

When is it OK to hate your job? A lot of people hate their jobs or at least they hate parts of their job or they