting that work itself brings glory to God apart from any good a man may do through his trade or craft.

As happened with the bulk of Calvin's doctrine, his followers further developed and modified his views on work, producing what came to be called the Protestant Work Ethic. Stated simply, this is the belief that those whom God has predetermined for salvation are then empowered by the Holy Spirit to do God's will, and the election of God is evidenced by personal material prosperity. This means that God's elect people are led by the Holy Spirit to participate in the affairs of the world, and by divine prompting will become successful in business, even over-shadowing their non-believing competitors, and thereby bring glory to God.¹²

The Puritans were a good example of this ethic put to practice. Both in the old country and in colonial America they proved to be very capable businessmen.¹³ Although disputed by some, it is evident that this pattern of thinking had a great deal to do with shaping the Industrial Revolution, especially in checking some of the abuses of a developing free-enterprise system. And while the idea might sound naïve to some, there are many Christians today whose faith rests heavily on their belief that God has blessed them most when they have followed Him the closest.

Perhaps the most recent stage of the Protestant Work Ethic is the conviction on the part of individuals that God actually calls them into a particular field of work or employment, therein to serve Him. Luther and Calvin used the Latin term *vocatio*, which means "to call," with reference to one's occupation as a calling directly from God. Today's English word "vocation" is derived from that usage, and is therefore linked by word etymology to the Protestant Work Ethic, although common usage today refers simply to one's job. But the New Testament never uses the

Greek term *klesis* (a calling) in the sense of a divine call into a secular profession or occupation. It is used for prophets and apostles being called of God to minister, and of the individual's call to salvation by means of the Gospel (2 Thess. 2: 14). It also can be understood in a slightly broader sense as the calling of a Christian to a nobler, all-encompassing purpose in life in Jesus Christ. This means being called to represent Christ as an ambassador in a foreign land, like a light shining in a world of darkness. But assuredly, while Paul was called to be an apostle (Rom. 1:1), he never claims to have been called to be a tent-maker. We have no biblical basis for believing that God ever calls someone into a secular field, nor that He assures someone of prosperity in return for faithful discipleship. Such was included in God's covenant with Israel upon entering Canaan (Deut. 34), but is not echoed by Jesus or other New Testament spokesmen. Our means of earning a living are a matter of choice. Our calling (vocation) is the manner in which we conduct ourselves while we do that.

The Protestant Work Ethic proved faulty in that it allowed greed and materialism to be condoned, glossed over, and in fact redefined as virtue. It allowed financial success to be interpreted as spiritual maturity, in direct conflict with the New Testament teaching against showing preference to the wealthy (Jam. 2). Consequently, in many early Calvinistic churches wealthy men were appointed to positions of leadership and honor, assuming their spirituality and godliness, while the poor were rejected and deemed spiritually weak, based on their impoverished state.

Despite this unfortunate development, the roots of the Protestant Work Ethic in Luther's mind were very sound. It is true that man's religion is evidenced by his routine life, and especially in his occupation. Other than his home life, a man's work receives the bulk of his time and energy. His job is so much a part of himself that he is customarily identified by what he does

for a living. He does not merely do banking— he IS a banker. He IS a lawyer, a mechanic, a plumber, a salesman, a teacher. This is not really valid, but it is the common perception.

Modern technology has gradually created more flexibility in this system, so that someone might change jobs or careers several times in his life, perhaps even without much training. But no more than a century ago, the average man did the same thing all his life and perhaps carried on a family tradition in a particular trade. Names such as Smith, Farmer, Baker, Butler and Mills are remnants of days when a man wore the name of his occupation.

It stands to reason, then, that a man's true colors and nature will be displayed while he is on the job. Here he faces certain pressure, while his patience, temperament, and moral fiber are put to the test in a variety of ways, almost on a daily basis. Jesus said: "the works that I do in my father's name, they bear witness of me" (John 10:25). To watch a Christian on the job is to see the truest testimony of his religious beliefs. True religion is not a pattern of rituals practiced mechanically on certain specified occasions. But rather, religion must be defined in terms of values, attitudes, and actions of life. The New Testament writer James rebuked his readers for making plans to go to a city to buy, sell and make a profit, while neglecting to include God in their business dealings (Jam. 4:13).

There is a story from the Victorian Era about Lord Palmerston, who after sitting through a Sunday sermon on the concept of "every day religion" commented: "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade the sphere of private life." This is humorous, but very telling. Man's persistent tendency to compartmentalize religion and divorce its doctrines and precepts from routine life is one of the factors that rob religion of its meaning. Work must be intimately bound up with a man's religious beliefs. Otherwise his religion is replaced by whatever occupies a position of prime importance in his life, perhaps even his job itself. One

surgeon, for example, said: “If you want to see my religion, come and watch me operate.” The New Testament, as a whole, presents the idea that true religion, carried out by a spiritually mature individual, flows through his entire being and is displayed in every facet of his life. The writer James (1:27) summarizes this as “doing good and being good.”

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Much of the New Testament is directed toward exemplary living, suggesting that God’s people are responsible for representing their faith to the world by their own conduct. Jesus stressed this idea in what is called the Sermon on the Mount:

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

Another text suggests that God’s people are obliged to live above the standards of the world, to the end that others might be led closer to God through their example:

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (1 Pet. 2:12).

Where better can such works be demonstrated than on the job? Carl Henry words it vividly:

Every time the Christian worker leaves his home for work, he moves from the private social sphere of the family to the public sphere of labor and economics. Through the Christian on the job the world meets the church. But it meets far more; it meets the Divine Worker. To what extent the worker understands the Biblical doctrine of vocation will be demonstrated by his work-attitude and work-accomplishment, by how he answers the question: “What difference does Christianity make in my job?” Is his work simply a means of subsistence, self-discipline, and character development, or is it provision of God, to be fulfilled as an expression of worship by dedicating God-given talents to the Lord’s service and to mankind. Is his labor only a means of developing bodily and mental powers by yielding to the orderly necessities of work, or is it an investment of personality in response to God’s ordinance and calling? ¹⁴

This conviction is embraced in Paul's charge "walk worthy of your calling" (Eph. 4:1). The Christian is called of God to a life of godliness and purity, displayed courageously but humbly before the eyes of skeptics and unbelievers.

Therefore, a Christian man should think of his job as a personalized vehicle for carrying out his true calling as a disciple of Christ. Putting God first in all things might mean selecting a job that affords the greatest opportunity to serve and influence others for good. And spiritual priorities might lead a man away from certain occupations which by their nature contradict his spiritual beliefs. Early Christians, for example, discovered that certain trades associated with sorcery and idol worship were incompatible with the Christian message (Acts 19:19-27). Of course, some may feel that this takes religion too far. Yet there is no more rewarding occupation than one in which a man can accomplish good and express his faith, simply by doing his job well. America could well benefit from the effort of a few thousand more doctors, lawyers, bankers, store clerks, technicians, and factory workers whose top priority is to represent their faith through their jobs. This does not smack of fanaticism. If practiced humbly, true religion is not perceived by others as overbearing or annoying. Instead, such people are constantly called upon to counsel, console, advise and instruct those around them whose own choices and life styles have brought them pain and misery.

EXPRESSION OF WORSHIP

A man once dreamed that he walked through the streets of a town on Sunday morning, and was disturbed at the fact that there seemed to be no sound. He saw church bells swinging back and forth in bell towers, but he heard no ringing. He looked into a church building and saw the congregation singing in unison, while an organist played on a huge pipe organ, but there was

no music. He saw a minister in the pulpit, moving his mouth and waving his arms, but he heard no sermon. Then through the silence came the voice of a little girl singing “Jesus loves me this I know.” He realized that he was hearing in his dream just what God might hear when people go through religious exercise with no sincerity, limiting their thoughts, prayers and devotions to a concentrated hour of worship one day a week.

Such was the picture presented of Israel’s worship by the prophet Amos, saying that God is nauseated by empty ritual and hypocritical worship.

I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5:21-24).

New Testament Christianity certainly includes occasions of devotion and group meditation. The early church assembled regularly to remember the death of Jesus through the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper, or Communion, 1 Cor. 11:23-24; Acts 20:7). But we have no clear record in the New Testament of what else they may have done in those gatherings, although it is commonly assumed that they sang, prayed, read scripture, as was done in synagogues, and heard sermons. There is no place in the New Testament that uses the term “worship” for these gatherings, or in connection with these activities. That connection developed later. Nonetheless, the Christian assembly was considered important, and they were encouraged not to neglect it (Heb. 10:25).

Today, numerous rituals and activities are common in what is defined as “Christian Sunday worship.” Many churches make use of candles, incense, banners, and other symbols of their beliefs that have to be explained to guests or new members. And, today many churches are shifting to praise music, with high powered band performances that closely resemble a “rock show.” Some ministers have denounced this trend as inappropriate and worldly. It is interesting

that some seminary professors of Christian worship don't even include music in their summary of essentials. But without a doubt, music has taken center stage in many churches today.

A couple of years ago I received a phone call from a woman named Sharon, who needed a minister to officiate at her wedding. She had been given my name by one of my congregants, who happened to be Sharon's co-worker. I told her I was happy to help, and in conversation I asked whether she had a church home. She said she did, and told me the name of the church. It was a large evangelical church, well known in the area. I asked why she did not prefer the assistance of one of the numerous ministers at that church. She said she had asked, but because of her former divorce they were not prepared to be involved in her remarriage. I then asked why she would attend a church that would not support her in the significant moments of her life. She said casually: "We like the band."

It is commonly recognized that humans tend to ritualize their religious beliefs. Not only that, but it seems that we habitually compartmentalize what we consider to be worship. And over the centuries, Christians as a whole have defined their worship of God as a short agenda of activities performed in the course of an hour on Sunday morning. It begins with an Invocation, and ends with a Benediction, with all kinds of "worship stuff" in between — songs, prayers, meditation, communion, offering, and message. It's like a worship sandwich, enjoyed by God who watches from above, or maybe left on the altar for God to enjoy at His convenience. Then, it is done with and out of the way for the rest of the week.

In certain ways, this is the sort of worship that was prevalent in ancient Judaism and which Jesus rejected. The Jewish mind was locked in on specific times and places which secured divine approval. As long as they had the temple, the Holy Mount Zion, the city of David, the Law of Moses, the priesthood, the feast days, the Sabbath, all conveniently packaged, they felt

confident and at ease. But Jesus told the woman of Sychar that the time was coming when true worshippers would neither worship on Zion nor Gerizim, but would worship God in “spirit and truth” (John 4:23). A major force behind the New Covenant was that God would break out of the traditional locality concepts, typical of ancient religions, into a broader concept of presence within individuals. This is clear in Hebrews 8:10, where the writer makes application of Zachariah’s prophecy of the New Age in which God would put his laws into the human heart and mind, no longer to be associated with a holy article such as tables of stone, ark of the covenant, and temple. Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God does not dwell in temples made with human hands (Acts 17:24).

Romans 12:1 is one of the most significant texts in the New Testament, yet it is commonly glossed over because the message is challenging. Paul writes: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” This very text suggests that the worship of which God is worthy must be the offering of one’s life in commitment to His service. And this clearly harmonizes with the idea of believers as a royal priesthood, busy daily offering up spiritual sacrifices in the true spiritual house which they comprise. The very body of a Christian is the temple of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:19) and collectively believers are the temple where God resides and where he is worshipped (1 Cor. 3:16-17). Therefore, it should be concluded that the Christian’s whole life is worship to God. He is a living, breathing, walking temple through whom glory is brought to God by his conduct in the world. “Therefore, whatever you do in the word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17). This does not preclude the duty to assemble with believers, but it elevates one’s duty in other areas of life.

John E. Mitchell began at age nineteen as an apprentice in a machine shop of a large firm, and then progressed to an office worker, vice-president, president, and ultimately CEO. In a book entitled *The Christian in Business* he presents a very balanced perception of the working man's life at just about every level, and advocates strongly that one should approach his livelihood as if God is intimately concerned for his feelings, pressures and behavior on the job. This attitude, he says:

. . . transforms that career into a thing of dignity, high purpose, satisfaction and excitement. A Christian's work should be far more than a livelihood; it is an opportunity to honor God by its performance. By his attitude toward his work, by the spirit in which he performs it, a Christian, whether he be employer or employee, should be a good advertisement, not so much for himself as for the Master.¹⁵

Chapter Five

THE PRICE OF SUCCESS

Christianity today might be described as a genius who sees himself as vastly superior to others, yet is in reality hopelessly neurotic and suicidal. Many Christians are embarrassingly like the double-minded man described in James 2. He is spiritually bipolar, with one foot in the kingdom of God and one in the world, and in a constant struggle with his own duplicity. Jesus said that it is impossible for anyone to serve two masters (Luke 16:3).

One of the most critical issues facing a working man is ethics, or more simply the standards by which he determines right and wrong. The Apostle Paul taught that a godly man should profess an honest and upright occupation (Titus 3:8), and he should strive to live honorably in the sight of all men (Rom. 12:17). But in the highly competitive world of business, the term “honesty” is kicked around like an old tin can, and reshaped to suit both individual and collective conscience. Dudley Lynch describes how many see it:

The world of business is a vicious jungle where people who wear white hats get eaten, lambs get fleeced, and the tortoise outruns the hare only if he can psyche him out or intimidate him on the back stretch. If such a brazen attitude bothers you, maybe you should try Mars or the ministry. The only realistic choice in the world is between being the intimidator of the intimidatee; the bully or the bullied.¹⁶

A young accountant related to me how his employer explained “the facts of life” in business. Having complimented him for his talents and potential, he proceeded to criticize his conservative standards of honesty. “You have to learn to work smart and beat the system if you want to climb the corporate ladder. You have to do things you don’t admit at church. That’s the price of success.” Of course the young man in question suffered a certain degree of disappointment and

disillusionment upon learning how his superiors approached the issue of business ethics. But he vowed within himself to hold to his integrity and self-respect, even at the cost of success.

While most of us would prefer believing in the basic goodness in people, and that there are more honest men in business than dishonest, it just may be that the good guys are outnumbered. Many young entrepreneurs have a rude awakening when they first venture into the business world, and soon decide they have no choice but to compartmentalize their lives. They put up a wall with religion and personal life on one side, and business matters on the other, with two distinctly different sets of ethical standards. And the challenge is not to allow one to encroach on the other.

Thus, many avowed Christians undergo a personality change like Jeckell and Hyde the instant they leave home for the office. At 7 a.m. they scamper into the city like a horde of aggressive Japanese beetles, to spend the day scratching, gouging and stomping all over each other, all trying to reach the top of the heap. There is something foreboding about a corporate mentality that encourages conducting business with callous brutality, like a robot in a Sci-Fi film, programmed to win at all cost. This is a frustrating scenario for routine life in the most enlightened and advanced age in history. In the words of Alan Richardson:

The beneficent intention of the creator in providing for man the honorable status of a worker has been frustrated by human sin. The whole field of man's work which ought to have been the sphere of his glad cooperation under the law of God for the common good has become the scene of sordid self-seeking, cut throat rivalry and fratricidal quarrelling.¹⁷

With this dilemma in mind, David Burks approaches the topic of ethics as a study for graduate students in business, drawing attention to the extreme disenchantment often felt in the American business scene.¹⁸ It seems that both businessmen and the public are growing increasingly concerned with the kind of tactics that are considered typical in the business world, and

necessary if one expects just to stay in the game, much less win. Burks includes kickbacks, payoffs, fraudulent bank statements, and even illegal payments into overseas accounts as common practices but not approved by everyone. Bluffing has become a very common practice in forcing the hand of either a client or competitor, like bluffing in a serious poker game. And that is the mind-set of many wheeler-dealers. It's just a game. So there is nothing really unethical. You do what is necessary to win. Many athletes approach their field of sports in the same manner— a little offensive holding, a little hair pulling behind the referee's back, maybe even a little pharmaceutical enhancement for an added advantage. It's all in the game. No big deal. And what happens if you get caught? Nothing much. You are sent to the penalty box, or maybe off the field for the duration of the game. Or maybe you are fined a thousand dollars, and after that it's all forgotten and you're back in play. Besides, this kind of conduct is not thought of as wrong, unethical or immoral. It is simply a little too aggressive or overly exuberant, or it is considered unfair play by current rules. The same is true for business. An offender has his hands slapped, and then is warned not to get caught again. But he is encouraged, off the record, to keep up the good work.

It is easy to see how this attitude easily gives way to dishonesty and fraud. False advertising is a monumental problem in business. Video commercials and printed ads are often designed to mislead the consumer, yet to remain under the protective umbrella of technicality and interpretation. Many products are inferior by design, with built in obsolescence factors in order to require replacement within a limited period of time. Fine print disclosures in legal contracts often leave a consumer with no recourse when he discovers he has been cheated. Some areas of dishonesty are simply too subtle to be nailed down in a court of law.

Burks also discusses intimidation as a business tactic, used to overwhelm a competitor in a power play. Women complain of sex discrimination in business, and the extra demands which are incumbent upon them as females. Sometimes promotions depend more on sexual favors than on job skills, intelligence or training.

Admittedly, ethics in general is a highly debatable topic, and ultimately hinges upon the standard by which good and evil are defined and distinguished. The word “ethics” comes from the Greek term meaning “custom” or “practice,” and refers to the standard by which one lives, makes choices, and behaves in critical situations. While we customarily use the term “morality” and “ethics” as distinctly different concepts, the two are closely bound up together and emerge from the basic principles of conduct. This very word is used in 1 Corinthians 15:33 in a famous adage, “evil companionships corrupt good morals (ethics).”

But what is good ethics? What is truly honest and honorable? Since we are told that there is honor even among thieves, it might be impossible for us to use these terms to define a standard of business conduct which would be acceptable for all. In fact, this is the basic problem addressed by the discipline of ethics.

SOCIAL STANDARDS

Norma L. Geisler appeals to the well-known Pueblo incident to illustrate the philosophical difficulties in establishing a standard for critical decisions, and the many opposing approaches which have developed in the field of ethics.¹⁹ In 1968, Commander Lloyd Bucher of the USS Pueblo and twenty-three crew members were captured by the North Koreans and accused of spy operations in their territorial waters. Bucher untruthfully confessed to the charges in order to save the lives and secure the release of his men. Geisler raises the questions that were

inevitably debated by military court concerning the commander's actions. Was his lie, with its vast political implications, morally justified in order to save human lives? This situation might appear too unusual to consider. Yet it is not at all hypothetical. Conflicts of various kinds and degrees occur quite commonly in the daily lives of ordinary people. Working men face them often. But on the basis of this example, various ethical philosophies can be outlined.

- A. **Lying is neither right nor wrong.** This view might be described as antinomianism, in the sense that it acknowledges no ultimate law or standard of ethics or morality. There are no norms. Into this category might be placed the Intuition Ethic of G.E. Moore, which appeals to one's "gut feeling" for a subjective decision as to what is right, and the Approbation Ethic advocated by David Hume, which essentially leaves the responsibility with each individual to do what is right in his own eyes.²⁰ This philosophy prevailed in the days of the Judges of ancient Israel.
- B. **Lying is generally wrong.** This is the Utilitarian Ethic, which advocates actions that produce the greatest good for the greatest number, but there are no universal norms. A more basic phase of this broad ethic is Hedonism, more commonly known as the Playboy Philosophy, which states that an act is right if it provides immediate sensual pleasure, or provides pleasure to the majority concerned.
- C. **Lying is sometimes right.** This philosophy is best known as the Situation ethic, defended in the 1960s by Joseph Fletcher, James Pike and others. This approach seeks to avoid extremes, advocating the right of individuals to determine the rightness of a given act on the basis of the immediate circumstances. But there are no universal norms.
- D. **Lying is always wrong.** This view can be called Absolutism, and while acknowledging a host of circumstances in which decisions must be made, and a variety of values which

may appear to conflict, lying remains wrong in all circumstances and there is no real conflict of norms.

- E. **Lying is never right.** This approach acknowledges many conflicting norms. Herein is Ideal Absolutism, under which a choice from two or more evils or undesirable alternatives may be excusable, provided that the individual did not intentionally create a conflict.
- F. **Lying is sometimes right.** This approach acknowledges that there are higher norms, but sometimes these can be broken. The roots of this ethic, called Hierarchicalism, were in the teachings of Plotinus, a Greek-speaking philosopher of the third century AD.

Other views, which are more specifically related to business and the problems of the working man, are discussed by numerous authors on this subject. Peter Drucker's Organization Ethic, for example, advocates loyalty to the system or in a corporate sense to the organization. Lying becomes ethical if it defends, promotes or protects the interests of the company. Another is the Success Ethic, which holds that in business whatever produces success is acceptable and ethical. The Legal Ethic, popularized by Albert Carr, suggests that whatever is legal is ethical. Under this standard, a "shady" businessman might exploit consumers under the protection of "fine print" in contracts, policies and warranties, and if caught or challenged he might respond that the consumers are the crooks and he is the victim.

Some businessmen are able to operate under such a distorted value system that even illegal maneuvers are justified and made to seem ethical. They may truly see themselves as modern-day Robin Hoods, believing that by cheating the wealthy they are playing a noble role in the cause of social justice. Others do it purely for personal gain, excusing themselves with

platitudes and clichés such as “all is fair in love and war,” or “might makes right,” or “do unto others before they do unto you,” or “that’s just good business.”

While it may not be clear to everyone, the world will continue to be marked by aggression, greed and materialism as long as people have nothing higher than their own interests to serve as ethical standards. At present, the situation looks especially grim simply because the western world is caught up in the value of individual rights and personal opinion, resulting at the destruction of ideals that are essential in binding individuals together as a society. In order for peace to exist in any culture there must be norms and standards common to all. Almost all the above ethical philosophies obliterate the concept of fixed standards, and rob governing agencies of any regulatory function that might be interpreted as infringing on the rights and liberties of the individual. Historians readily acknowledge that such a trend is integrally linked with social disintegration.

ULTIMATE STANDARD

There is little an individual can do to stem the tide of social change or decay. But nations are made up of individuals. And if enough individuals detect and analyze problems in their own sphere of activity, and make changes in their own lives, the entire course of history can be altered for the better. Such a subtle revolution was precisely what Jesus of Nazareth launched by calling disciples to a life of “going the extra mile,” and “loving one’s neighbor.” There is indeed a better way than the approach suggested by the myriad human ethical standards. There is an alternative which could be termed the Christian Ethic, which presupposes and is based upon the acceptance of a higher standard than anything which might emerge from self-interest. The apparently endless struggle of humanity for peaceful co-existence, which is continually

interrupted by social unrest, conflict, and war, leads to the conclusion of one ancient prophet “It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23). We all need what Burks terms “a sky hook,” a power cable which will link us with a higher standard than our own interests. Paul urged his readers to avoid conformity with the world, and to allow their minds to be renewed by the will of God (Rom. 12:2). There must be a standard which is nobler and more reliable than those offered by society. If society becomes one’s ultimate standard for conduct then society becomes its own God. But if a man chooses to serve the true and living God, he then elects to yield personal intuition to a higher authority, regardless of “peer pressure” and the standards of his associates in the business world. Jesus taught his disciples to be “wise as serpents yet harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16). He urged them to seek first the kingdom of God, and let the anxieties of business take care of themselves (Matt. 6:33).

In I Peter 2:12 there is a relevant admonition to persevere in honest conduct, even when surrounded by unethical and unscrupulous business practices among the nations. People who seek to be identified with God are to shine as lights in a dark and crooked world (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15). They are to be different, set apart, not in the sense of being odd, puritanical, ascetic or anti-social, but by choosing a superior standard of ethics and by striving for goals of excellence in both private and public affairs.

In 1981, *Psychology Today* conducted a survey, the results of which were discussed by James Hasset in a later issue.²¹ The purpose was to determine the feelings of the American public on certain ethical questions, and the degree to which people actually practice the standards which they avow. Responses were elicited concerning a wide variety of scenarios, ranging from exceeding the speed limit and pocketing a few cents when undercharged, to padding an expense account, cheating on income tax, lying about the quality of a product, violating marriage vows,

and buying stolen goods. In many cases the situations were worded in the questionnaire so as to complicate the decision by conflict and extenuating circumstances. Care was taken in evaluating the data to assure randomness.

The results were interesting, to say the least. It seems that most people do not generally live by the ethical standards which they consider amenable. But it also appears that most violators suffer feelings of guilt and admit wrong behavior. One fact emerged, however, which is very significant to the present discussion and which is contrary to the earlier opinions of many psychologists. It seems that strong religious convictions do serve to evaluate standards of behavior in situations where ethical decisions have to be made. Hassett says “the more religious, the less likely to bend the rules.” It was further revealed that people in general today feel uneasy and uncertain about many practical issues of life, because of the shifting and indistinct standards offered by society.

Across the nation there are thousands of successful business executives whose Christian priorities are well known in their respective spheres of influence, as pointed out by Parrot.²² I have a number of friends and acquaintances who are splendid examples of uncompromising faith and character, and who would attest that godly ethics in business is an asset to success, rather than a detriment. One is the superintendent of a large school system has achieved a remarkable level of prestige. He is also a college lecturer, holding a doctorate degree in education, and is highly respected in his field. Yet, as valuable as his time may be as a professional, he never misses church or his regular Bible study class, and as a deacon he devotes much time to church visitation and service work.

Another personal friend is an author, professor and professional consultant in the field of business management. But as a Christian he holds frequent seminars adapting his knowledge to

areas related to church leadership and personal spiritual development. Still another, who is an elder in a local church, has developed a small business into a multi-million dollar enterprise in only a few years. His standards of business conduct are impeccable. Still another is an electrical contractor, and on numerous occasions has had the opportunity to win job bids by means he considers to be unfair and unethical. He is not tempted by the fact that all his competitors do it. He refuses, forfeiting contracts in favor of integrity and self-respect. But he is still a good businessman, and is well on his way to wealth – the honest way.

There are no pat answers to serious ethical questions. Every situation is different and must be resolved, or acted upon, by the individual after carefully examining alternatives, legalities and underlying motives. It is easy to suggest reliance on a supreme code of ethics which offers and assures the best for all concerned. But determining that standard remains the challenge. Rules and regulations help. For example, the American Association of Advertising and the Association of National Advertisers have adopted a code which condemns seven practices as untruthful and objectionable in nature, five of which are mentioned here:

1. False statements and misleading exaggerations.
2. Indirect misrepresentation or distortion of details.
3. Price claims that are misleading.
4. Testimonials that do not reflect the true choice of a competent witness.
5. Pseudo-scientific evidence.²³

Even with such guidelines, each specific case requires serious attention and thought. Hopefully it is evident that a godly man would seek the noblest course of action in any situation, based upon an intense desire to do what is right and just. Richardson says, however, that honorable business conduct, to have any nobility about it, must be more than simply carrying out a business

transaction according to set rules; “it must include doing it with a certain delicacy and interior sense of what right really is.”²⁴ Rather than rules, then, it might be better to identify principles that tend to foster greater nobility in decision making. The following principles are interrelated, but combined they clarify what constitutes ideal ethics.

Integrity

Integrity is generally defined as “uprightness of character.” It is a consistency of thought, speech and action, all measured against the highest available standard of conduct. Golightly’s interviews with twelve top executives after the Watergate Scandal revealed that integrity is the principal attribute which enables individuals to reach the top.²⁵ The attitude that “you can only climb the ladder if you’re crooked” is untrue and an unjust characterization of successful business as a whole. For every dishonest executive and crooked politician there are three or four good ones who are what they are because of their noble character. Such men conduct business in such a way that it benefits all concerned, rather than exploiting some in order to benefit others, themselves in particular. “They who deal truly are the delight of God” (Prov. 12:22). Therefore, a man who is seriously interested in developing quality of character, to rise above his peers with unchallenged merit, must begin with integrity.

Fairness

Fairness presupposes a degree of negotiation, whether wage, price, quality, features, number of items, or details of service. It suggests that in every business deal there is some give-and-take, on both sides, so that all parties can walk away satisfied. This is implied in a common deal-closing question “Fair enough?” Sometimes, however, one party walks away unhappy

because the deals does not seem fair. When the ideal is to negotiate win-win agreements, that does not happen if the customer feels like a big loser.

Everyone has had at least one bad experience in purchasing a product that had parts missing, didn't work, or was different from the illustration on the box. And getting a fair settlement seems next to impossible. Often after making two or three trips back to the store, wasting hours of valuable time, and filling out reams of senseless forms, the customer remains dissatisfied and may feel punished for having bought a product there.

Many have had bad experiences in trusting their possessions to someone else to clean or repair. For example, a marathoner takes a track suit to be dry cleaned at a shop that advertised its expert handling of special garments. He is concerned about a number of cloth patches on the jacket, commonly collected by runners for completed marathons, so he asked about the risk of damage. The attendant replies that there is nothing to worry about. A couple of days later he picks up the track suit, and the patches were all okay. But the lettering on the back of the jacket was melted and wrinkled, and a couple of the letters were missing. He complained to the owner, who apologized but directed his attention to the small print at the bottom of his receipt— "Not responsible for damage to your garment by cleaning process."

Technically, such warnings provide a business exclusion from liability and therefore the legal right to refuse compensation for damages. But the real cushion is the fact that the amount of effort and expense required to hire an attorney and take the matter to court. Forcing either compensation or replacement is often illogical. In most cases, the customer gives up and goes away angry. In those cases, some might find other ways to get satisfaction even if it amounts to vengeance, such as writing a tacky article in the local newspaper, or posting bad reviews on the internet. Angry customers have been known to commit criminal acts far more serious than the

immediate cause of anger. And most people would agree that personal vengeance is not worth risking jail time or a stiff fine. But, from the perspective of the business owner, the cost of bad business is usually not in refunds but in loss of customers.

Someone has said that the difference between a cosmetic surgeon and a mortician is that the mortician buries his mistakes. Fortunately, most of the mistakes made in business are less significant than those of a cosmetic surgeon. Most business errors do not leave scars on a customer's face, worn for the rest of her life. Common business mistakes can be corrected with a repair, a swap, or a refund. There is usually a fix if there is a willingness to make an effort, and of course if the customer has a little patience and understanding. A bad haircut will grow back in a couple of weeks. A bad cement driveway is much harder and more expensive to fix.

It is refreshing to deal with a company that takes responsibility for its mistakes and will go out of its way to make customers feel satisfied even after suffering a loss. It may be hard to believe, but there are businessmen who would rather suffer loss than to defraud someone. Jesus clearly had a great impact on Zacchaeus, a Jewish tax collector in Jericho (Luke 19:1-10). Such was the extent of his change of heart that he vowed to repay anyone he might have defrauded as much as four times the amount. The extent of his penitence might be extraordinary and the percentage of compensation excessive, but the attitude of Zacchaeus represents the ideal.

Maintaining a good reputation is important for any business. Some business owners claim that if they had to compensate for all their mistakes they would never make any money. If this is true, it would be better to refrain from promises that cannot be kept, find a better quality product to sell, or improve performance to a level that warrants consistent satisfaction and praise.

Honesty

Joe Denman was the owner of a wrecker service and auto scrap yard. He had a simple test of honesty that he frequently performed on unsuspecting employees. He was talking to a customer when a mechanic he had just hired came up to him and asked for change for the coke machine. Taking his five dollar bill, Joe handed back five ones and a stack of quarters. Although the exchange transpired quickly, the customer observed that Joe had given the man too much change. But after a quick count, the mechanic closed his fist and headed for the coke machine. Joe said nothing. As the unsuspecting worker hustled back out to the wrecking yard, with two cokes in hand and five dollars and a couple of quarters in his pocket, Joe winked at the customer and said “I just like to know what kind of man I have working for me.”

That kind of test might have its flaws, but it is revealing nonetheless. Some have said that a man who will steal a dollar will certainly steal a thousand. And Jesus suggested that a man who wants to be entrusted with great responsibilities must prove himself in small ones (Matt. 25:21). Basic honesty is a very significant facet of human character and integrity, and is the root of ethics. Harvey Firestone, founder of the international corporation bearing his name, said: “I believe that fundamental honesty is the keystone of business.”

Most dishonesty in business does not occur in the form of outright theft. It usually is found in subtle forms of fraud. John Mitchell discusses the expression *caveat emptor*, Latin for “buyer beware,” as a summary of the one-sided ethical standards that are common in the business world. Sometimes it seems as if society plays a cruel trick on itself by permitting its businesses to practice legalized fraud while cushioning them against liability. Ralph Nader’s campaign against consumer rip-offs during the 60s and 70s was very timely, and helped Americans learn how to defend ourselves against ourselves.

Old Testament legislation opposed unethical practices, such as damming up public waterways to create a commercial monopoly, the use of false weights and measurements (Lev.19:35-36; Deut. 25:13-16), and charging excessive interest on loans (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36; Prov. 28:8). Any man who wants to represent his faith by means of business practices should adopt the motto *caveat vendor*, “seller beware.” It is the Christian’s responsibility to conduct his business according to the highest standards of honesty attainable.

Consideration

Jesus made one of history’s most provocative statements in the form of the Golden Rule: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matt. 7:12). This statement provides a foundation for all ethical questions– the ability to place oneself in another person’s position, and then to act according to the other person’s needs and feelings. Treating others with kindness and respect generally engenders warmth and kindness in return.

Unfortunately, most people want to receive kindness before they show it, and they withhold friendship until they receive gestures of friendship from another person. Jesus taught that anyone can show love and friendship to members of his own group, and to those who are friendly to him. There is no special merit in that. But to do so toward those who might not be friendly is a greater challenge. “If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?” (Matt. 5:46-47). A Christian can claim no merit for conduct that is equal to that of his worldly peers. But a man who can put his own interests aside and extend friendship even to the unfriendly clearly represents a standard of ethics worthy of the divine. H. J. Taylor is credited with the Four Way Test avowed by Rotary

International to determine the soundness of any endeavor: *Is it truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build good will and friendship? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?* When one is seriously concerned for the interests and welfare of other individuals, he will naturally develop a reputation for sound ethics in business.

Self-Control

Work is often the breeding ground for conflict and frustration. Consequently, situations on the job site become the most grueling test of a man's demeanor, specifically his ability to control his tongue and temper. Here biblical principles penetrate office buildings and workshops to meet some of the most intense and aggravating circumstances of normal life— when parts don't fit, when customers are irritable and dissatisfied, when a significant book-keeping error is discovered and hours of tedious research are required for a resolution, when an employee is defiant and disrespectful to a supervisor, and virtually forces a confrontation— these are among the serious tests of self-control. It takes a man of steel to remain calm, cool and collected when an angry customer, or an angry employee, in his face, using abusive language, and perhaps even threatening violence. In such a situation the man who is “quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger” (James 1:19) becomes the most admired man in the world. Christian ethics includes self-control.

Choice of Vocation

D.W. Faunce, writing at the zenith of the Industrial Revolution, suggested that the very nature of an occupation might determine its ethical character from the start. From the standpoint of godly standards, he suggested, a job “must be right in kind and method.”²⁶ To be more

specific, for a person who has determined within himself that the gambling industry as a whole represents vice and human exploitation, an occupation such as book making or operating a casino would be dismissed immediately as unethical. For an individual who is convinced of the destructiveness of alcohol, tending a bar, driving a beer truck, or even selling alcohol in a store might be outside the bounds of godly ethics. Likewise, he would reject any involvement in pornography, drug traffic, prostitution, or dealing in stolen or illegal goods. Even within parameters set by law, he might reject an occupation based on exploitation of the weak or ignorant. A godly salesman would not utilize sales techniques that are designed to nudge a consumer into a sale, without ample time to make an intelligent and deliberate decision. A man of honesty and integrity could not push a product which he knew to be inferior or falsely advertised. Such a man cannot mislead, misrepresent or defraud others. He sees himself first as is a man of integrity, with ethical standards set by God, and not the world.

Courage to Stand Alone

In a democracy, where officials at every level are empowered by consent of the people, it is hard to understand that the majority is not necessarily right. When everybody seems to accept a practice, it is embarrassing to be the odd man out, especially if it means being labelled a “stick in the mud,” “prude,” or “holy Joe.”

Robert Redford starred in a 1980 film called *Brubaker* that demonstrates the high cost of standing alone for principles of justice and truth. The fictional film was based on the real-life experience of Tom Murton, the first professional penologist the state of Arkansas had ever hired as a warden. During the 1960s Arkansas maintained two large prison farms, Tucker and Cummins, from which over a thousand inmates were used as forced labor to produce profits of as

much as 1.5 million dollars per year. Murton was sent there on the orders of Governor Winthrop Rockefeller to clean up perceived crime and corruption, based on reports that were suppressed by the previous governor. Murton found the reports to be true. The prison was rife with criminal practices, including sexual assault, electrical torture, flogging, prisoners having to pay for medical assistance, extortion of money from inmates by "trusty" guards, and open marketing of illegal drugs and alcohol. But the discovery that resulted in Murton's termination involved the bodies of some 200 inmates, buried on prison grounds, allegedly shot while escaping. But informants said that most of the men had been killed by "trusty" guards for refusing extortion demands. Informants also reported one mass murder of some twenty prisoners. After his termination, Murton published his findings and a general reform was initiated. But he was "black listed" by prison systems, and was forced to go back to his duck farm in Oklahoma.

This is a good illustration of the stressful nature of ethics. Standards of right and wrong mean nothing if never put to the test in a real environment. Sometimes, the test is in front of an audience, and sometimes the test has terrible consequences for giving the right answers. Church assemblies are a sheltered environment. Typically, everyone holds much the same convictions as others, and is on his best behavior there. It is easy to pray boldly and sing songs of praise with gusto, uninhabited and free from threat. But church is usually a sanctuary from the hostilities of the world. The real test of faith for an honest working man is in the arena of secular business and politics. And it involves standing by personal convictions even when he has to stand alone.

Jesus seemed to anticipate that when he said: "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven" (Matt. 10:32). Each practical test of faith results in either a confession or a denial of Christ. Early Christians met that test in a dramatic fashion when verbalizing their faith meant being thrown to the lions, crucified or dying

on a gladiator's sword. Today the agony is seldom more than emotional alienation or embarrassing innuendo. But the test is real.

A group of salesmen sat in a meeting listening to a company executive explain a new expense account system that was designed to save the firm a sizable sum in taxes, if every employee complied. In short, it amounted to padding their records. After a long silence, one man raised his hand and said: "Sir, I just don't feel comfortable doing that!" There was a long silence, and then another echoed those reservations. Discussion ensued, and it became obvious that most of the men in the room saw the executive's suggestion as unethical. Subsequently, the new policy was returned for revision. In this particular case, it took the courage of one to embolden others to stand for the right.

Ethics in a working man's world is a serious matter. And one of the greatest needs is the courage to stand by convictions when put to the test. Most people are too timid to do so. They fear company reprisal, or ridicule from peers. But without a doubt, following the upper road often means standing against the majority. And that requires the courage of Joshua, the great Israelite general, who was prepared to express his own mind, regardless of the decision of others. "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).

Chapter Six

WORKING FOR THE MAN

The late Freddie Prince's role in the television series *Chico and the Man* satirized the eternal struggle between worker and employer. America's massive workforce is comprised of many ethnic groups with a variety of skills. The counterpart of the worker, whom Freddie calls "the man" is also multidimensional. He represents the management and executive aspects of business, ranging from young owner-operators of small struggling businesses all the way up the ladder to the heads of large corporations. He could be a white collar supervisor, blue collar foreman, manager, administrator, principal or chief. These are also men of all ethnic groups. The "man" might also be a woman. "The man" is not necessarily wealthy, for in Marxist terminology he is found primarily among the bourgeoisie, or middle class, as opposed to the lower proletariat and upper nobility. So "the man" is anyone who represents the establishment. "The man" is boss, or whoever is over "the working man." And this section deals with what a Christian working man owes the boss, in terms of rightful duty and responsibility.

DEALING WITH FEELINGS AND PERCEPTION

Members of the establishment are not the working man's enemy, but some degree of resentment and suspicion is understandable. History is full of class tension and human exploitation, and tension between worker and employer today is like an age old rivalry carried on as a matter of tradition. Whether master and slave, lord and serf, noble and peasant, rich and poor, or today's employer and employee, the guy in the lower stratum feels somehow cheated and suppressed as if he is the victim of a global plot.

There was a time in America when working conditions were appalling for just about everyone. We see examples of those conditions in many underdeveloped countries today. In the 1800s children were exploited for labor in numerous industries, such as mining, textiles, agriculture, glass factories and canneries. Despite emaciation from poor diet, severe dehydration, and chronic illness from dust and fumes, countless children were forced to work and many died before reaching adulthood. After decades of bitter debate, federal regulation of child labor was achieved in 1938 with the Fair Labor Standards Act. Of course, before 1900 the majority of America's population made their living on farms or ranches, and it was essential for children to provide various levels of labor for family sustenance.

For many adults also, labor was tantamount to slavery. Especially in the south, sharecroppers were enslaved by landowners who made impossible demands and promises they never intended to keep. Miners worked their lives away digging coal for a company that placed no greater value on a man than on a good mule, and workman were held in bondage through a system of escalating debts for medicine, housing and supplies. Tennessee Ernie Ford's rendition of *Sixteen Tons* is reminiscent of hard times for a coal miner who sang woefully "I owe my soul to the company store." And of course, the most extreme examples are from the lamentable days of slavery in colonial South, when blacks raised prayers to God for deliverance, as did Israel in Egyptian bondage. Our nation is truly comprised of "tired and huddled masses" who ventured to these shores seeking a better life, and even more so for those who were brought here to be exploited. Many paid dearly for the freedom of a new nation, a freedom that would only be enjoyed by those who inherited it generations later. A Hungarian nobleman visiting factories in McKeesport, Pennsylvania wrote:

Fourteen thousand tall chimneys are silhouetted against the sky along the valley that extends from McKeesport to Pittsburgh, and these fourteen thousand chimneys discharge

their burning sparks and smoke incessantly. The realms of Vulcan could not be more somber or filthy than the valley of Monongahela. Thousands of immigrants wander here from year to year, and here they suffer till they are swallowed up in the inferno. Scarce an hour passes without an accident and no day without a fatal disaster. But what if one man be crippled, if one life be extinguished among so many! Each place can be filled from ten men, all eager for it. Newcomers camp out within sight of the factory gates, while a little farther away others arrive with almost daily regularity— thousands of immigrants to don the fetters of slavery!²⁷

These conditions have all but vanished, and we have advanced to the prominent status of being the most affluent and opulent nation in the world. But bitterness and resentment on the part of workers toward “the man” lives on. Many potentially great individuals are the slaves of their own attitudes. A dark sense of loathing toward all representatives of the establishment holds them back from reaching their own objectives.

Despite this lamentable history, the working man still owes a debt. In the material which follows, it will be suggested that a godly working man is responsible to his employer in ways that are not included in a written contract. His obligations to God place upon him the burden of doing his job with added dedication and a certain finesse, which will assure him the favor of both God and man.

MASTER AND SLAVE

The New Testament addresses the subject of work responsibility largely in the context of master-slave relationships. In the days of Imperial Rome, all people were classified as either citizen or non-citizen. Non-citizens were slaves of a variety of sorts, with no legal status and subject to extreme exploitation and abuse. Many were taken captive in battle and brought to Rome as permanent slaves under a master. Their status was similar to that of Africans owned by masters in America’s colonial South. Others were indentured servants, working off a family debt or bound to someone for a specific period of time. This also had a parallel in America’s history.

During the seventeenth century most of the white laborers in Maryland and Virginia came from England as indentured servants.

In the first and second centuries, most Christians were of the non-citizen class, therefore largely house-servants and laborers, all of whom were under some kind of legal bondage to a master. Servants generally resented their masters and felt bitter about their own inferiority and servitude. They often did their work grudgingly and only by compulsion. But as Christianity spread throughout the empire, a profoundly new attitude became evident. The Emperor Constantine was so impressed with their dedication and deportment that he declared Sunday a legal holiday, allowing Christians time off from work on their day of assembly. This new spirit had its roots in the teachings of Jesus, and more specifically the apostolic teaching that Christians were responsible to God for the manner in which they carried out their daily chores. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people, because you know that the Lord will reward each one for whatever good they do, whether they are slave or free. (Eph. 6:5-8).

It was evident in the first century that Christianity produced better workers, not because they were more easily dominated, but because they were more conscientious, dedicated, honest and co-operative. Christian workers felt a compelling responsibility to serve their masters well, knowing that by their own conduct they themselves and their religion would be judged. In a letter designated to the young evangelist Timothy, we find this admonition: "All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered" (1 Tim. 6:1).

In America's early history, biblical texts like this one were used to defend slavery. Slaves were told that it was their duty to God to obey their masters and be submissive. It should be noted that Paul and his contemporaries took slavery for granted and could not conceive a culture without it. It was part of the social system, and had been so since long before recorded history. So they accepted it, and encouraged Christian slaves to comply. Slave owners were taught to treat their slaves fairly, but were never told that the system was immoral or that they should set them free. Seventeen centuries later, the entire western world came to recognize slavery as a grave moral evil, and that it is equally wrong to defend it with biblical texts that reflect antiquated social norms.

So, for these reasons, the New Testament texts written about masters and slaves can be appropriately interpreted in the context of employers and employees, and it is sensible to think that God has a serious interest in the way Christians conduct themselves on the job. So, applying that to a modern context, a policeman walking his beat, a store clerk taking inventory, a yard hand operating a fork lift, an accountant tediously sifting through a company's financial records, a computer programmer working through the night to feed data into a hungry machine, all have something in common. They are all employed by someone who pays their salary and to whom they must give account. A working man who seeks to please God is not just working for "the man." He is working for "the Man Upstairs," and this greater obligation pervades his entire life, adding purpose and significance to all his menial responsibilities.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

On this basis, a worker who takes his faith seriously will then view his occupational responsibilities with greater concern than would his "non-believing" peers. He will ask questions

that others might not consider with equal depth. “What does God expect of me on this job?” “What do I owe my employer in terms of performance and loyalty?” “If I were in my boss’s shoes, what kind of person would I want working for me?” “How must I conduct myself on the job in order to effectively represent my faith in God?” The answers to these questions are found, at least in part, in the following principles.

Love Your Enemies

In the previous chapter mention was made of Jesus’ teaching on interpersonal relationships, which is capsulized in the famous Golden Rule. Another of his statements in this regard originated in the Old Testament, and is said to be the foundation of all the Law and Prophets: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . and love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-40). Perhaps the most compelling teaching of Jesus on love reached far beyond goodwill, neighborliness and brotherly kindness. In the famous Sermon on the Mount he admonished his audience to love their enemies, bless those who curse them, do good even to people who hate them, and pray for people who mistreat them (Matt. 5:44). That is a tall order. Paul echoes these sentiments, adding that by so doing the Christian will stack burning coals on his enemy’s conscience, which may lead him to repentance (Rom. 12:20).

Learning to conduct one’s daily affairs in a genuine spirit of love is perhaps the greatest of all challenges to the Christian. But without a doubt, this approach is the surest formula for personal abiding happiness and fulfillment. The boss is not the working man’s enemy, although he often perceives him as such. And the best alternative to bitterness, resentment and alienation is love. Its transforming power produces entirely new dimensions in job satisfaction, and will

open doors to levels of success a worker may never have considered possible. Love at this level does mean sappy sentimentality. It does not even mean that the worker must like the boss as a person. Rather, it means to offer respect, and to genuinely seek and promote his or her well-being. It means to refrain from speaking ill of the boss and defend the boss against harsh criticism and insubordination. In many cases, that itself is challenging enough.

Go the Extra Mile

Jesus also taught the principle of going beyond the call of duty in his famous statement “whoever would compel you to go a mile, go with him two” (Matt. 5:41). This text notoriously presents problems for Christians in terms of practical application. What exactly does it mean? One can imagine a common scene along ancient Roman roads, when a soldier gruffly compels some unknown Jew to carry his gear, expecting a spiteful and recalcitrant response. But how perplexed the soldier might appear when the bearer gladly gathers up his burden, laughing and talking with the soldier along the way. And then, to the soldier’s amazement, the bearer accompanies him on past a well-known distance marker, one or two stadia further than he was compelled. That is literally going “the extra mile.” And from what we know about the context of early Christianity, that might well have happened.

Likewise, it is difficult to imagine the pleasant shock when a Syrian noble receives an unsolicited gift from his servants on his birthday; or when a Greek philosopher assigns his house-servant a difficult task, expecting resistance, but instead his instructions are carried out willingly and cordially; or when a Phrygian merchant finds chores done and improvements made on his property, all on his servants’ own initiative. What is the explanation for such uncommonly amiable behavior on the part of servants and slaves? The answer is the presence of a new spirit, a

new approach to life, called “the Way.” The message today is known as the Good News. Those who have experienced this newness of life are called Christians. Most of the early converts were slaves and ordinary laborers, and they made no effort to rebel against the system which held them in servitude. Instead they stopped complaining and sought to overwhelm their masters with service beyond the call of duty.

Following that pattern, a Christian working man today is compelled by his faith to give more than might be expected, to put extra effort in every facet of his job, not because he owes it to his employer but because he owes it to God— a little extra touch in a project, a little extra time for the sake of doing a job well, or to handle an occasional overload without grumbling. This does not mean costing the company time and money or giving away products just to win the favor of customers. Nor does it mean becoming a company door mat, allowing others to walk all over you. It means operating in the true spirit of an extra-mile worker, who does his best because that is who he is and that is his way. Of course, in many cases the extra effort will not be noticed and appreciated, but in others it will, and it will bring rewards and promotions. But rewards are not the motive. The motive is serving God.

Suffer Wrong

Naturally there are many people who are not touched by acts of kindness and who interpret goodness as weakness. Such people will take advantage of the good intentions of another, riding rough shod over him with no regret. Having had such an experience, and it might occur more often than not, a believer might ask the same question that Simon Peter asked about forgiveness: “How many times do I have to do this?” Certainly this is a tough question. How far

does one have to go in order to feel confident that he has gone the extra mile? Is he compelled to expose himself to abuse and exploitation in order to fulfill his duty to God?

One example from the Apostle Paul suggests that there is indeed a limit, and one has to decide when the time comes to draw a line. In Acts 17 a company of evangelists were beaten and imprisoned for preaching the Gospel, and Paul appealed to the magistrates on the basis of his Roman citizenship, charging that he had not been treated according to legal protocol. He not only demanded release from prison, but also demanded an official apology. A Christian is not compelled to be a door mat. But he should try to err on the side of extra effort in the balance between giving too much and giving too little. The same apostle taught that it is better to suffer a wrong than to wrong someone else (1 Cor. 6:7). And certainly there are many situations in routine living in which one's patience is pushed to the absolute limit. Another New Testament epistle adds this advice:

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good, and you endure it, this is commendable before God (1 Pet. 2:19-20).

Give an Honest Day's Work

The modern work world is plagued by clock watchers. Nearly every office, store and factory has its share of employees who have no greater ambition than to fill time and draw a pay check. Workmen congregate daily at a local bar or café to kill an hour before starting their routine, and the same crew might be found at another hangout in mid-afternoon. Some service technicians have predictable stops which are calculated to add time to short runs, therefore allowing them to draw more pay for less work actually accomplished. The same routine can be found in factories and workshops. After clocking in at 8 am a worker takes forty-five minutes to

unfold materials and tools and set up a project. Then within a half hour his eye is on the clock, eagerly watching for morning break. After break, he gets in a couple of hours of serious work before lunch, but lunch hour is often stretched into seventy minutes. Then another challenge arises in the form of early afternoon grogginess, prompted by a full tummy and warm sunshine. Sometime in afternoon, energized by a snack break, he does a couple of hours of efficient work before he starts watching the clock again. Then during the last hour, he works at a frantic pace to finish up, pack up and punch out.

The above scenario might sound offensive to truly conscientious workers, and rightfully so. But this has been observed in many fields of work far too frequently to be fabricated, or even exaggerated. When Yuri Adropov became the General Secretary of the Communist Party in 1982, he launched a campaign against this very problem, which had plagued the Soviet Union for years and dragged the national economy toward stagnation. J.F. Burns, of the New York News Service, reported seeing Russian construction crews work at a snail's pace, and then take long tea breaks with idle chat simply to kill time. He reported factory workers standing around smoking cigarettes as if they had nothing to do, workers walking around disturbing those who were attempting to work. These issues, along with absenteeism, drunkenness, and irresponsibility were part of the generalized profile of workers that has crippled the Soviet economy and contributed heavily to maintaining a standard of living that is closer to the third world than to the West.

In America the problem has never been so generalized, and hopefully it will never become so. But working men need a renewed value for doing an honest day's work for a promised wage. Again quoting the Apostle Paul, everyone should mind his own business and do

his own work (1 Thess. 4:11-12). Clock-watching and goofing off on company time is not a mark of godly character. One who steals only time is still a thief.

Strive For Excellence

John W. Gardner, who was Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare under President Lyndon Johnson, said that excellence is doing ordinary things extraordinarily well. And he said that an excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher:

The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because it is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good philosophy nor good plumbing. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.²⁸

There was a time when a stamp *Made in U.S.A.* meant quality, and foreign imports were generally considered cheap imitations. But as many have observed, in the latter decades of the twentieth century there occurred a general decline in pride and quality of workmanship in America. Most of us have had bad experiences with products that were poorly designed or produced. We have returned to an automobile dealership time and time again, complaining of rattles, engine sputtering and electrical failures in a brand new car. We have bought a lawn mower with missing parts, or a washing machine that leaked. These things happen because someone in a long chain of assemblers, fitters, painters and packers did not care whether the job was done properly.

Ralph Nader, mentioned earlier, is known for his stalwart endeavor to renew concern for quality in American business. And certainly many others, from small business owners to corporate executives, have promoted the principles of pride and personal responsibility for the pursuit of excellence. Robert Cox, a New York advertising executive, is the man behind the slogan “Quality is Job 1” embraced by Ford Motor Company. In many areas of manufacturing,

serious effort is being made to revive the old system of personal pride, with inspectors adding their signatures rather than an impersonal number to a finished product. This is how it should be. Among the unfortunate realities of human nature is the tendency to hold others accountable for values and behavior not evident in ourselves. That applies to leadership that operates at a lower standard than those expected in followers. And it equally applies to people who hold leaders accountable for standards that they themselves refuse to practice.

The issue of pride and excellence cannot be mandated or enforced by company policies and government legislation. It is an attitude, a philosophy of life that must be embraced with great conviction by individuals and then passed on by personal influence. It must be exemplified in both business practice and personal conduct. It must be nurtured in homes, not just in word but also in example, so that children at an early age learn to take pride in doing their very best at whatever they do. Another text from the Apostle Paul reads “Whatever your hand finds to do, do heartily as unto the Lord”(Col. 3:23). That grass-roots kind of value system is not quickly nor easily built in a nation, nor is it easily restored once lost.

Take Responsibility

Most of us also have had the frustrating experience of being shuttled around from office to office with a problem, finding no one who wants to take responsibility for a solution. Or perhaps you phone a company’s customer service department, and you are put on hold several times and transferred repeatedly from one person to another. But you never get an answer or solution. Often salesmen make wild and extravagant promises in order to secure a sale, but three months later no one wants to address your complaint and everyone you talk to has an excuse.

The following list of excuses was posted on a company bulletin board, with the heading “Please give excuse by number in order to save time.”

1. That’s the way we’ve always done it.
2. I didn’t know you were in a hurry for it.
3. That’s not in my department.
4. No one told me to go ahead.
5. I’m waiting for an O.K.
6. How did I know this was different?
7. That’s her job, not mine.
8. Wait until the boss comes back, and I will ask him.
9. I forgot. Sorry about that.
10. I didn’t think it was very important.
11. I’ve been busy I just couldn’t get around to it.
12. I thought I told you.
13. I wasn’t hired to do that.

It is refreshing to hear someone say “I’ve made a mistake, but I will correct it,” or “I don’t know, but I’ll find out and take care of it for you.” One of the attributes desired in employees is the courage and willingness to take charge of a situation, to make decisions, to take initiative in questionable matters without passing the buck or running back and forth to a supervisor for an okay. Of course, it is understandable that in certain situations, management may require approval before acting, and in such cases lower level employees must comply. But often taking responsibility for decisions in one’s own area will save time and money. Even occasional bad decisions will not be as irresponsible as no decision at all.

Be Honest

Honesty and integrity have been discussed earlier under the broad subject of ethics. But a note should be added here also. Many large firms report losing hundreds of thousands of dollars every year to their own employees, not in terms of robbery or embezzlement but because of pilfering.²⁹ This means, taking home small items like paperclips, staples, pens, paper, envelopes,

product samples, and raw materials, and other relatively inexpensive items. Such items amazingly disappear in great numbers on a daily basis— they seem to sprout legs and walk off.

Added to this form of theft, there is the abuse of gasoline allowances, company cars and equipment, and a ledger full of other misdeeds which are clearly unethical and dishonest. Any person who claims to be devoted to God should know better, even without being told. To new converts at Ephesus the apostle writes: “Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need” (Eph. 4:28).

Stay Positive

A worker owes it to his employer to stand behind the company in every way possible within the bounds of ethics. This means cooperation with company rules and regulations, and it means promoting that policy among fellow workers. There are biblical texts in both testaments that speak out strongly against those who sow discord and promote strife (2 Cor. 12:20; Prov. 6:19). A dispute which developed among the herdsmen of Abraham and his nephew Lot led to a permanent estrangement of these two men and their capital interests (Gen. 13:1-13). Such can happen also in a modern context over nothing more than petty complaints among workers. Admittedly, a worker who has membership in a labor union can find himself in a position of serious conflict when pressured to protest company policies, or to support a strike. But other than extreme measures by organized labor, a godly employee will display exemplary devotion, cooperation and loyalty to the company.

Get Along With People

Wall Street Journal asked a number of chief executives what characteristics they looked for in employees, and which traits were most important for advancement to executive roles. Those most frequently named were integrity, industriousness, and the ability to get along with others. Research by industrial psychologists indicates that in most fields of employment interpersonal skills are far more important than intelligence or technical aptitude. Furthermore, it is evident that deficiency in this area accounts for more dismissals than any other single factor.

A psychologist was interviewed on a radio talk show, and also answered questions and gave advice to callers. A man phoned during the program complaining of losing his third job as a bank teller. He boasted of his talent in this field, and prided himself in exceptional dedication. But he said that his unwillingness to “goof off” like other employees invariably led to bickering, and eventually to his dismissal. His conclusion was that he was fired unfairly, and that the real problem was jealousy on the part of his fellow workers. The counselor responded with tact, yet with unmistakable clarity. She told the caller that when a person has lost several jobs for basically the same reason, it would be wise to look at himself for the source of conflicts, and if necessary seek professional help in identifying and correcting any abrasive and unpleasant characteristics.

It is exceptionally difficult for most people to be fully and honestly introspective, and to recognize their own character flaws or annoying personality traits. Most people have a magic mirror of self-delusion that reflects an image very different from what others see. For this reason, it is not uncommon for someone to move from city to city, and from job to job, becoming increasingly bitter and disillusioned, pointing a finger at bosses and co-workers, when the real problem is within himself— a habit or personality trait that inhibits long-term relationships.

The Apostle Paul wrote: “if it be possible, as much as you are able, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18). However, beneath the effort to get along lies the more complex matter of honesty with self. Patrick Morley has a book called *The Man in the Mirror: Solving the 24 Problems Men Face*. Morley squarely addresses issues like relationships, identity and integrity, with a view to helping men do better in all phases and elements of life, including life on the job.³⁰ The objective, of course, is to recognize both strengths and weaknesses, in order to honestly work on weaknesses with a view to improvement.

Take Pride In Servanthood

John Mitchell tells a story about a conflict between a shipping clerk named Matlock and a night janitor named Washam.³¹ One of the janitor’s duties was to clean out the big cuspidors in all the company offices. Tobacco chewing was common in those days, and due to careless spitting habits cleanup was a rather demeaning chore. Matlock was somewhat of a perfectionist, and once complained to Washam about his lack of care in cleaning his cuspidor. A dispute arose which eventually came to the company president’s ears. Taking Washam aside the “big boss” carefully explained their mutual responsibility to God for doing their jobs well, and how important his role as janitor really was, lowly though it may seem. He played a role in keeping the entire staff happy and productive in their own spheres of work. The boss suggested that Washam put that cuspidor on his priority list, because in pleasing Matlock he would be doing the whole company a service. Not only did that solve the problem and bring to everyone’s attention the value of servitude, but the conversation initiated a lifelong friendship between Washam and Matlock.

Too few people in the modern business world are willing to be servants. Department stores which once employed sales persons to serve the public now are largely self-service, with a cashier at the exit who knows nothing about the stock. Customer service booths are sometimes staffed with individuals who have little service to offer and give out information reluctantly. Service stations no longer give service. They simply sell gasoline at self-service pumps.

As a boy I often pictured taxi drivers as devoted public servants, waiting patiently at the curb while their clients lingered in a prolonged goodbye, or speeding away through traffic at the command, “follow that car!” That was the way they were portrayed in movies. But as an adult, I discovered that some of the most obnoxious people I came across were cab drivers working the circuit at international airports. In certain cities they are notorious for rude manners, for offering as little assistance as possible to passengers, and for taking tips grudgingly, as if no amount was enough to warrant even an honest “thank you.”

When Jesus’ fame began to spread throughout Palestine and his disciples sensed the imminence of the Kingdom of God, they began to argue among themselves as to who would occupy positions of honor in the new economy (Mark 10:35-45). Jesus responded that true greatness was to be found in servitude and humility. Of course, Jesus exemplified this teaching by his very life, and he emphasized the spirit of servanthood on specific occasions such as the washing of his disciple’s feet (John 13:4-15). But during his ministry, and over the centuries that followed, many of his disciples had difficulty in applying that teaching to routine life. Most people resist the idea of servanthood. We prefer to be served and honored. We enjoy praise and recognition. And it is helpful to remember that no matter who you are, there are always lesser and greater and the happiest people are those who accept their role and status with humility.

Moral Uprightness

Like it or not, workers owe it to their employers to conduct themselves with dignity and moral uprightiness in all inter-personal relationships. In this age of permissiveness, many promote the philosophy that one's sexual behavior is totally his or her own business. But evidence is overwhelming that sexual intimacy among employees of any firm has a disruptive and degenerative effect on morale, proficiency and productivity. Therefore, it should be noted with care that one's personal life can and often does infringe upon the rights of others, and by all the principles outlined above the godly working man is duty bound to strive for moral purity. That not only allows for a clear conscience when you fall asleep at night, but it make is less likely to wake up to trouble the next morning.

Be Grateful

Gratitude is a difficult concept to teach. We try to nurture our children by urging them to say "thank you" when they are given a gift. And of course, when they do not want to eat their green beans at supper we remind them of all the starving children in Africa who would gladly eat those green beans. And, of course, each year in November, Americans enjoy a holiday called Thanksgiving, possibly dating to the 1621 feast at Plymouth, Massachusetts, and the gratitude of early pilgrims for simple food and survival in the new land. The day has roots much earlier, and is also celebrated in many other countries as a harvest festival. But for most Americans the day is more about parades, the most famous being Macy's in New York City, and gorging ourselves with turkey and dressing, and watching football on television. The occasion, it seems, fosters

very little true gratitude in anyone, and many families do not pause to offer a word of thanks to God.

But it seems that none of us really knows the meaning of gratitude until we experience having little or nothing. Hard times make people appreciate good times. Someone said “I complained that I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet.” I have to admit that I did not fully appreciate America until I spent ten years in Africa. I did not appreciate everything my parents gave me until I was ten thousand miles away, trying to fend for myself.

Many companies spend thousands of dollars training employees in their jobs, either by subsidizing college courses or providing on-site supervision. Employment often requires an investment of time, money, and trust, which in turn demands a response of gratitude from the new employee. And genuine gratitude will display itself in loyalty and performance. But it also needs to include remaining with the firm long enough to repay the investment in his training. And it involves working each day with an “attitude of gratitude” for the income, the security it provides, and possible opportunities for advancement. This can be stated simply with another biblical quote: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful” (Col. 3:15).

To conclude this section, it is readily acknowledged that living according to the noblest standards in the world is a tall order. The personal example of Jesus himself and the principles he taught were provocative and challenging. True discipleship is not without demands. It demands self-discipline, dedication, and a consistent positive attitude. Every noble cause has a price. As Jesus said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

Chapter Seven

THE BOSS MAN'S BURDEN

Management has taken a new direction in recent years. In the 1940s when Elton Mayo pioneered studies in worker motivation, common blue collar workers were thought of as money grabbing rabble with no group loyalty and little leadership potential. Industrialization had wiped out many of the face-to-face relationships that were once the basis of trade. The principles of human interest and commonality, which western society strongly advocates, seemed for a time to be stifled by the noise of big business.

Today there is a more general awareness of the intrinsic value of the individual as a basic cell in the vast organism of society. His needs, wants, feelings and ambitions are the truest monitor of the vital signs of the whole. Recognizing this important fact, business management is becoming more people-oriented. Louis William Norris says that today the executive is constantly faced with problems concerning people, and his routine decisions both involve and affect other people.³² Workers are being accepted as intelligent, perceptive, ambitious and productive, and given proper incentives and a climate of trust between labor and management, they will eagerly involve themselves in their jobs.³³

These advancements should not escape the attention of the business owner or corporate executive, even more if he chooses to be a Christian. It is common knowledge that successful people are constantly reading and learning, because they recognize that success depends on current knowledge and trends. There is much to learn and many needs for improvement in every area of life. And a man who finds himself in the role of both manager of people and servant of God is doubly blessed and doubly burdened. He holds in his hands the potential for influence in

two worlds— material gain and human development. That position thrusts upon him first the responsibility of leading people in successful business activities. Their livelihood and the welfare of their families depend on his decisions. So that role cannot be taken lightly.

In addition, many of his employees look to him as a role model for life. They will be shaped by his personality, life-style, and attitudes. Therefore, he must exude the principles of life and faith to an even greater degree than he would if he were an employee, the co-worker of his own employees. This added challenge truly separates the men from the boys. This is what distinguishes a task master from a great employer. He is not just good with money, and markets, trends, and visions. He is good at leading people, to nurture in them a share in his vision and motivate them to get on board his train to success.

PERSONALITY

Herzberg suggests that American industry is relying more and more on personality and temperament as principal considerations in evaluating candidates for management roles.³⁴ More recent studies verify his observations. Executive failures today occur more often because of personality problems than the lack of either knowledge or skill. Here the reference is not to “personality clash,” a nebulous expression often used to gloss over more serious problems, but rather to the inability of managers and executives to deal with people in a cordial and effective manner. In plainer terms, the most important qualifications for leadership in business is personality. People with poor temperament and disposition, abrasive speech, tactlessness and other undesirable mannerisms are poor candidates for management. In many situations it has been erroneously assumed that these characteristics are essential. A foreman on a construction crew or a supervisor of a team of dock hands, for example, were once thought to require iron

fists and a fiery tongue in order to motivate and control the kind of men who filled those jobs. But this philosophy is being replaced in many quarters by more refined methods that have proved more successful. The kind and level of respect fostered by tough-guy methods is often nullified by bitterness and resentment, which in the long run are detrimental to corporate interests.

Johnny Cash recorded song about Onie, a harsh and insensitive work foreman under whom the singer suffered years of physical and verbal abuse. The lyrics express how he can hardly contain himself until that last five o'clock whistle announces his official retirement, at which time he plans to vindicate himself by delivering a fist-full of knuckles to Onie's obnoxious mouth. In reality, no one can seriously consider himself serving the best interest of his company when his attitudes and methods of dealing with people create in them hostility and bitterness. That is a pressure-cooker waiting to blow. A man who truly regards himself the servant of God would do well to adopt higher principles and methods that work better and are more in keeping with his calling.

COMPASSION

Often in big businesses little people are forgotten. Sometimes that is no fault of any one individual. It even happens in churches where serving human need is the whole ministry objective. Yet, when it does occur, the overlooked individual justly feels that no one really cares and somebody ought to know better. When Braniff International folded in 1982, several thousand employees were turned out in the cold, with too little advanced warning even to arrange alternative jobs. Layoffs almost always end in bitterness and disillusionment. But while such

large scale tragedies are beyond the control of most managers, other types of issues occur daily in the business world in which human compassion is sadly lacking.

Companies whose policies are people centered, and which go the extra mile to assure the welfare of employees, are certain to be rewarded by exceptional loyalty and financial success. Jesus often structured parables that contrasted insensitive masters with others who were compassionate and merciful. Good executives are those whose ears are attune to the personal needs and problems of their workers. They demand excellence, but also are patient with human weaknesses. The task of firing is tempered with caution and concern. The role the manager plays is not only about accomplishing company goals but also about nurturing growth in employees. Therefore, he also keeps the wellbeing of each employee at heart.

The Apostle Paul outlines a number of practical exhortations in Romans 12 which should be kept in mind by every Christian executive. He urges him not to think too highly of himself, but to keep his ego in check (vs. 3). He encourages brotherly love, giving consideration to those of lower status (vs. 16). He encourages patience with others, and promotes those traits which make for peaceful relations (vss. 12, 18). He encourages the pursuit of excellence (vs. 11), and the spirit of hopeful optimism (vs. 13). He encourages honesty and true devotion to all that is good (vss. 9, 17). He encourages a sharing of both joy and sorrow with others (vs. 15). And, he discourages hypocrisy, evil motives and all forms of vengeance and retaliation (vss. 17-21). These principles are people centered, and represent the very spirit of compassion which Jesus exemplified during his ministry here on earth. They also represent the kind of traits found in most successful business leaders.

RESPONSIBILITY

Once a man comes to perceive himself as an agent of God in this world, a compelling new responsibility is thrust upon him. He sees his role in business as a challenge, a quest as if commissioned directly by God. He is in a position of responsibility, like a steward who has been placed in charge of a portion of his master's goods.

A good friend of mine, a man whom I credit with the Midas touch since all his business ventures have proved successful, expressed the burden he feels to do well with his assets. In his view, when God blesses a man with a few talents and a certain degree of financial success, He holds him accountable for how well he develops those basic resources. Success breeds success. And having wisely invested, he finds his money producing more money. The greater the success, the greater the burden he feels to invest wisely. He also feels a greater burden to donate generously to worthy causes. Therefore, he concludes, the greatest problem he faces as a Christian in business is not avoiding greed or materialism, but coping with the responsibility to do well with his money.

To many people, that philosophy may sound much like the Protestant Work Ethic discussed earlier. Although he understands all success as blessings of God, he does not suggest providential reward or divine intervention. Rather, it is an illustration of the natural results of good management, combined with a personal sense of responsibility to serve God in the business arena. Jesus suggested this very concept in his famous Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14-30). Certain servants were entrusted by their master with various sums of money. One was given five talents, another two talents, and another one talent. The first two were very successful and pleased their master because they invested their portions of money in business enterprise and increased their investments by one hundred percent. But the third servant buried his talent in the

dirt, and when the master asked an account he returned it as it was. His master was dissatisfied and the servant suffered the consequences.

It is ironic that the term “talent,” which refers to a variable weight of silver or gold in ancient near-eastern and Mediterranean cultures, is the same English word we use today to describe personal talents, skills or resources. Such talents were also viewed in antiquity as gifts of God, and so the Great Eternal Master holds each servant responsible for how he uses those talents to produce good in the world.

Another aspect of the executive’s responsibility pertains to people. John Mitchell says that a Christian executive faces a great conflict between money and people, because his primary role in a company is to make money. The bottom line is net profit, and profits are made by the most effective use of people and materials.³⁵ Yet the man of God quickly develops a keen sense of responsibility to those individuals in his employment, and his value system reminds him constantly that people are more important than money. Of course, making a profit is important to all concerned. If a company operates at a loss, everyone suffers. So in an indirect sense, a company executive bears the responsibility to his employees to see that the company makes money. This safeguards the future of the company and that of its employees.

It is also clear that corporate responsibility includes human development. At one time the only type of training a company might consider for its employees was that which pertained to their immediate job skills. But today management has become aware that productivity depends on many aspects of personal development and wellbeing. Workers are affected by home life, self-image, religion, health and politics. Therefore, it stands to reason that companies which take a keener interest in people as people will also provide various types of counselling and personal development benefits, which are likely to profit the company in the long run. Some large

operations, Ford Motor Company, for example, have devised programs and clinics that promote better health. Current studies of various degenerative diseases, and their connection with diet and exercise, have prompted serious interest on the part of business management. Healthy workers will be more productive for a longer period of time.

Sidney Harman, chairman of Harman International Industries, Inc. once stated that he felt it his duty to develop the people who work for him simply because it is right.³⁶ Mary Kay Cosmetics is a good example of a large company which operates on people-oriented principles. Beauty consultants are trained to think in terms of helping others to achieve their goals in life, to feel better about themselves, and to experience personal development through the vehicle of Mary Kay products. Employees are made to feel like members of a large family, where each one is loved and where personal and emotional needs are a priority.

The ears of management must remain open to the needs of its employees. Effective communication is based on listening, as a tool of sensitivity. Management must have the ability to read symptoms of personal problems in its employees. Where companies are too large for executives to have any personal dealings with workers, lower level managers and executives must be trained in this significant skill. This is a part of corporate duty to its employees, and a Christian business executive has even greater concern that this responsibility is met.

A very essential adjunct to an employer's indebtedness to his employees is the subject of fairness. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Masters, give your servants what is right, because you know that you have a master in heaven" (Col. 4:1). Throughout history unfairness in labor has fanned the flames of social unrest, and has prompted more hatred and civil unrest than then perhaps any other factor. Often those who were guilty of such injustice were the religious elite, whose professed law codes promoted justice and equality.

The Code of Hammurabi, dating to about 1750 BC, provided protection for workers by prohibiting unfair wages and demanding prompt payment when contracts were fulfilled.³⁷ The Law of Moses, developing over a long period of Israel's early history, included similar standards for business practice (Lev. 19:3; Deut. 24:14-15). The prophet Jeremiah rebuked contemporary business men for their reluctance to pay workers a fair wage for a day's labor (Jer. 22:13). And Nehemiah, as governor of restored Judah after the Babylonian Exile, launched a national campaign to eliminate unscrupulous business practices and the exploitation of workers (Neh. 5:1-13). All such principles are equally important today.

MOTIVATION

One of the most significant areas of research by industrial psychologists has been employee motivation. Bureaucracy works on the basis of authority established by the book, a structure into which people are inserted. Management plans are devised and then people are hired to fill carefully defined roles. The impersonal nature of this structure often leaves workers feeling expendable and unimportant, with little motivation to perform. Wise management, therefore, includes policies, programs and benefits which by nature stimulate high performance impulses in its employees.

Involvement is a very important motivational factor. People are inclined to work harder when they feel somehow involved in company goals and policies. This feeling can be instilled in workers by making available to them various methods of profit sharing, stock options and other investments which will yield financial returns in proportion to corporate success. Many companies today are creating programs which draw lower level workers into advisory roles, where critical decisions actually hinge upon employee input. A good example is Honeywell's

Quality Circle, where managers and workers sit together in round-table discussions of production problems and planning.³⁸

Another motivational technique is praise. A publication entitled *The One Minute Manager* by Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson promotes people-oriented management, emphasizing that people who feel good about themselves produce the best results. The strength of their method lies in the proposition that dynamic results can be effected in only one minute; that is, by brief encounters of a very motivational kind. They recommend a periodic summons of individual workers to a manager's office, or perhaps a chance encounter in the work area, during which praise is offered for performance, followed by a smile and handshake. In conjunction with such one-minute encounters, the authors also suggest quick reprimands when errors are made, giving attention to constructive and encouraging elements, and concluding also with a friendly handshake. They also recommend periodic reviews of individual job goals where applicable, in the form of a 250 word synopsis read aloud, followed by comments from the worker's immediate supervisor, and ending on a positive note.

These principles are sound and are supported with biblical texts. Praise for doing well was practiced by ancient kings and by leaders of the early church (Prov. 3:27; 2 Cor. 7:4). And on occasions of conflict where admonition is necessary, the best approach is direct confrontation conducted on a cordial basis (Matt. 18:15). One remarkable scripture that applies to many situations is found in Hebrews 10:24 "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

A number of other considerations might be investigated depending on specific circumstances. Certain jobs could be restructured so as to be more interesting by nature, or to establish a closer relationship between a worker's tasks and the final product. Films, tours,

literature, lectures, and refresher courses are also valuable motivational tools. Merit rating systems, on which bonuses, salary increases and promotions are based, are a very important incentive to hard work.

CHARACTER MODELING

Everyone needs someone to look to as a role model. Everyone needs a hero. Christians basically look at Jesus as the principal example in attitude, obedience and self-control. But even the Apostle Paul suggests that in Jesus' personal absence, it is good to look to some other individual who in turn exemplifies those worthy characteristics seen in Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1). No one is in a better position to represent his faith and to model his ideals than a business executive. His sphere of influence is broad, stretching laterally and vertically. Depending on the level of his executive role, perhaps hundreds of individuals look to him as a model for those personal traits that are essential to success. They want to be like him in order to achieve what he has achieved. And those who are honest, upright and kindhearted teach others to be like them. When godly men truly devote themselves to the principles they avow, their potential for positive influence in this world is immeasurable. Unfortunately, executives who are ruthless and authoritarian also teach others by their examples, but what they teach is not good.

One method of promoting higher principles is through organizational policy. Two professors at Brigham Young University have published their research findings on honesty among employees. They determined that behavior on the job does not just depend on personal integrity, but on organizational climate, company policy, atmosphere set by executive personalities, and by mottos promoted by management.³⁹ Workers are more honest when honesty is modelled by company leaders and stressed as company policy. Directors of Mary Kay

Cosmetics draw heavily upon the teachings of Jesus in training consultants in methods of dealing with the public. The company motto is the Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matt. 7:12).

My father worked many years for Crain Chemical Corporation in Dallas, Texas. The company owner and president, Lacey E. Crain, built this multi-million dollar organization out of nothing, and the godly principles he avowed continued after his death in the atmosphere of his company. Many of his sales personnel were blind, deaf or otherwise handicapped. Business conventions were conducted as family functions, where alcoholic beverages were prohibited, prayers were offered before banquets, and Bible classes were available on Sunday mornings to any who were interested.

Many corporate heads such as Crain unashamedly display Bible verses on their office walls, and are both admired and respected throughout their spheres of influence. Such factors as church attendance, marital fidelity and even the reputation of their children are all important aspects of an executive’s influence for good in the world of business.

The many of values and virtues which ever Christian businessman should endeavor to develop in his life is almost endless— character, integrity, impartiality, firmness, courage, compassion, humor, purity, serenity, kindness, industriousness, humility, tact, and perception.⁴⁰ By continually endeavoring to improve himself, he will improve the quality of those who work under his leadership. In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: “An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.”

Chapter Eight

THE QUEST FOR CONTENTMENT

To be thoroughly, absolutely and irreversibly happy is probably the single objective for life that all men and women hold in common. Yet, for many people, even a reasonable degree of contentment is like an elusive butterfly fluttering just beyond grasp. John Bunyan was an English writer and Baptist preacher of the seventeenth century, often called a tinker-philosopher since he was an apprentice to his father, a tinker by trade. In his poem *Of the Boy and Butterfly*, Bunyan depicts the child in all of us as we look for happiness where it cannot be found.

Behold how eager our little boy
 Is for this butterfly, as if all joy
 All profits, honors, and lasting pleasures,
 Were wrapt up in her –
 Of the richest treasures found in her –
 When all her all is lighter than a feather.
 He halloos, runs, and cries out, “Here, boys, here.”
 Nor doth he brambles or the nettles fear.
 He stumbles at the molehills; up he gets,
 And runs again, as one bereft of wits,
 While all his labor and this large outcry
 Is only for a silly butterfly.
 This little boy is much like those
 Whose hearts are wholly at the world’s dispose.
 The butterfly does represent to me
 The world’s best things, at best but fading joys,
 Like this poor butterfly to these our boys.
 His running through the nettles, thorns, and briars
 To gratify his boyish fond desires;
 His tumbling over molehills to attain
 His end, namely his butterfly to gain,
 Plainly shows what hazards some men run
 To get what will be lost as soon as won.
 Men seem, in choice, than children far more wise
 Because they run not after butterflies,
 When yet, alas, for what are empty toys.
 They follow them, and act as beardless boys.⁴¹

Life in America is a conundrum. We are the wealthiest nation in the world and a role model for all nations, in terms of personal freedom and the opportunity to pursue personal ambitions. On the other hand, we are a nation under great stress. From a political point of view, we are engaged in a constant tug-o-war between two major parties and among a great variety of special interests, beliefs, and ideologies. But sociologically, the struggle is to find balance in a system where many interests and entities demand time and energy. Most people struggle to find a balance between career and numerous personal priorities such as family, church, and hobbies. In that regard we are not much different from most other western nations, or other developed nations of the world. Of course, we all recognize that one of the problems is the desire for the very best products at the very lowest prices, and the highest possible wages for the least amount of time and effort.

Jesus taught that one of the objectives of his ministry was to show people how to have a more abundant life (John 10:10). This was not in reference exclusively to spiritual life or the afterlife, but a fuller and richer life on earth. To experience that, one has to learn the secret of being happy and fulfilled in a culture with many obligations that are in conflict with personal interests and commitments.

Some individuals mistakenly think that happiness is linked to the attainment of a certain goal, or the possession of a particular thing. Such people are trapped by what Wayne Dyer calls “futurizing,” the tendency to live in a constant state of stress and incompleteness, surviving demands of the present while reaching forward to grasp the misty and idealistic future.⁴² Stated differently, people are mistaken when they think that they will be fully and completely happy when a particular thing is accomplished, earned, awarded, or acquired. I will be happy when I get a promotion, when the house is re-carpeted, when the boat is paid for, when the kids are all out

of the house and on their own. This process always ends in disappointment, because when the future becomes the present, the expected sense of total fulfillment is not there, or at best it lasts for only a short time and is replaced by another futuristic illusion. Thus, happiness and fulfillment remain elusive, like a butterfly just beyond grasp.

Jesus said that “man’s life does not consist of the abundance of things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). Happiness is a state of mind, and is not really dependent upon wealth, health, prestige, or social status. It does not follow naturally upon an unbroken chain of pleasant experiences.⁴³ Instead, it is a state which results from a healthy, well-adjusted perspective of life, the world, and self. Happiness is the result of a mature and healthy attitude. It draws upon learning, self-discipline, and acceptance of reality, however it may unfold. And although it seems distant and elusive at times, genuine happiness is attainable by everyone, regardless of age, sex, race or circumstance of life. Therefore, the ordinary working man who finds himself enslaved by work, thinking that he will be happy when he earns enough to buy all the things he wants, sadly will never be happy. He is looking in the wrong place. The apostle Paul wrote that he had learned to be content in all circumstances, whether in abundance or poverty (Phil. 4:12).

JOB SATISFACTION

The average adult male in western society spends more than a third of his waking hours each week on the job. It stands to reason then that his pursuit of happiness and contentment is greatly affected by satisfaction with his work. Robert Veninga, in a discussion of “the soulless job,” lists various stages in the degenerative process that is common among dissatisfied workers.⁴⁴ At first, a worker’s attitude might be described as contented, but he is working too many hours, perhaps seventy or more, driven by ambiguous ambitions which he might not be

able to identify in specific terms. Then long hours and the strain to better himself lead to the feeling of being pushed, and this in turn affects his overall sense of wellbeing. This is followed by job disappointment, at which point he begins to experience a general lack of energy on and off the job, and insomnia at night. Then comes stage three, which Veninga calls job disillusionment. This includes exhaustion and failing health. As unhappiness intensifies, the worker reaches job despair. There are few waking moments when his mind is not on his job, and even when he is ill he feels compelled to carry on. Finally, he hits a brick wall when he reaches the end of his physical and emotional endurance. He cannot go on. He either quits, or suffers emotional disturbance obvious enough to warrant his being fired. He might even turn to drugs or alcohol, which in turn leads to termination.

As tragic as this may seem, it happens fearfully often. But the whole sordid scenario is avoidable. There was a time in history in which miserable working conditions were expected, and vocational choices were limited. For the most part, workers were either peasants or slaves, and either did whatever they were told to do, or they were trained in a particular trade as a matter of family tradition. But in an age of unlimited career opportunities, job satisfaction is almost totally a matter of personal choice and initiative. Vocational counsellors today play a key role in helping individuals match their talents and interests with job requirements, and ultimately to attain meaningful and rewarding careers. Naturally, jobs with high status and big bucks are more desirable, but they are fewer and harder to obtain. And principles of high demand and competition often force less capable individuals to settle for careers below their ambitions. Intense dissatisfaction might haunt those who are unable to assess their abilities realistically, so job satisfaction might hinge on selecting a vocation for which one's abilities are suited. Aiming

high is noble, but in a competitive and specialized society, this can easily result in disappointment.⁴⁵

Gary Collins, in a general text on counselling, points out that many people are unhappy with their jobs simply because no planning was involved in career selection.⁴⁶ They find jobs in the “help wanted” ads. They work simply for a paycheck and some degree of security, but find no element of happiness or fulfillment in their work. Having a job is a necessary evil, a daily drudgery forced upon them but not really wanted. And some people stay in such jobs for years, or maybe all their lives, and therefore comprise a massive segment of the population who are basically unhappy at work, all the time.

Some dissatisfaction also arises because career choices were made too early in life. High school students are under extreme pressure from parents, teachers and peers to make decisions and commitments they may not be ready to make. Then after a few short years, having invested time, money and energy in vocational training or earning a college degree, they find themselves committed to a field in which they have comparatively little interest. Many individuals spend several years in college doing general studies, and may reach their middle or late twenties without developing any concrete career ambitions.

Admittedly, this problem might not exist in a culture where vocational choices are limited. But along with all the advantages of freedom, there seem to be certain disadvantages which we have not fully understood until now. Ideally, a job needs to match an individual’s aptitude, interests, and even personality type, and when one finds himself trapped by an unhappy job situation, and possibly facing a life of discontent, professional vocational guidance would be well advised.

TEDIUM

Of course, an important factor in job satisfaction is the nature of the work. If a job is boring and tedious, it is unlikely to be fulfilling for just about anyone. People generally do better in a field of work that interests them the most. Naturally, where there is interest there is also greater ease in attaching value and purpose, and perhaps even to see work as a contribution to society as a whole. But even then, sometimes a conscientious worker can find himself struggling in a hum-drum routine that gives him little personal satisfaction.

In Britain during the nineteenth century there was a reaction against a decline in standards associated with machinery and factory production. What came to be called The Arts and Crafts Movement began in decorative and fine arts, but over time influenced craft makers, designers, and town planners as well. The ideas it represented came from numerous innovative individuals, such as architect Augustus Pugin, writer John Ruskin, and artist William Morris. It is said that Ruskin and Morris investigated the problems associated with the current modern industrial system, and found among factory workers a disturbing sense of slavery to soulless machinery. This observation, along with appalling work conditions during that era, led to the birth of industrial psychology. The next half century saw extensive scientific effort both to improve work conditions and to increase productivity.

Lawrence Jacks describes a factory in 1925 where food products were prepared and exported.⁴⁷ One man stood all day long at one end of a production line, doing nothing but knock the tops off fresh eggs. Charles Dickens drew a similar picture of Mr. Podsnap, a caricature of a pompous Englishman in the west end of London. His lifestyle was routine to the point of total boredom: “up at eight, shave at 8:15, breakfast at 9, to the city by 10, home again at 5:30, dinner

at 7.” It was a regular and unaltered program day after day, year after year. The American novel *Babbitt* tells the same story. Set in a large prosperous city with fast growth and vicious competitive spirit, Babbitt’s life is that of a pathetic worker victimized by the tedious cycle of unfulfilling labor.

Today, the work place involves considerable advancements in tools, methods and technology. But still, many workers suffer the basic problem of tedium. There is no way to calculate what proportion of men and women have jobs which they find creative, challenging and meaningful, as opposed to those who find their jobs boring, meaningless, and unfulfilling. There must be millions of workers who stand all day on an assembly line, fitting the same part to the same housing, or threading wires through a piece of conduit, or drilling holes in parts they cannot identify. Likewise, there must be many workers who pull a handle or press a treddle, not really making anything, but making a minuscule part of something, and experiencing no feelings of identity with the finished product. They simply watch a machine make something, all the while hating the monotonous, tedious grind of the day, with no sense of pride or accomplishment. If someone asks “How was your day?” they answer “Fine.” But deep down, the feeling is: “This is a boring job. I hate it!”

Tedium is a very significant hindrance to happiness. In recent years a great deal of research has gone into the specific topic of attitude toward work, and psychologists seem to have given special consideration to the triad of factor-attitude-effect. Herzberg capsulizes a host of data and suggests the following factors in order of their importance to most working men.⁴⁸

1. Achievement— pride in the successful completion of a task.
2. Recognition— praise from superiors and externals.
3. Nature of the work— challenging, creative, and inherently fulfilling.
4. Responsibility— sense of wellbeing derived from the knowledge that a task, equipment, or personnel are entrusted to his care.
5. Advancement— promotions upon performance of duration.

6. Salary— fair wage for service rendered.
7. Other factors — inter-personal relationships, status, company policy, job security, personal life.

These findings suggest that the most important considerations in job satisfaction are really subjective in nature and are almost totally governed by one's attitude toward himself and his work. Wayne Dyer, who has authored several texts on self-fulfillment, suggests that a man who has mastered the art of "now living" will find meaning, fascination and fulfillment in any job.

Why is it that one garbage man is surly, bangs the can around as hard as he can, and leaves trash scattered in the gutter, while another one is always pleasant, neat and tells you "It's fascinating what people throw away; the archaeologist who excavates the dumps in a thousand years is really going to have fun trying to figure out what this stuff is." Or tells you "you know, there's a new recycling center for cans and bottles opening up a few blocks away." The garbage, the trucks, the boss and the pay are the same for both of them, so I leave it to you to judge why one of them is happy and constructive and the other is miserable and destructive.⁴⁹

This is a sound observation. And it would seem that even when a job is tedious and dull by nature, it can be fulfilling and meaningful to a man who has the right attitude toward it. He must see in his job, whatever it might be, a task of importance and he must take pride in performing the task to the best of his ability.

When the noted English architect, Sir Christopher Wren, was directing construction of a new cathedral, a passing journalist asked permission to interview some of the workers. "What are you doing?" he asked each of three men. The first replied, "I am cutting stone for ten shillings a day." The second answered, even more grudgingly, "I am spending ten hours of my life ever day on this job." But the third, a workman with a healthier attitude toward his job, answered proudly "I am personally assisting Sir Christopher Wren to construct one of London's greatest cathedrals." Therein is the secret to job satisfaction, even in tasks that some would consider dull and tedious.

COPING WITH CHANGE

Another challenge in the modern work arena is the feeling of insecurity that results from rapid change. Adjustment to change has always been difficult for individuals, as well as society. But only in recent history has change become so rapid that it threatens emotional stability. In the past century the world has become a fast turning carrousel, rocket powered and computerized. The pace of life is staggering, and many people are intimidated by the volume of information one must absorb simply to function as a responsible adult. In some fields, such as computer science, advances are being made so rapidly that technicians cannot keep up. By the time a trainee has completed a course, the equipment he learned on is obsolete. Alvin Toffler's book *Future Shock* demonstrates the universal devastating effect such rapid change has had upon modern man. Few are really able to keep pace, and some have such a strong sense of finality about the direction of humanity that they cannot envision more than a few more decades until the whole system will end in a great catastrophic doomsday. Elton Trueblood, writing at the close of World War II, said that the most common and most amazing reaction to the shattering events of that time was the emergence of an "Interim mentality," meaning that life continued, but it was marked with a sense that the world is waiting for a catastrophe.

Our economic system is failing today because men have so largely lost incentive to achievement. And they have lost incentive because, in their entire manner of living, their psychological and spiritual needs are not fulfilled. They go back and forth to their places of employment, beget children and try to pay their bills, but they do not feel that all these details are steps toward some great and dignifying end. Even dull work, whether manual or clerical, that is intrinsically repetitive and mechanical, could be ennobling if it were seen as part of something larger, but this is precisely what we've lost.⁵⁰

During the years immediately following that war there was a sharp decline in the number of young people going into specialized training, no doubt a reflection of a general attitude of fatalism. That changed in the 1950s, which became a carefree era marked by rock and roll and

escalating prosperity. Those were the “Happy Days,” when the Builder Generation left war behind and set about starting businesses. New schools and churches sprang up in communities all over the country. However, that positive spirit was short lived. It was chilled by a long list of social concerns, such as the cold war, the effort to balance power among the world’s super powers, and more significant, the threat of nuclear war that could eliminate humanity altogether.

Tomorrow is a significant factor in the modern west. People seldom live for yesterday, or even think about it. They build for the future. But where the future is uncertain, and where each man wrestles with a sense of uneasiness, insecurity, and temporary living, the whole society suffers. Jacks saw this developing early in the twentieth century. In his view western civilization was like a nest of ants preparing for winter. There was an obvious mental tension, and anxiety which could be felt by everyone, from government officials to common workers. He writes:

I venture to think that even in these practical times with their discoveries, advertisings, exploration and noisy successes, there does arise in us from time to time a dim disturbing suspicion, a haunting half thought, that the whole enterprise on which we are engaged is futile.⁵¹

Perhaps that feeling will be with humanity from now on. Coping with change and uncertainty will continue to be a challenge, thrust upon us by our penchant for exploring, experimenting and improving. If you have not experienced such a feeling already, brace yourself. World population, rapidly developing technology, and urbanization are all signals of what is to come. The past century has brought the most significant change in human history. There have been more technological advances than in the rest of human history combined. Today there are a few individuals still living who have witnessed the history of aviation from the first flight of the Wright Flier at Kitty Hawk all the way to the launch of space shuttles at Cape Kennedy, and the rendezvous with the International Space Station. That happened in a single

lifetime. Future generations might see this planet become one immense city, the colonization of earth's moon, commercial mining on other planets and the development of underwater cities. All the engineering and robotics of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* will be common place sooner than we think. By the year 2040 college graduates will be applying for jobs that don't even exist today. Computer science and data processing are skyrocketing. And of great concern is the likelihood that with continued rapid change, there will be political and social problems of a far greater magnitude than any problems we face today.⁵²

Yet with all this frightening change, from today's world to tomorrow's unknown, man remains basically the same, with the same basic physical and emotional needs. In each generation the individual still has to face himself, struggle for happiness and fulfillment, for personal dignity, and for a spiritual relationship with the Almighty. In each age the plain ordinary working man continues to work to provide for himself and others, and in that quest experience threats, challenges, conflicts, and frustrations.

LIFE PURPOSE

Herzberg observes that in ancient cultures every worker had a hard life, filled with threats and uncertainty.⁵³ But the factor which made life less emotionally taxing than that of a modern worker is that his efforts generally pertained directly to his immediate needs, and to those of his family and community. In some primitive cultures, all work was done by the group for the benefit of the group. Shelters were constructed by various members of the group. Children were nurtured by members of the group. Hunters brought their quarry home to be shared by all. Even agrarian cultures as recent as the nineteenth century enjoyed a hand-to-mouth connection of work to reward that does not exist in industrial and high-tech cultures. Farmers harvested crops

for their own consumption, ranchers ate meat from their own herds, and craftsmen made products and sold them directly to people in their own communities. There was personal interaction in the efforts that provided for everyone. The simplicity and directness of this kind of culture, the relationship of work and reward, provided a sense of fulfillment to each member of the community and the community as a whole.

In contrast, the Industrial Revolution brought mechanization, corporate hierarchy and extensive job specialization. The whole economic system has become complex, involving a vast network of interdependent specialists who never meet or communicate directly with each other. Daily community life depends on water, gas and electrical supply, garbage collection and disposal, internet and television supply, police and fire department services, hospitals and clinics, grocery stores, auto repair and service stations, and dozens of other companies without whose specific service a community is rendered helpless. In the modern system of complex infrastructure and international marketing, the individual worker often struggles to find a sense of purpose or fulfillment. He works for money in the form of a check, and after withholdings for insurance, retirement, social security and taxes, his take-home pay seems very meager compensation for his efforts. Often funds are transferred electronically into an account, and are nothing more than an adjustment on a computer spread sheet. He never touches or sees his pay. Sometimes he sees himself being totally controlled by machinery and computers, which are completely insensitive to his needs and feelings.

JOB SECURITY

Job security is defined as assurance, in the form of contract, collective bargaining agreement, or labor legislation, that a worker will keep his job without the risk of becoming

unemployed. But every worker knows that job security is an illusion. Most industries are sensitive to numerous economic shifts, and in the “real world” job security is based on informed speculation. Large scale lay-offs by big corporations have at times left hundreds, even thousands of workers without jobs and no possibility of work in the same field. Sometimes highly trained technicians have found themselves looking for new vocations, because the positions for which they trained became obsolete and they were terminated with little warning. One of the best examples is the aerospace industry. In the 1960s, there appeared to be unlimited potential for growth and expansion in the field of space exploration. But within a few years the market was flooded with PhDs in aeronautical engineering, and jobs became scarce at best. Then when cuts in America’s space program became necessary, thousands of technicians and engineers were laid off. This kind of trend creates insecurity, even paranoia, among men with specialized education, and even more so among those with limited skills and training.

In an age of computer technology and rapid advances in almost every field, older men especially have difficulty keeping pace. Some fear being replaced by a mechanical brain or robot. And the fear is not without basis, for robotics in large assembly lines has already proved itself in several countries. Older men also tend to feel uneasy about younger men and women with university degrees coming up through the ranks at a rapid pace and replacing them, or worse taking management positions above them. Often men in their late 50s or early 60s simply live day to day, holding on until retirement so they can get out. Some corporations have been able to offer incentives to early retirement, while others have tried to pressure out their aging employees with long hours and impossible workloads. Whether real or imaginary, these possibilities play a role in either facilitating or inhibiting personal happiness and contentment.

CLIMBING THE LADDER

In certain fields, employment includes potential for advancement. This is especially so in management, as suggested in the common phrase “climbing the corporate ladder.” In western society, part of the cultural nurturing of gender roles is to instill in males a sense of necessity to climb, to advance, to stay ahead as if running a race. This drive becomes so compelling that many men feel pursued, like a fox in the field with a dozen hungry hounds yelping at his heels. He has to beat the other guy to the draw, keep moving, keep climbing, or he will slip behind and get trampled in the rush. Someone said “Just when I thought I was getting ahead in the rat race, the other team sent in fresh rats.” The term “success” has become a key word, and every man hopes to scale the wall of the pyramid to reach a level which is recognized by his peers as successful.

But questions arise about the motivation to “be successful.” Does anyone ever reach a plateau at which there is really any marked and recognizable satisfaction? Is contentment in any way attached to this kind of success? Is there a healthy level of achievement at which a man should cease feeling driven to climb, and therefore be happy where he is?

There are a number of good books on the subject of achievement and self-fulfillment which encourage striving for goals of excellence, reaching for the stars, daring to dream the impossible dream and then striving to make it come true. And in every such publication, the author seems convinced that this attitude of life will bring a degree of happiness which the individual would never have attained otherwise. In fact, such writers address themselves largely to individuals who seem trapped by discontent. But it should be noted that some individuals, despite switching on the achievement drive and blossoming into a dynamic sales closer or advancing from janitor to corporate CEO, still do not find happiness. As was pointed out at the

start, happiness is totally a matter of attitude toward life and its components. It does spring from the components themselves.

In 1525 the peasant class in Germany found a way to grab the coattail of the Protestant Reformation in an endeavor to break out of social degradation. A number of documents were produced, the most famous being the Twelve Articles, outlining the major points of discontent. Their demands would seem meager today, when viewed from the vantage point of American social freedom and equality. They simply wanted freedom from servitude, and less oppression from their lords. They wanted legislation to protect widows and orphans from exploitation, and to prohibit lords from appropriating community land for personal use. They wanted to hunt venison and fowl, and to fish, which were privileges enjoyed only by the wealthy. Martin Luther, who had already come to the fore with his provocative criticism of the Catholic Church, took their part in an attempt to establish peace.⁵⁴

These developments, as part of world Renaissance, led to the unparalleled freedoms now enjoyed by western civilization. But what is noteworthy in this discussion is that all the advances and personal freedoms, rights and privileges have not produced any greater degree of happiness. In fact, most sociologists and psychologists would agree that the volume of suicides, anxiety related illness and emotional disorders is greater today than even a century ago. It is clear that technological and social advancement do not in themselves bring personal contentment and peace of mind. In the present era, strikes among dock workers, postal workers, independent truckers, professional athletes, air controllers and garbage collectors in various parts of the United States, which is the wealthiest and most socially advanced nation in the world, serves as ample evidence that happiness is an elusive butterfly.

RESISTING MATERIALISM

Perhaps the greatest enemy of happiness is materialism. Since the dawn of time, individuals have struggled to live in peace, forever inflamed by the desire to have, and to have what others have. The laws of Hammurabi and Moses, and the teachings of Confucius, Buddha and Mahavira all warn of the evils of covetousness, greed and materialism. People are never very happy as long as they compare themselves to others. Today we call it “keeping up with the Joneses.” Solomon, speaking as the preacher in a book called Ecclesiastes, concluded that his materialistic philosophy of life had left him empty and disappointed.⁵⁵ He had tried everything in the search for happiness— art, architecture, servants, music, lands, agriculture, occult wisdom, wealth, and collecting wives and concubines, but he discovered that none of these “things” brought fulfillment. The New Testament writer James described the same problem among his readers, saying that they lust, and desire to have what other have, and are willing to kill in order to have, but they are never happy (James 4:1-3). It is human nature to constantly compare what we have to what others have. It is likely that anybody could be happy and well-adjusted if he lived in isolation from others, so there is no competition. Everyone has experienced the neighborhood chain reaction starting perhaps at Christmas when one kid gets a new toy or game, and then everyone else has to have one. Adults are affected the same way with more sophisticated toys like exotic cars, boats, planes, extravagant houses, all of which are status symbols. The average American has an income that ranks in the top 10% of world population, and a standard of living envied by all. Yet, if you ask any working man how he is faring he’ll tell you he’s barely getting by, poor as church mouse, and angry because no matter how he tries he cannot catch up to the leader. In the rat race, someone else catches all the breaks. The problem is

that compares himself to those who have more, and he sees himself at the bottom of the heap. In reality he is part of a huge middle class with great wealth, compared to the rest of the world, but he looks at the small minority at the top, the peak of the triangle, which creates the illusion of poverty at his level. His problem is not what he has or does not have, but his distorted perspective, and his attitude toward it.

It is ironic that in a nation with so much wealth there is so much unhappiness. One of America's issues is bondage to commodities at the sacrifice of family relations and personal emotional health. This systemic problem is addressed by sociologists like Jack and Judith Balswick.⁵⁶ The number of dual earner families is on the rise, and many complain that the pressure of work simply does not allow for quality family time. There are many suggestions as to what can be done to help families ease back from the excessive work hours, and enjoy more time together. Some suggest that the problem could be addressed by employer programs that encourage stronger family values and allow special time off work to be with the family. Others say that churches might give financial assistance to families that choose to work less and focus more on the family.

However, the real issue is that the individual and collective hunger for commodities demands income to pay for them, which in turn requires more hours of work to match financial expenses and commitments. Many couples place themselves in a bind early in their marriage by first choosing a life-style and then committing to whatever level of work is required to pay for it. The Balswicks make it clear that we cannot count on society to adopt family-oriented values. Rather, every person and every family must get control of the addiction to things, even at the risk of appearing foolish. Rather than working longer to support the lust for commodities, a family together should agree to live with less.

Another consideration is the fact that among the highest paid individuals are movie and television stars, musicians and professional athletes. That means that while American consumers constantly complain about paying taxes to finance government and infrastructure, we are more than happy to pay for entertainment. That, combined with the other luxury commodities that we crave, such as cars, boats, motorcycles, RVs, alcohol, tobacco, pets, toys, jewelry, and the newest and best electronic devices, as well as eating out too frequently, comprise the primary components of a family's expenditure and in turn the nation's economy. In such an economy, with a systemic drive to acquire possessions, there is a consequential increase in emotional health issues and decline in quality time with family.

Art Linkletter, famous radio and television personality, said that the glamorous lifestyle of the rich and famous is not all it is imagined to be, and more to be avoided than idolized. He drew attention to affluent neighborhoods, such as Bel Air in Hollywood, California as a center of alcoholism, drug abuse and emotional imbalance. He said that this should be a clear indication that money is not a passport to personal contentment. Like the man in Jesus' parable who was obsessed with tearing down his present barns to build bigger ones, so it is evident that the compulsion to build and acquire, along with the lust for fame and fortune, are an escalator leading to nowhere. A close friend of mine stood next to a wealthy industrialist at a dinner party, listening to an uncommonly honest conversation about personal problems. This individual had become emotionally unstable and addicted to prescription drugs, and he said remorsefully, "I would gladly give it all up, if I could start all over and just have a happy home."

Psychiatrist Robert Coles has conducted extensive research among the poorer segments of American society, such as migrant workers, mountain people, bayou fisherman, and the like.⁵⁷ And as strange as it may seem, among them are to be found some of the happiest and best

adjusted people in the country. These have learned the art of enjoying simple things, such as long conversations at the supper table, quietness in early morning hours, sunrise and sunset without rush hour traffic, time with friends and loved ones not hurried by the clock and a busy schedule, and an entire style of life that is not strained by the obsession to equal or better everyone else. Perhaps this is one of the reasons no New Testament spokesman attempts to advise on selection of a trade, since unity in Christ terminates all class consciousness and distinctions of honor among professions (Col. 3:11; 1 Cor. 2:26-31; James 2:1ff). Those traits which our society strongly encourages, including competitiveness, ambition, and the drive to acquire wealth, are limited in terms of desirability and personal well-being. Happiness does not depend on such traits.

ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES

A final note pertains to the ability to adjust to transient stress, losses and disappointments that occur in normal life. No one is free from occasional pain and sorrow. No life is all sunshine and roses. Even for a Christian who is doing his best to serve God, there will come times that are difficult and challenging. These challenges are not to be seen as punishment for wrong doing, nor should they even be considered the will of God. We have no theological reason to think that God brings pain, suffering, and failure upon anyone. It is simply a matter of life in a real world, where “the rain falls on the just and unjust” (Matt. 5:45). Good people often suffer the same sickness, disease and misfortune as godless reprobates. The notion that everything happens for a reason is unsound and counterproductive, and is a derivative from Calvinism that is promoted in American pop-religious culture. But it is neither sound nor does it promote healthy or spiritual well-being. In contrast, those who put their trust in God have an advantage in that their positive,

faith-based attitude carries them through such trials and keeps them going when others might give up in despair. Bad things happen to everyone, good people and bad people. But those who believe in God see Him as their unfailing friend, ever present and always working for their best interest.

Another observation made by Linkletter is that one of America's greatest ailments is its desire to be happy, and on an emotional high, all the time. People who are truly happy have the ability to ride through pain, sorrow and temporary unpleasantness, confident that things will get better and the future is bright. One of the most meaningful literary phrases is "it came to pass in the process of time." Happy people understand that, and refuse to allow transient, unhappy moments to rob them of the deep, abiding happiness that pervades their overall approach to life. James writes: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance (James 1:2-3).

The famous evangelical theologian Francis A. Schaeffer asks "How should we then live?" In response to all that has been said, what is the working man to do? The answer is that he should take more seriously the basic principles of spiritual and emotional health, and develop a deep abiding trust in God as the divine architect of this universal enterprise in which we live and work. And from that platform, he must continue to help build and organize as if the world will stand for millennia to come, but feel confident and courageous if it does not. Each working man must see himself as a vital component in human society and enjoy helping to lay foundations for the generations who will follow, trusting that if they are here, they will build on them and live on in faith.

Chapter Nine

THE MACHO IMAGE

One of the greatest stumbling blocks to the average male in western society today is the constant pressure to conform to an image. Society has its ideas of true masculinity, and even if no one is capable of fitting the mold perfectly, the qualities of the ideal male are constantly exalted in the public eye. Today the super-male image is described by the term “macho.” The average working man feels himself in constant stress between opposing forces. On the one hand, he is compared to superheroes with well-defined muscles and the combat skills of a Navy Seal. On the other hand, he is urged to be himself and to seek goals and standards which do not conform to society’s composite macho male.⁵⁸ This is especially true if he believes in God and wants to be identified as a “godly man.” In so doing, he knows he will incur the ridicule of a predominantly disbelieving world.

Ann Steinmann and David Fox, in a book entitled *The Male Dilemma*, present an objective look at these opposing forces experienced by the modern male. Special attention is given to the pain of transition in an age of history characterized by rapid change and shifting values. The sexual revolution has upset traditional roles of male and female and caused severe difficulty in both genders to adjust and find new identity. Steinmann and Fox ask:

What is it like to be a man in society undergoing nothing short of sexual revolution, in which every major change in the relative status of men and women during the last fifty years has brought women freedom and power undreamed of even by the early crusaders for women’s rights? What is it like to be a man at a time when, with the advent of the pill, women have the sexual freedom formerly practiced only by men and known to women only in fantasy; a time when every gain for women is paralleled by a corresponding loss of male freedom, job and status? What is it like to be a man in a society in which these changes occur at an ever-accelerating pace and in which every book written about the period ponders the problem of...women?⁵⁹

The answer to these questions for the average male is quite simple. It's sheer HELL! And the conflicts within him are intensified by his loss of personal identity to a non-existent super-stud, glamorized on television, in magazines and in movies, and idolized by women. The ordinary working man is expected by society to be a good citizen, loyal worker, doting father, faithful husband, and great lover. But he is constantly bombarded by super-images against which he is compared by all his peers. Borrowing further from Steinmann and Fox, we can picture two extremes within the male segment of American society. At one end of the spectrum is the Macho Man, comprising about ten per cent of the total. He is the rugged outdoor type who drinks Coors and smokes Marlboro, and is more at home out in the woods than in the city. He can be found rafting down a river, hanging on the side of a cliff, free falling from a plane, or riding a horse along a wilderness trail high in the Rockies. His personality exudes authority and commands respect. He spends his days in the company of men, and his nights in the company of adoring and submissive women.

The extreme opposite of this macho image could be called Casper Milquetoast, representing the ten percent of males at the other end of the field. But this weakling is male only in physiology. His behavior is meek and passive; he is easily browbeaten and thoroughly domesticated. His limits are set by his wife who plans his activities, gives him permission to speak, and dominates him in every sense of the word. His children show him no respect and are shamefully disobedient.

Eighty percent of males fit somewhere between these two extremes. In a democratic society, one might think that this vast number of men would set the pace and serve as the standard for masculinity. Instead, the average male is being torn apart by pressures and influences from opposite directions. He resents being compared to movie stars like Robert

Redford, Clint Eastwood or Burt Reynolds, as much as a woman resents being compared to Bo Derek and rated from 1 to 10 on the basis of her facial beauty and body shape. But from a very early age every male in the western world is groomed for competition. Before he is out of high school, the anxiety of a fast paced and highly charged world is already gnawing at his gut. Regardless of the profession he might choose, he is expected to think fast, perform well, handle responsibility, right from the starting gun, and then advance steadily toward an executive position in a high-profile organization. His mind is programmed to be successful, which does not come without serious competition. The stress factors are building up within him before he even reaches legal manhood, and he is on a preregistered course toward hypertension, ulcers, high blood pressure and heart failure. And while the attainment of success demands virtually all his energy, society also expects him to have expensive hobbies which show off his manly agility. If nothing else, he feels compelled to get a tattoo of a skull and cross-bones on his arm, drive around in a pick-up truck with a gun rack in the window, and maybe grow a beard, wear boots, and chew tobacco, all to look tough and give the impression that he does manly things.

Paradoxically, there is a completely different set of forces tugging at the male in the form of feminism. Advocates of women's liberation complain of traditional male dominance, and suggest changes in gender roles that respect women and acknowledge their legal and social equality. While this objective is justly warranted, it is often interpreted by men as emasculation in mind, body and spirit. A recent television special on homosexuality revealed that some of today's confusion of sexual identity has its source in the pressures of conforming to an image. One gay businessman expressed the fulfillment and peace of mind he had discovered in a homosexual relationship, void of responsibility for providing support, threats of divorce and alimony payments, and other required symbols of masculinity. Another spoke of his freedom

from male competitive pressure, especially to win feminine attention through strength and masculine adroitness.

The ordinary working man of the twentieth century lives in a world which expects him to commit emotional and spiritual suicide just to prove he is macho, while at the same time giving way to the feminist demand for equality. It is impossible for a man to live a fulfilled life while totally preoccupied by the mixed messages of society, to discover his feminine side while flexing his macho muscles, to be all he can be, but not to over-step boundaries of propriety. It is equally impossible to establish a solid relationship with God when he is constantly confused about his ultimate standard, his ideal and idol— is it James Bond, or is it Jesus Christ?

It may be surprising for an ordinary man to learn that the typical macho image is not really the ultimate in masculinity. Admittedly, men are more naturally inclined to action sports and certain kinds of physical labor than women. But the composite picture of the macho male, when lived out in real life, is an immature, irresponsible, insecure and immoral individual who achieves very little of real worth to and within society. He is a little boy trying to prove that he is the six million dollar man. It takes far more courage and masculinity to be a real man, in the eyes of man, woman, and God.

FAMILY RESPONSIBILITY

Somewhere the idea got started that to be tied down to family responsibility is not macho. Singles bars are full of men, young and old, who think that masculinity is synonymous with freedom. So, the image of a bearded guy rolling along Route 66 on his Harley-Davidson represents the ultimate in male ambition. Nothing could be farther from the truth. While some men might not feel a social or spiritual obligation to marry and have children, the acceptance of

such responsibility is one way in which genuine fortitude is expressed. The film entitled *The Magnificent Seven* came out in the early stages of macho-mania. In one scene the character played by Charles Bronson made a speech to three little Mexican boys, rebuking them for admiring a soldier of fortune such as himself, and not giving credit to their own fathers. These men, he stated firmly, although they are peasant farmers, have far more courage than he. In this, the writer of the screen play attributed due respect to any man who shoulders the responsibility to be a husband and father.

This seems to be the way the typical God-oriented working man demonstrates masculinity. Writing from the perspective of a patriarchal society, Paul describes the husband as filling a role that reflects the “glory of God” (1 Cor. 11:7). Elsewhere in the New Testament, Christ is compared to a husband who sacrifices himself to care for the needs of his wife and family (Eph. 5:25-33). This places a lot of weight on a man’s shoulders. Political officials are seen to age considerably during even a short term of office. Business executives suffer untold tension and anxiety in making decisions that affect thousands of employees and millions of stock-holders. Clinical tests on monkeys have verified that responsibility for feeding and caring for another monkey can cause enough stress to produce stomach ulcers. There is no greater pressure in the world than responsibility for the welfare of others.

GODLY STANDARDS

Some men think that godliness means being a sissy. It is a mistake to define masculinity in terms of a vile tongue, low moral and ethical standards, and disinterest in religion. In reality, such a man demonstrates shallow character and very little self-discipline. He operates on the basis of physical and emotional impulse. A gorilla can express his feelings by yelling, making

threatening gestures, and throwing feces at his antagonist. Any boar pig can have sex, turned on by sight or scent. But those talents and tendencies to dominate do not represent superiority, nor does “barnyard morality” offer humanity an edge over the rest of the animal kingdom. In reality, it is control over his appetites and impulses that gives evidence of true superiority.

During the 1950s there was an incident in Germany involving four American soldiers who were accused of gang-raping an eleven-year-old girl. The 1961 film based on that incident was called *Town Without Pity*. During their trial all four soldiers pleaded guilty, but the testimony of an army psychiatrist was that Corporal Jim Larkin was impotent and therefore could not have participated. Larkin angrily argued his guilt. But the court gave him a lesser sentence, no doubt concluding that he sided with his comrades to uphold his own masculine image.

When a man chooses to sacrifice character for macho image, he allows himself to be exploited and abused. There is nothing noble or praise-worthy about the absence of character. Nor is virtue evidence of weakness. The highest standards of morality and ethics require the greatest degree of courage, character, and self-discipline.

It is unfortunate that many famous paintings of Jesus are from Renaissance artists who portrayed him fashionably pale skinned, unblemished, and cleanly washed. Jesus was the son of a carpenter, and no doubt bore all the scars and blemishes of his trade. Jesus is also unjustly portrayed by some as a raving lunatic. On the contrary, he was in complete control of his human passions and impulses. His speech and behavior were disciplined. He had clarity of thought, determined will, flawless character, impeccable standards of morality, and an unyielding dedication to his noble objectives. He was at home with all people in any situation, yet he never yielded to the temptation to do evil or compromise his noble mission just to identify with sinful

companions. He was not the victim of his environment, but the master of it. And more than that, he was the master of himself.

EMOTIONS

There was once a professional football team called the Houston Oilers. In 1980, they finished the regular season with eleven wins and five losses, earning a wildcard spot in the playoffs for the third year in a row. But they were defeated by the Oakland Raiders and flew home totally dejected. At the Astrodome, they were met by an enormous crowd and were overwhelmed by the team spirit and supportive enthusiasm. Bum Phillips, then head coach of the Oilers, was unable to hold back his tears as he strained to express the team's gratitude for such a welcome. Real men have emotions. Real men shed tears.

Similarly, Bob Lilly and Dick Butkus, both memorable NFL players, wept openly during acceptance speeches when inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. And no illustration is more famous in the history of modern athletics than that of Gail Sayers, who unashamedly expressed his deep love for the dying Brian Piccolo.⁶⁰ These, and many other examples, are a stark contrast to the image that some have fixed for masculinity. A serious error is made by parents who teach their sons that big boys don't cry. Our society has encouraged certain emotions in men that are considered aggressive and masculine, but other emotions, such as fear, compassion, disappointment, loneliness, regret, or love, have been labelled weak emotions reserved only for women and children. We have much in common with the ancient Spartans who trained their children to show no emotion at all, and to kill and to make love with mechanical dispassion. There is nothing unmanly about tears. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus feeling intense compassion for his friends whose vision was limited and faith weak (John 11:35). Simon

Peter wept in bitter disappointment for having denied Jesus in his hour of trial (Mark 14:72). Modern males have been programmed to feel threatened and vulnerable if they admit being wrong or express their emotional need for another person's love. Emotions are not a sign of weakness, nor is it weak and unmanly to say "I'm sorry," "I was wrong," "I feel confused," "I need your help," or "I love you." A man who is truly macho is a man with emotions and no fear of revealing them.

For this reason it takes a true man to admit his need for God, and to recognize the error in his mode of living in time to avoid disaster. It took courage for the noble King David to confess his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and his conspiracy to murder her husband Uriah. Prompted by Nathan's tale of the ewe lamb, David eventually confessed "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13). During the years that followed, David suffered deep remorse for his behavior, struggling to accept divine forgiveness and to forgive himself. Some of his most beautiful and touching psalms reveal these deep feelings, and illustrate the occasional illumination that occurs during one's pilgrimage through life. Before David could truly know himself, he had to bare his soul to his friends and to his Creator, and in knowing himself he came to know God.

Chapter Ten

MIND RENEWAL

A famous text in Proverbs 23:7 says poetically that as a man “thinks in his heart” so is he. In ancient wisdom the heart was the seat of character. Thoughts and actions, whether good or evil, are ultimately a reflection of one’s true identity. The Genesis story of the Great Flood includes a summary description of Noah’s contemporaries: “Every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5). The misery which people bring upon themselves through injustice and inhumanity can be described as nothing more than the realization of their thoughts and desires. The collection of books that comprise the Christian Bible paint a picture of God’s relationship and dealings with mankind, and divine awareness of human thoughts, motives, desires and fantasies that result in evil actions. This is the basis for the common Christian doctrine of the fallen state of humanity. People, in short, are sinful— not because we inherit guilt or are born sinful, as in some Christian traditions, but because we have inherent weaknesses and tendencies that result in evil. From time to time we all think, say, and do things that are beneath what Abraham Lincoln called “the better angels of our nature.”

Jesus’ teaching was provocative and revolutionary because it took Jewish rabbinical legalism back to its headwaters, and applied the Law of Moses to gut-level everyday life. Jesus went to the heart of human problems, the human heart. He said that the source of adultery is lust, and the source of murder as hatred, envy and greed (Matt. 5:21-28). He also quoted the prophet Isaiah to demonstrate that attempts to worship God are often nullified by hypocrisy and insincerity: “These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Mark 7:6).

For this reason, an essential step in the working man's struggle for maturity and completeness is to gain control of his heart, mind, and character.

FANTASY CRAZE

This subject is by nature as broad as the human intellect. But few would argue with the suggestion that one of the most common human problems is the control of thoughts. This topic may well be the Achilles' heel of the human soul. If a man can gain control over his secret perceptions, wishes and fantasies, and the intense emotions associated with them, he then will have won the battle against the Evil One who lurks in the dark corners of his own mind.

The subject of fantasy has interested psychologists for many years, and is usually listed among the numerous escape mechanisms by which an individual might avoid facing and dealing with the anxieties of real life. Fantasies are generally determined by unfulfilled wishes and ambitions, and emerge from the subconscious in exaggerated idealistic images similar to those of the dream state. They range in nature from a child's make-believe conversation with a doll or toy soldier, to vivid visions of sexual fulfillment. There are fantasies of revenge, death, power, conquest, fame and fortune. Some fantasies are sedate and euphoric; others are bizarre, grotesque, and violent. Subtle expressions of individual fantasy emerge in art, music and literature, and psychologists agree that fantasies in themselves are neither abnormal nor symptomatic of emotional disturbance. For the purpose of this study, observations and discussion will remain somewhat general.

It seems that individuals of every class and background are finding themselves caught up in a trend to dwell upon their secret wishes and desires, and to find ways of fulfilling them. This trend is closely linked with what is called the New Morality, and with the other philosophical

influences at work in our society over the past century. No doubt most people see this as merely another exciting feature of our advanced free-thinking age, and have little concern for where it started or where it might lead. But from the standpoint of Christian morality, interlaced among these trends there are some serious problems that warrant discussion.

The film *West World* is an American science fiction thriller written and directed by novelist Michael Crichton. It made its debut in 1973, and was named for one of the several attractions at a computerized fantasy-fulfillment resort where supposedly nothing ever went wrong. Ironically, certain flaws in technology caused some of the androids to go berserk, and to the dismay of the guests as well as administrators, the ideal dream vacation turned into a nightmare.

The television series *Fantasy Island* presents much the same concept. Guests arrive at this elaborate resort to have their fantasies acted out through a previously arranged program with the aid of paid personnel. Some patrons come there to recover the past, while others hope to alter it. But, as often as not, patrons leave the island having discovered that most problems lie within themselves, rather than in external circumstances, and there is still a real world to which each one must return.

West World and *Fantasy Island* do not exist, at least not yet. But there are, in fact, numerous agencies across the country which for a fee, organize versions of fantasy fulfillment. A man who has always wanted to be a rock star can stand before a wild ecstatic audience, and gyrate like Elvis to the rhythm of a professional band. For a few minutes he can pretend he is actually the king of rock, and perhaps the sensation of stardom is really there. But most of those who have tried this kind of fantasy fulfillment, in reflection feel a little silly. "It was fun," they say, "but I knew it wasn't real. It was just make-believe."

All this may seem a little farfetched. But the attempt to live out fantasies, especially those of an erotic nature, is more generalized than one might think. People have always endeavored to make their dreams and fantasies come true. Explorers discovered the New World, driven by a yearning to know what lay beyond the horizon. The time worn fantasy of flying like birds has literally leaped from drawing board to reality over a short time in recent history. The dream of early astronomers of space travel and rocket technology has come true sooner than most expected. As early as the seventeenth century mathematicians designed calculating machines, too sophisticated and complex to be built in their own time. But when technology eventually caught up with human imagination, the field of computer science was born. In only a decade, man found himself in the age of the computer, and soon every home will be equipped with a terminal, complete with memory, and processing functions, to monitor and control appliances, shopping, personal records, and perhaps even family medicine. Scientists claim that we soon will face a dilemma of creating and then dealing with computers with capabilities far superior to the human brain. In fact, this is already true, at least with regard to memory, speed of recall and accuracy of logic functions. In less than a single lifetime, the mere fantasies of nineteenth century novelists have become a matter of routine, all because of the human determination to bring his thoughts and fantasies into reality.

DESTRUCTIVE PHILOSOPHY

It is for this very reason that society as a whole, and individuals in particular, owe a debt of responsibility to guard and control personal fantasies. This is not to say that any one of us is capable of governing the thoughts of other human beings, or that there is a clear means of determining the morality of one's secret thoughts and wishes. But one such fantasy, a devastating

bomb capable of obliterating an entire nation, is one that we regret having brought to reality. Again, it was a dream that became a nightmare, and at present is like a sedated monster whose guardians tiptoe and speak softly lest the beast is aroused to destroy us all.

Much the same is true of other dreams and fantasies which might extend no farther than one's personal life. It is a gross presumptive error to suggest that human wishes, motives, thoughts and desires are always good. It is also incorrect for an individual to presume to be the best judge of what is wholesome and good for himself, much less for others. We do not require a list of common personal and interpersonal problems to remind us that otherwise normal people often are incapable of sound decisions and right thinking.⁶¹ Thus, in trying to fulfill personal fantasies many have overstepped their bounds by invading the personal space of others.

When the Apostle Paul visited Athens in the first century, he found philosophers who "spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21). While we would expect great thinkers to concentrate on elevated topics, it is evident that much of their interest was earthly and sensual. Many of those who shaped the thinking of the ancient world were preoccupied with the same erotic fantasies which dominate society today. Today's hedonism had its roots in Platonic thought, and when one reads the details of daily life in the Greco-Roman world, it is more than clear that promiscuity was an integral factor in the ultimate decay of those societies.

SEXUAL FANTASIES

Therefore, we must conclude that obsession with personal fantasies can represent serious psychological issues, as well as withering moral values and imbalanced judgment. There are many kinds and degrees of personality disorders, but boredom, restlessness, failure to enjoy the

simple things of life, and the inability to maintain meaningful relationships are all symptomatic of underlying disturbances. The solution is to take stock and regain control of self, and to accomplish that might require assistance. There is no shame in needing help. In our culture, seeing a counselor is common, especially for people in high pressure professions. That includes church ministers.

Ours is the age of personal freedom, the declaration of rights for the individual. Some call it the “me generation.” And it would seem that extensive social liberty naturally brings out the best in people; it creates a hunger for uniqueness and identity, a sense of restlessness and yearning to do more, to be more, and to excel. It welcomes, rather than demonizes, exploration and discovery, and the challenge of traditions and approved theories. It congratulates those who dare to shatter glass ceilings of ultimates and superlatives.

But for others social liberty brings added and unwanted pressure to perform and compete, and thus makes a sense fulfillment more difficult to achieve. And for some, the concept of freedom is viewed as a release from social responsibility, and the right to ignore common boundaries of propriety. Thus, some individuals become renegades and rebels without a cause. Liberty amounts to an escape from accountability, with the excuse of just being themselves or being different.

In this regard, sexual fantasies become an important topic. Many ministers as well as sociologists have pointed out society’s preoccupation with sex. This is evident in the increased inclusion of explicit sex in films and television, and the propagation of sexually explicit material, both in print and video. At the same time, various types of personality disorders have been identified that involve sexual fantasies, sexually explicit materials, and overt sexual behavior. The term “sex addiction” has come to be used, but this has proved to be a rather broad and

complex topic that is currently being studied to determine effective treatments as well as possible causes, including bio-chemistry.

There is basis for connecting this with other cultural trends. The drug culture with its psychedelic mind expansion has opened the way to new vistas of fantasy expression, and prompted a social search for new highs. Carnival rides and amusement centers are enhanced seasonally in order to satisfy the increasing appetite and demand for thrills. The movie industry strains itself to increase the realism of violence, the intensity of terror and suspense, the quality of special effects, the difficulty of stunts, and the provocative use of language and sex. And clearly the pornography industry today represents the avant-garde in exploitation of personal erotic fantasies. Adult magazines and movies cater to the interests of the public, no matter how explicit, no matter how bizarre. And it is difficult to determine which of the two, industry or public appetite, more strongly influences the other. It is a bizarre symbiosis, in which the two feed on and promote one another, and the trend seems to be negative rather than positive.

The springboard for debate on this trend is often the claim that husbands and wives have become bored with each other, and marriages need a little spicing up in order to survive. But it is very difficult to credit the porn industry with such a humanitarian motive as saving marriages. In fact, marriage is not the concern. There is an alarming frequency of songs, movies and television programs that play upon sexual fantasies involving threesomes, or groups, or spontaneous encounters, rather than those between marital partners. The reason is that the latter is boring and commonplace, and the trend is to push the boundaries. One song has the lyrics "If you need a fantasy to keep you satisfied; then just hold me like I'm someone you ain't never tried."

It should be stressed that superficial "spicing up" of marital sex generally does little to solve marital conflicts. The divorce rate is rising, and on the advice of pop psychologists many

couples have become veritable acrobats at sex positions thinking this will save their relationship. But matters usually deteriorate anyway, because their problems are not about sex. In fact, contrary to the opinions of some, marital love has little to do with sex. Sex videos, kinky clothes and vibrators cannot create genuine committed love. Marital compatibility and longevity hinge upon factors such as basic philosophies of life, personalities, religious beliefs, family relationships, expectations of the marriage relationship, career demands, gender roles, friendships, personal habits and hobbies, financial management, even beliefs about raising children. The icy cold slap in the face is that sexual fantasies can get out of control, and they can overpower or ruin other components of a relationship that otherwise might have proved healthy and lasting.

NO ULTIMATES

Human imagination stretches far beyond reality. Sexual fantasy in many situations is greater than the capacity for fulfillment. Everyone knows the feeling of hunger on a holiday like Thanksgiving, when the inviting aroma of home-baked foods fills the house and you can't wait to sit down to eat. You imagine yourself eating your own weight in turkey and dressing, cranberry sauce and apple pie. But you discover that in only a few minutes you have eaten to the point of nausea, and for the next couple of hours you are uncomfortably full and regret giving way to gluttony. You may feel as if your appetite has been completely satiated and you will never want to eat again. Even the din of conversation among friends and relatives can't keep you from falling asleep on the couch. Then, and this is the irony, after a couple of hours you are hungry again, and you go back to cold leftovers of the same food you gorged on earlier.

Such is “the fantasy fantasy.” There is no experience that completely satisfies, or could be described as the ultimate fantasy fulfillment. Often, an experience is not nearly as exciting as it was imagined beforehand, and is followed by feelings of depression, even remorse and self-loathing. And like an obese glutton whose stomach has become his god, so the erotic thrill seeker becomes enslaved by his own fantasies. He is like a heroin addict, each day feeling the need growing stronger and the hunger more intense, and sadly, fulfillment becomes more and more elusive.

New Testament writers were very much aware of the intrigue of erotic fantasy in their day, and they addressed it in numerous statements. The Apostle Paul encouraged converts to avoid conformity to the world’s standards and trends, but to be “transformed by the renewing of the mind” (Rom. 12:2). Mind control is a cardinal rule for a truly happy and elevated life, and in this regard Paul suggested continual meditation on things that are “pure, true, honorable, lovely and virtuous” (Phil. 4:8). Emotional and spiritual well-being is dependent on right thoughts, right feelings, and right conduct. To control one’s mind is to control one’s destiny and influence on others also. As summarized by Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer, “I believe people are as they think. The choices we make in the next decade will mold irrevocably the direction of our culture...and the lives of our children.”⁶²

Chapter Eleven

OTHER SHOES TO FILL

One day my two oldest children, ages 4 and 7 at the time, were playing in our bedroom closet, trying on clothes and parading around the house in a game they called “grownups.” My little son tried on all my shoes, shuffling about the room in each pair, imagining himself as big as his dad. Eventually, he commented to his sister, “Dad sure has lots of shoes to fill.”

I am sure that my collection of footwear was much like that of most other men, and as I think back I see symbolism in my son’s observation. The array of shoes in my closet is a panorama of my life. It represents everything I am and all the things I do. Several pairs of dress shoes represent my role as minister, counselor and teacher. I wear them on speaking engagements and on formal occasions like weddings. But there are also work shoes, scuffed and covered with dirt from the menial tasks I perform now and then. The paint and oil stains remind me of another side of my life, completely apart from my profession. There are also jogging shoes and tennis shoes for recreation, western boots for riding, or just pretending to be a cowboy, and another pair of boots for the woods and hiking trails. My soft loafers are for the office and every day, and my sheepskin house shoes are reserved for leisure times at home. Indeed, I have lots of shoes to fill.

Every working man has a variety of roles to play which combine and interlock to form the total of his life. Discovering that God has an interest in what he does on the job does not automatically set his whole life in order. But recognizing that his faith is not confined to what he does at church on Sunday helps him to discover a new sense of value and purpose in everything he does. Development in each of these areas is part of his metamorphosis into a new creature,

growing, maturing, fine tuning, toward his full potential in the Kingdom of Heaven (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17). These other areas of opportunity match the other shoes a Christian working man wears.

HUSBAND

There are many single men in the working world, but the typical, or average, working man is married with children. Therefore, the roles of husband and father must be discussed as important avenues of expression for the admirable principles that make up his character.

Marriage is not essential to serving God. There is no special virtue or spiritual benefits attached to marriage. Neither is there in celibacy. Jesus and the Apostle Paul remained single, but both recognized the nobility of the marital bond, and both strongly discouraged divorce as “not what God intended.” They taught that if a man chooses to marry, he should be willing to make a life-long commitment.

In the ancient world into which the church was born, the status of women was sadly lacking in dignity. Their legal and social rights were few. In most cultures wives were, in practical terms, no more than the property of their husbands. Both civil laws and religious traditions were slanted in the favor of men. This ancient social paradigm is called “patriarchy.” The term means “father rule,” and in one form or another it was the social and family structure in every ancient culture, including Judaism and the Greco-Roman world of the first century church.

However, in carefully reading the Gospels it is evident that Jesus had a remarkably different attitude toward women, and rejected many of the restrictions and taboos typical of Jewish tradition. It is also clear that among the earliest Christians women had more freedom of expression and participation in the church than is evident in later church tradition. Certain women were recognized as prophetesses, and at some point they prayed and spoke in the

assembly (Acts 2:17, 1 Cor. 11:4-5). Some served as deacons (Rom. 16:1), and there was an order of enrolled widows who were supported financially in return for benevolence work in the church community (1 Tim. 5:9ff). These facts are among the evidence brought to light by modern feminists in defense of the equality of women in society, church and home.

This evidence stands in contrast with seven key New Testament texts that place wives in the position of subordination to husbands.⁶³ Following these texts as divine rules, the church developed over the course of centuries a firm tradition that placed the husband as head over the wife and limited leadership in the church to males only. This tradition has persisted until the present, and is still held firmly in many churches today.

It should be noted that these texts, along with the traditional paradigm of patriarchy, have been thoroughly analyzed and debated in a growing collection of scholarly works today. And it is becoming evident that the status of women falls into a broad category of power-based and unjust social structures and political ideologies that have been challenged in recent history. These include military and political domination, persecution, slavery, racism, classism, as well as the abuse and exploitation of children. It has become self-evident that ancient social structures rooted in power and dominance conflict with the spirit of Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It must be noted that until the eighteenth century, Christians commonly used the Bible to defend slavery. Even now, some avowed followers of Jesus use biblical texts to defend polygamy and concubinage, capital punishment, and harsh discipline of children. Some even draw from the Old Testament evidence for a nation's divine call to overthrow another nation. Yet, two centuries ago a movement began in America that led the western world to recognize that slavery is a great moral evil. It has been pointed out that wherever the Gospel has gone, so followed the elevation of human rights. Likewise, most Christians have been able to distinguish

biblical texts that represent inferior norms of ancient cultures from those that truly represent the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ. Yet, the vast majority of Christians support the subordination of women in the home and church.

The numerous texts on the status of women in the New Testament demand an explanation. Why did New Testament writers, including Paul, say so much about it, and why did they support the social order of pagan cultures? Against this, Paul writes one statement that declares the opposite: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal.3:28). Was Paul intentionally ambivalent? If so then why?

In short, the status of women was a matter of significant debate in the Greco-Roman world. Their intrinsic rights were recognized by many philosophers, but it was a challenge to restructure society by law in a way that did not foster rebellion. Male dominance of the home was a firm tradition, recognized by law. In the Mystery religions women had considerable freedom, but not without challenge from traditionalists and not in ways as to challenge the time honored authority of the *pater familias*.

So, the principle of equality reflected in certain early Christian texts represents the true spirit of freedom offered by the Gospel, and one that many in that day welcomed. Yet, perceived as a sect of the Jews, early Christians were under severe persecution for their faith. In order to survive, and to win others to Christ, it was necessary to avoid any appearance of violation of law or breaking with time honored social structure. Thus, New Testament spokesmen urged Christians to live as if they are foreigners and exiles, to maintain good conduct so that if any one accuses them of being law-breakers, their mode of life will demonstrate that they are in fact good law abiding citizens, and they are attributes to society rather than trouble-makers. Thus, the

ancient household code, including husband, wife, children and slaves, was addressed in Christian documents as an honorable structure that all Christians should follow. But it was not, and cannot, be construed as a divine mandate for all cultures and all times.

It is Paul also who stressed the male obligation to change the prevalent mentality concerning marriage by displaying the same love and sacrificial devotion that husbands characteristically demand of their wives. To the church at Ephesus he writes:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for his body, just as Christ does the church— for we are members of his body (Eph. 5:25-30).

People do not make good marriage partners automatically, or simply by doing what comes naturally. Even in our modern culture, women have to work at being good wives. The role is demanding, and requires the maintenance of healthy attitudes and the practice of many techniques that enhance their role. Men also, should recognize that the role of husband is demanding, and if played well requires serious conscious effort. Counsellors generally agree that in comparing husbands and wives on a very broad basis, wives tend to put more effort into making their marriages work. Husbands are often lax about maintaining the romantic elements in marriage which they were very eager to employ in courtship. And when marital problems develop, husbands are less willing to communicate their feelings, to seek the aid of a counsellor, or to make the personal changes necessary to rebuild a stable relationship. It is often suggested that problems in marital sex relate to hang-ups on the part of the wives, but it is becoming evident that husbands are often less informed than women. Male sex problems are not so much “hang-ups” as ignorance, impatience and insensitivity. Some have suggested that the principal

cause of marital failure is a general lack of awareness on the part of men as to the essentials of being a good husband. James Dobson states:

Women typically know more about how a man is supposed to do his job at home than men do. Women read the books, women go to the seminars; women talk to each other about this; women are into Bible studies where they are studying what the word of God says men are supposed to do. It's very agitating to women to know what the dude is supposed to do, and he isn't doing it – and how to tell him without nagging him. That is an internal conflict that women all over this country are feeling today.⁶⁴

For this reason, every husband who takes his role seriously should continually reevaluate himself and accept full responsibility for building the kind of marital atmosphere he desires, rather than pretending that everything depends on the wife. He cannot expect much devotion from a modern woman while his conceptions of the marriage relationship are essentially Medieval, or worse, Neanderthal.

A truly perceptive husband will realize that respect must be won, rather than demanded. Women are typically very responsive to kindness, consideration, understanding, patience, thoughtfulness, and romantic affection. But if neglected or taken for granted, a wife might retreat into a castle of solid ice, or she might seek elsewhere for the warmth and romance she craves and deserves. That doesn't make it right, but it is understandable. So, if a man believes that he has been blessed with a good wife, he should also believe that God holds him accountable for his treatment of her, and his quest for godliness will never be complete until he learns to love her and play the role of husband with finesse and dexterity.⁶⁵

FATHER

Children are another blessing of God entrusted to parents for care and wholesome upbringing. Should a man find the role of fatherhood added to his life, he has every reason to be proud and happy. One ancient psalmist wrote:

Children are a heritage from the Lord, and offspring a reward from Him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them (Psalm 127:3-5).

But, being a good father, like being a good husband, is a serious challenge requiring both time and effort. In general, children today have a far better lot in life than those born in the time of Christ. It was not uncommon in ancient Rome for unwanted babies to be thrown in the gutters to die of exposure, or to be eaten by rats. Even today, in many underdeveloped countries the infant mortality rate is extremely high, including some cultures where children are treasured as divine gifts.

In contrast, in western society where medical and technical advances seem to give children every possible advantage, child abuse and neglect remains an alarming and serious social issue. On a daily basis, clinics and welfare agencies deal with cases in which children have been beaten with sticks, burned with cigarettes, scalded in hot water, starved, locked in closets for weeks at a time, and sexually violated. Greater numbers of children appear to live normal lives, but suffer emotional abuse from parents whose methods of discipline are cruel and excessive.

In such a world of covert evil, God calls men to play one of the most powerful and influential roles known to humanity— it called fatherhood. It is truly unfortunate that many good men, those with outstanding qualities and immeasurable talent, are still veritable failures at the rudimentary task of fatherhood. Western society is plagued by the problem of the absentee father. More than all the things money can buy, children need the presence of their parents in large doses on a daily basis. The average father in America spends no more than a few minutes each day with his children. Many are totally devoted to their jobs and the pursuit of material

ambitions. Yet when accused by their children of not caring about them, they excuse themselves with a platitude such as “I do all this for you.”

Money and gifts are not genuine love, nor are they an adequate substitute for love. Toys, video games, dogs, horses, cars, boats, and scholarships to college are no replacement for a dad’s direct personal presence in a child’s life. Ross Campbell, in a bestselling book entitled *How to Really Love Your Child*, says that the most important things a father can give his children are eye contact, appropriate physical touch, and focused attention in the form of conversation, games, hugs, kisses and fondling.⁶⁶ All of this, simple as it may be, requires time. Time is the one thing most fathers do not want to give their children, and it is the most valuable gift of all.

Discipline is also a chore which should be shared by the father. In too many cases, mothers bear full responsibility for child guidance and discipline. And here the term “discipline” should not be thought of simply as punishment for willful disobedience, but rather restraint from unwholesome activities, personal instruction in values, and encouragement in times of frustration and disappointment. Proper discipline has both positive and negative elements, and always should follow careful deliberation. It must never be reactionary or beyond reason. Harsh and abusive measures were the concern of Paul when he wrote: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

Most of what children learn about life, responsibility, ethics, morality, personal values, attitudes and spiritual insight are modeled by parents at home. A child whose father is never around to talk personally, about feelings, interests and problems, is deprived of one of the most significant positive influences in life, at a time when it is most needed. And a child who has suffered abuse from an insensitive and irresponsible father will find it difficult later to respect

authority of any kind, and will also be less likely to develop any meaningful relationship with God as the Heavenly Father.

CHURCH MEMBER

Another pair of shoes a plain working man wears is his “Sunday-go-to-meeting” shoes. Attending church assembly on a regular basis is an important part of the life of any godly man. Here we are not talking about some kind of hypocritical façade, like playing church once a week simply to put on a religious front and show off personal righteousness. On the contrary, involvement in a local church is an indispensable part of service to God. For a start, attendance of the weekly assembly is encouraged by one New Testament writer as something a Christian should not neglect (Heb. 10:25). But church attendance should not be thought of as duty, one of those things you “have to do.” Rather, as the Oakridge Boys put it, a man should honestly say “I get to” go to church.

The assembly is meant to function as a refreshing, edifying and motivational experience for every believer, to enable each one to approach the new work week with greater confidence and faith. It is this environment which provides the impetus for purposeful and courageous living. The church family is a commonly recognized source of love and support in times of stress. Of course, a Christian remains a Christian, with or without church in his immediate vicinity. Connection with God, and service to God, does not depend on a building or a list of names on a roster. A Christian can and should see himself as God’s agent for good wherever he goes. However, for most people, participation in the life and activities of a church is the principal medium of community service in the name of God, and the nucleus around which his entire life revolves. He is a part of the church and it is part of him. It offers opportunities for personal

growth through education, service and leadership. He sees the church as the body of Christ wherein there is life.

STEWARD

This term has to do with the use of money as a vehicle of service to God, and is commonly used in terms of financial support of a church. Jesus' famous Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25) was mentioned in chapter six. Here it comes up again. This is because money is often closer to a man's heart than all the other blessings, talents and resources for which he must give account.

The writer of 1 Timothy 6:10 says: "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." Everyone should take note. The text does not say that money is evil. It is the love of money against which one must guard his heart. But equally true is that money in the hands of a generous man can be a very powerful tool for good. And in the battle against materialism and avarice, there should also be a serious endeavor to make the most effective use of whatever financial resources he has. Even an ordinary working man, with a modest income and few material possessions, must see himself as accountable to the Man upstairs for what he can accomplish with these blessings. After all, if a man gives his life to God, everything he has becomes God's property anyway. Personal possessions are only on consignment. Therefore, a working man might feel an inner compulsion to use his home for hospitality, his table for benevolent fellowship, and his transportation for service to those less fortunate. Certainly, he will want to give a portion of his money.

The various New Testament texts on giving do not specify amounts or percentages, as did the Jewish laws of tithing. Instead each individual is encouraged to give generously and proportionately as God has prospered him (1 Cor. 16:2). Giving should not be done grudgingly or by compulsion from church leaders, but out of eagerness to take part in a good work (2 Cor. 9:5). Churches accomplish an immeasurable amount of good around the world by sponsoring medical aid, education, and other benevolent services, all of which is financed by voluntary contributions. Beyond this method, an individual is at liberty to use his money to honor God in other ways he may discover and choose. Again drawing from Paul, there are no laws against doing good (Gal. 5:23), and Christians should take advantage of every opportunity to do good to anyone in need (Gal. 6:10).

One of the things essential to good stewardship is effective management. Family budgets might seem unimportant, compared to other issues discussed thus far. But many people find it difficult to give to charitable causes because they cannot make ends meet. Their financial attention is constantly on their own interests, excused by the adage “Charity begins at home.” This is precisely the point to which the subject of stewardship is directed. Many couples have no sense about financial management, even on a small scale. One of the principal causes of divorce in western culture is financial tension, which in most cases is unnecessary. The problem is debt, which in turn is caused by materialism. Many families adopt a life-style beyond their means, and then pour all their energy into maintaining it. Or put another way, they bite off more than they can chew financially, and then destroy their relationship trying to chew it. This is a miserable way to live.

Most families can benefit from a little guidance in arranging and controlling their finances. They could do more, and be happier, if they did a better job of managing money. Often

it is a matter of establishing priorities. Most Americans spend far too much money on junk foods and eating out. Many spend enormous sums on pet foods, and expensive hobbies, which fall very low on any realistic list of priorities. Still others are the slaves to very expensive bad habits, such as alcohol, tobacco, sleep aids, tranquilizers and other drugs. Some throw their money away gambling.

Of course, no amount of good advice or guidance will help if it is not wanted and welcomed. Assistance never works when the recipient does not see the problem and will not accept the cure. But for those who are willing to take this subtle suggestion, great improvements in household management can be effected with relative ease. There are numerous good books on the subject in local libraries, and in every city there are ministers and counsellors who will gladly provide guidance. Professional financial consultants may seem to be the best source of advice, but the cost is often prohibitive. Financial problems are much like emotional problems, in that those who need help the most cannot afford to pay for help. But a word to the wise is sufficient. Every man who seeks to serve God must give account for the stewardship of his money, and everyone is capable of doing well in his own circumstances.

CITIZEN

The New Testament has much to say about the believer's duty to obey the laws of the land, and to support his government in every way possible. In an indirect sense, elected officials are God's agents to punish evildoers and to maintain law and order (Rom. 13:1-7). Praying for them is important (1 Tim. 2:1-2). But in a democracy where every individual has a voice in government, personal exercise of that privilege is a responsibility. Early Christians lived under the iron rule of Imperial Rome, which compared favorably to the dictatorships and other despotic

forms of rule which modern democratic societies oppose. Yet, if it was the duty of first century Christians to support and pray for the Roman government, certainly there is a greater obligation for a Christian working man in a modern democratic system to exercise his political rights to the fullest. It becomes a moral obligation for every believer to speak out on issues where his voice might assist in building a better world. At the very least, it is his duty to vote.

Yet, it is surprising that comparatively few people in the United States actually exercise these rights. According to statistical abstracts, in the 1980 presidential election only 53% of registered voters cast ballots, and this was a comparatively good turnout. That figure actually represents no more than fifteen percent of the American population. In local elections the turnout is often as little as ten percent of registered voters. Many of these never take the time to study issues before voting, and do not know one candidate's position from another. So it is an irony to speak of our government as being "of the people, by the people, and for the people" when "the people" do not really let their voices be heard. Some approach an election thinking that all politicians are crooks anyway, so voting does not really matter. On the contrary, every issue is important, and a part of the duty of godly people is to let their lights shine by lifting their voices, joining hands, and casting ballots to help build a better country and a better world.

Of course, there are many other ways in which civic minded Christians can accomplish something of worth. In every city there are numerous organizations that serve as agents of community service and goodwill, and offer opportunities for involvement— the Lions Club, Rotary International, Jay Cees, Chambers of Commerce, Red Cross, Salvation Army, and others. Most are continually looking for volunteers. Local Parent-Teacher Associations are an excellent tool for exerting a positive influence in the community. And of course, election to the city

council or school board, although often an exasperating experience, can be a tool for good in the hands of a man of integrity.

LAZY BOY

One last topic which might easily escape attention is that of leisure. Every working man should have some form of recreation, especially if he has a high pressure job with little physical activity. Even Jesus saw the need to get away occasionally. When the crowds pressed around him and stress mounted, he would retreat to the mountains to be alone, or on some occasions he would sail for a few hours with a fishing crew across the blue waters of Lake Gennesaret.

Today, work addiction is a common problem. There are those who enjoy work so much that they can't put it down. However, considering the volume of complaints about work tedium, it is doubtful that enjoyment is the explanation for work addiction. It seems rather than that many men and women are driven by other subconscious factors to excessive hours on the job, and they simply can't logically face and overcome it, even if it drives them to an early grave. Wayne Oates offers significant advice to workaholics about how to use energy to greater personal advantage through leisure.⁶⁷ This is a very important subject for a Christian who views his body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, which should be cared for to maintain optimum productivity in God's service.

Therefore, among the many evils that threaten to thwart his life of faith, this is a subtle one that he might never recognize. A man who over taxes himself through job stress, rather than giving himself the benefit of proper rest and recreation, is sacrificing himself to a false god. Eventually he will become ill, and then he will be a burden on others. He will die too young, depriving his family of leadership, love, and friendship, and robbing God of potential service.

Therefore, by not taking good care of his body he sins against himself, his family, his community, and his God. Strong words, huh? But it's true.

This also applies to diet. American prosperity has produced a great evil in the form of gluttony. Eating is a favorite American pastime, and junk-food is among the favorites. Texts on diet and health are virtually unanimous in pointing to bad eating habits as the cause, or at least contributing factors, in a variety of diseases and disorders, including cardio-vascular disease and adult onset diabetes. It is ironic that the average American is overweight, yet hopelessly malnourished. The factor most clearly responsible for degenerative disease is the excessive intake of caffeine, salt, sugar, cholesterol and fats.⁶⁸ Truly, many of us are digging our own graves with a knife, fork and spoon. Therefore coupled with rest and leisure, a working man needs to pay attention to proper diet.

How does a working man relax? Some guys would respond that what they love is a full day in a lazy-boy recliner watching football. Others might picture themselves under an umbrella on a beach recliner sipping on a Mai Tai. However it is accomplished, appropriate rest, relaxation, and recreation are essential components of a happy and healthy life. All of it should be done in moderation, meaning at a healthy level. For some people the terms "rest and recreation" could be spelled "wrest and wreck-reation," because what they enjoy does them more harm than good. Heavy exercise on weekends, with almost no physical activity during the week can be disastrous. And relaxing hobbies that involve no exercise, in reality can be emotionally beneficial but accomplish nothing toward physical health. So, the point here is select forms of exercise and relaxation that are personally satisfying as well as beneficial. Research indicates that cardio-vascular conditioning is accomplished by regular daily exercise that maintains respiration and heart rate at a vigorous plateau for at least twenty minutes. For this reason

jogging, vigorous walking and swimming are highly recommended.⁶⁹ But here again, each individual should read relevant books and consult a physician for information and advice.

The working man clearly has many shoes to wear, and many roles to play in life. Some are more difficult and challenging than others. Some are more important than others. But all are important. So, just as he seeks to excel in his occupation, let him seek to excel in these graces also.

Chapter Twelve
STARTING OVER

Louisa Fletcher has written:

I wish there were some wonderful place
 Called ‘The Land of Beginning Again,’
Where all our mistakes and our heartaches,
 And all of our poor selfish grief
Could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door,
 And never be put on again.⁷⁰

Starting over is a key concept in the New Testament. When Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, he asked “What must I do to enter the Kingdom of Heaven?” (John 3:1ff). The answer that left this Jewish leader puzzled was “you must be born again.” Among Christians today, there are differences as to what Jesus meant and exactly how and when the “new birth” occurs. But everyone sees in this a bright neon arrow pointing at an opportunity to start over. The Apostle Paul spoke clearly about putting away the old person, and he says “just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Rom. 6:4). He also wrote that “if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17).

However, this transformation is not an instant makeover. It is easy to imagine a mystifying metamorphosis, something like being reconstituted at the receiving end of a Star Fleet transporter, but with enhancements. Thus, a man is plunged into baptismal water as a sinner, and he comes up with a completely new attitude, new beliefs, and changed personal habits and perspectives, all by the work of God. It is as if the Holy Spirit remodeled, rearranged the furniture, and moved in, all in a matter of seconds. But that type of conversion is not taught by Jesus or any other New Testament writer, and our own senses tell us that for most people change

takes a while. Often, it requires discipline and determination. Even the Apostle Paul, after his life-changing experience on the road to Damascus, was taught by Ananias before emerging as a preacher of the Gospel. Nevertheless, the changes required of anyone are a combination of submission to higher norms (meaning God) and self-discipline. That might take much greater effort for some than others, but it is the responsibility of commitment. A statement from Jesus, quoted previously, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” (Mk. 8:34).

The principal flaw in the doctrine of Predestination, which originated with Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and was later revived by John Calvin (1509-1564), is that it relieves the individual of personal responsibility for his own actions in life, both his spiritual condition we commonly call “lost” and his regenerated state called “saved.” There are several versions of Predestination, which has been a highly debated topic over much of Christian history. The predominant view is that all humans are morally depraved at birth, the result of a fallen state inherited from Adam and Eve. Election (being chosen) to the kingdom is not a matter of choice, but is predetermined by God. This means that God, and God alone, decides who is saved. When God deems the time to be right for an individual’s conversion, He sends the Holy Spirit into his being, and this divine presence effects renewal of character and spiritual nature, and also prompts choices and actions that demonstrate renewal, regeneration, and sanctification. So, the individual becomes virtually a passive host for divine activity.

This view was rejected by the Roman Catholic Church many centuries ago, and it was also rejected by most church denominations that emerged from the Protestant Reformation. Nevertheless, it still thrives today, particularly within churches of the Reformed tradition. And numerous cognates emerge in pop theology, in novels, plays, films, and television series, all with

hints of God's sovereignty. Common expressions such as "in God's good time," or "everything happens for a reason," "or God is in control," are subtle reflections of this belief.

For the present study, the important point is that the Gospel is about God's love and grace available to any and all who will receive it. The great summary text in John 3:16 declares that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The Gospels also suggest that the divine Son, in the body of Jesus of Nazareth, offered himself on the cross for the sins of the world. That is the ultimate demonstration and the great metaphor for divine love for lost humanity, and for each and every lost individual. Through Jesus as the Christ of our faith, new life is available to all who are willing to claim it. Jesus says "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Rev. 3:20).

It is the choice of every man and woman to respond to God's love. Both in Old and New Testaments, the basis for a covenant relationship with God is the promise that if someone will trust and obey, God will pardon and save (Deut. 28:1-15; 1 John 1:9). Salvation is available to all, but only a few seek it, and fewer still find it (Matt. 7:14). When the Rich Young Ruler asked Jesus what was required of him to inherit eternal life, the answer sent him away disappointed and deflated (Lk. 18:18-23). He learned that there is a price attached, even to "free salvation." The cost of discipleship sometimes separates the courageous from the fainthearted, because many people are unwilling to face the essential changes in attitude and ambitions, values and actions. Nevertheless, that is the requirement. It means willfully leaving behind the old person who once was, allowing him to die on the cross with Jesus Christ, to be symbolically buried with him in the tomb, and then to be raised to walk in a totally new life (Rom. 6:1-7). It means coming out from among the ungodly, not by avoiding contact with them physically, but by refraining from their

conduct and habits (2 Cor. 6:17). It means renewing and redirecting one's life, not according to the standards set by society, but by a more noble standard of purity, justice, selflessness, and truth (Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 4:8). It means putting aside the miserable memory of past sins and misconduct, and resting in the grace of God (1 Cor. 6:9-11). But the choice sits squarely on the shoulders of the individual.

The famous poem *Invictus*, by William Ernest Henley, is commonly understood to be a humanistic declaration of self-sufficiency. Yet, the last few lines appropriately define the courage of commitment and resolve to stand true to God in response to the most brutal elements of life.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

ACKNOWLEDGING SIN

When a man starts thinking seriously about his relationship with God, his very behavior might reveal the mental anguish that often comes with facing truth. He might display symptoms of depression. He might lose his appetite, suffer insomnia, and mope about with the appearance of constant worry. He might spend hours at a time in quiet meditation, in places and at times totally atypical of his routine. Family and friends might express concern for his health or state of mind, but he will brush it off as nothing more than an upset stomach or job fatigue.

The fact is that he has reached a spiritual crossroads, and his emotions demand a decision. He has spent years going after all the things that he thought made life worth living, but now he realizes that something is missing. Something BIG! Changes going on all around him, and the lines appearing in his own face have made him aware that his life will not go on forever.

Something deep inside tells him that what he was taught as a child about the “hereafter” was more than a fairytale, and that if there is a great Judgment he must make preparation. He believes, although perhaps without conviction, that God exists and that He cares for him as an individual. But at this stage in his life, he can’t quite reconcile the many confusing and contradictory doctrines he has heard from many sources. If he had any clear sense of himself, he would call it FEAR— fear of God, death, judgment, and hell. He is certain that he is not in good standing with his creator, and that salvation is more than simply developing a healthy self-image and a satisfied mind. So, what is he to do?

A significant portion of human anxiety pertains to feelings of guilt. In our day, most people have come to think of sin as an outdated concept arising from primitive superstition and nonsensical taboos. Psychology and related scientific disciplines, which in some ways vie with religion for credibility, have reduced the biblical doctrine of sin to about the same depth of concern as being considered “naughty” by Santa Claus, who will probably bring gifts anyway. But if a man is a believer in God, and if he has any degree of value for the biblical message, he then accepts that sin has to do with his relationship with God, the creator, and that he is a sinner. That means that to him sin is more than a guilty conscience, or lingering regrets for bad choices in life. Rather, he sees himself as did the Apostle Paul, a man in whom there is a constant warfare between two elements of his nature: on the one side, a desire to do what is good, true, right and noble; on the other side, the tendency to do what he wants to do, regardless of truth and right (Rom. 7:14-25). Sin exists in his thoughts and actions, and even in his neglect of certain responsibilities to do what he should. The very meaning of the Greek word for “sin” is *hamartia*, meaning “a bow-shot which falls short of the mark.” This simile is valid concerning any specific act of sin, a lifestyle that is sinful, or the overall state of being a sinner.

The Apostle Paul, on whom we rely for much of our basic beliefs, paints a bleak picture of humanity: “There is none righteous, no not one,” he states, “for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:10, 23). He lists in this epistle, and in others, a number of misdeeds of which men and women are guilty, and accordingly stand in judgment before God (Rom. 1:26-32; 3:10-23). Sin, therefore, is more than the pangs of an oversensitive conscience.

It has become far more palatable in our society to soft-soap the concept of sin, and play down guilt feelings as unhealthy and undesirable. Yet, it is inconceivable that humanity can maintain any degree of nobility if the prevailing social philosophy is one with no standards of right and wrong, and no values or ideals, no moral conscience— just “every man for himself.”

Of course, many Christians like to think that there is a fixed higher standard in the mind of God which serves as the basis of judgment and accountability of every human soul. But it is difficult to reconcile the New Testament God of love and mercy with the Old Testament God, who is jealous, vengeful, and intolerant of sinners, and whose laudable leaders are remembered for how many idol worshippers they killed, including men and women, with their children and animals.

No matter how this enigma is explained, we still find in the New Testament evidence of God’s disapproval of sin and a clear call to repentance. And sufficient writers enumerate sinful deeds and habits for us to recognize that sin is best defined as substandard thinking and behavior. For this reason, the popular concept of good ole’ boy religion, in which everyone worships God as he sees fit and according to his own standards, is not a sound conception of divine will or sensible religion.

THE PRODIGAL SON

Many men either do not realize or will not admit their depravity until they have hit rock bottom. Some men have to learn everything the hard way, and only come full circle after a long journey down a miserable road. Such was the case of the Prodigal Son in Jesus' famous parable (Lk. 15:11-24). This young man's selfish and irresponsible departure from home represents the natural degeneracy of an ordinary man who abandons God's grace for the world of sin. His reckless squandering of his inheritance in "riotous living" represents sin in general, living according to the impulses of desire and appetite. The young man learned too late that his friends were only loyal while he had money. When his resources were depleted, they abandoned him to the elements. Eventually he found himself tending swine, and hungry enough to eat their food. He had sunk as low as he could go, and to a Jew of Jesus' day, who saw pork as an abomination to God, this fate was especially degrading. Here the wayward son "came to himself." For the first time he realized what he had lost and what he had become.

There are many real-life stories about such a prodigal at his moment of awakening. One is about a man named Eric, whom I discovered one afternoon lying in the church yard, collapsed in a drunken stupor. He looked up with one eye squinted, peering through a cloud of alcohol fumes and halitosis, and announced "I'm drunk!" My wife and I lived in a church parsonage at the time. Not knowing what else to do with him, I got him up and helped him to the garage. I had a station wagon that had not run in a while, and I didn't have the money to repair it. I loaded him into the back and covered him with a blanket. The next morning about breakfast time, groggy but sober, he stood knocking at the back door. As I unlatched the door to let him in the kitchen, his opening words were, "Look at me! I'm filthy! How did I get like this?"

This was Eric's pig-pen, and that morning was the turning point in his life. The next few weeks were like Hell on earth, as he worked through his many problems and fought his addiction. He made up his mind to "return to his Father," to recapture all he had squandered in life, and he discovered that the road home was long and treacherous. I felt helpless at times, but did the best I could. I took him to look for work and a place to stay, and hooked him up with a local AA counselor. I listened to his stories as he unburied haunting memories— the disintegration of his marriage, repeated job failures, service as a mercenary, and the guilt he suffered for having taken human life. As the months went by, he came and went into my life, often phoning me when was down. Once, after several weeks with no communication, he called from a phone booth near a railway overpass, threatening to jump in front of a train. I managed to talk him through the crisis.

Two years later Eric drove into the church parking lot. He had gained weight, and was well dressed and groomed. He had found a job, bought a car, and was active in a church. He had been sober over a year. Sitting next to him was his new bride. They were happy. Life was good. The prodigal had made it back home, and it was evident that his Father had welcomed him with open arms.

The first step in the process of reconciliation to God is the full realization of the need. From a clinical standpoint, that is when an individual with an addiction or personality disorder truly admits to himself that he has a problem and is helpless on his own. That is a critical turning point in his struggle. It is only then that he will reach out to God. He sees himself in Jesus' parable and says "I am that lost sheep; I am the prodigal son." Not everyone will admit to himself that he is a sinner, or that he is in any sense of the term "lost." But if a man is honest with himself, when the evidence begins to mount up, he will face the truth. Sin has a way of

catching up with us. “What a man sows that shall he reap” (Gal. 6:7-8). And often, alienation from God is evidenced by various levels of misery, dissatisfaction and emptiness, all of which compel a man to search for answers and solutions.

The hardest part in the entire conversion process is making up his mind to start over. Getting up out of the pig pen and heading for home can be a painfully difficult experience, and a man views it with intense dread. Like an ominous cloud on the horizon, with threatening winds of hurricane force, he is inclined to run away rather than brace himself against the storm. It is harder than starting a serious weight loss program, or beginning a regular exercise schedule. The thought of remaking his entire life is overwhelming, even with personal encouragement, and reminders like “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). He dreads ridicule from non-believing friends, and he fears failure.

Therefore, making up his mind to get up and walk away from the pig pen is a crucial decision. It is a “make or break” situation. He must find the courage to take charge of his own spirit and his own future. All that has been said is worthless if he cannot, or will not, do that. Jack Henry Abbott, in provocative book entitled *In the Belly of the Beast*, offers insightful comments about the human learning process when sitting in a prison cell: “Words teach nothing but a vocabulary. They only address the imagination in one way or another. The use they are put to should be to act, not to build sand castles.”

Benjamin Franklin wrote that “experience is a dear school, but a fool will learn in no other.” Prison is perhaps the most challenging level of education a man could experience, and many learn nothing there. The wise man is one who can be educated without prison, without hard knocks, without the pig pin, and will turn himself around without being forced.

Jesus did not promise that starting over would be easy, or without sacrifice. But he did assure us that the rewards of discipleship are well worth the effort. Making a new beginning is not as drastic or dramatic as it may sound. It is not like selling out and moving to a new country to carve a living out of a wilderness. In most cases it is mostly a matter of attitude. The biblical concept of repentance is really a change of mind that results naturally in a change of life. There must be an awareness of the urgency and the willpower to be different, starting NOW. It requires saying “This is a new day, the first day in the rest of my life, and if God is for me who can be against me?” This is a taste of the glorious freedom to be found in the Kingdom of Heaven, where the ordinary working man is exalted to the ranks of nobility as a servant of God on earth.

CONCLUSION – A STRATEGY FOR LIFE

The foregoing chapters have established a basis for new dimensions to the working man’s world. We believe in a God who is compassionate, who understands the human experience of pain, frustration, and conflict, and who is supportive of a man’s desire for happiness, fulfillment, and peace of mind. The ordinary working man typifies humanity, and if the Gospel has no practical relevance to his life, it has no meaning at all. We have ample evidence that the primary avenue of service to God is the activities of daily life. The world is a fertile field for sowing the seed of the Gospel, not through homily, but by the steady influence of a godly man living his faith at home, in the neighborhood, and on the job.

The gap which often exists between the church and ordinary people is a product of the human tendency to institutionalize, compartmentalize, and specialize. It is not because God has withdrawn himself from people. True religion is not confined to ritual and doctrine, but should

be expressed in every facet of life. A believer's own body is the temple of God. Through one's daily activities, God is confessed or denied, praised or blasphemed, worshipped or despised.

Therefore, in order to realize the ideals and objectives outlined in the foregoing chapters, there must be a workable strategy. Life is brief. James says "it is but a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). One cannot take too long to find himself and get his act together. Soon it will be over. And you only go around once. There are no second chances. So how can all these objectives be stated in a few short, easy to follow maxims? What are the immediate goals? What is the battle plan? What is needed to go forward from here? Here it is.

- 1. Take charge of yourself.** Be responsible for your conduct, thoughts and feelings. No one can live your life for you. Even God cannot override your will to make you be what you do not want to be, or will not try to be.
- 2. Establish priorities.** Recognize what is really important in life. Make a list, with eternal life at the top. Family and friends are very important. Happiness is far ahead of material possessions. The joy of service outranks any attainment for personal glory.
- 3. Let down your barriers.** Let people into your life and into your heart. You will find that often the walls that keep people out also keep God out. And the same walls stand between you and your goals.
- 4. Open up your mind.** Read. Study. Investigate. Ask questions. Take a course. Your perception of the whole world will change as you learn.
- 5. Develop faith.** There is nothing as powerful as a deep abiding trust in God. Faith will carry you through trials and lift you over mountains. It will shine through the clouds

- of tragedy and disappointment like the warm rays of the sun. God is not the cause of your troubles. God has not abandoned you. God is forever and always your friend, and always seeks your best interest.
- 6. Be optimistic.** Hope for good. Look for good. Try to produce good, even in the face of opposition and skepticism.
 - 7. Strive for excellence.** Do the best you can in all you do, as unto the Lord. It doesn't matter what others do.
 - 8. Develop self-respect.** Recognize that you are important; you are unique, valuable to others, and to God.
 - 9. Accept grace.** Realize that no sins are too great for God's grace and mercy. Learn to forgive yourself. Throw off your burden of guilt and be free. If God can forgive you, why should you not forgive yourself?
 - 10. Break away.** Do not allow yourself to be shackled by institutional barriers. There are no laws against godliness. You are free to be as good and do as much good as you like.
 - 11. Enjoy serving.** Set aside your pride and your hunger for praise. Adopt a spirit of true humility and put others before yourself. The greatest satisfaction in life can be found in doing good things for others.
 - 12. Be obedient.** Apply everything you learn to your own life. James, as a servant of Christ, writes:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourself. Do what it says. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does (James 1:22, 25).

13. Learn to love. Real love is unselfish. It seeks the truest form of good for others. It loves the unlovely, and does the loving thing in spite of wrongs sustained. And remember that God is love, and God loves you.

NOTES

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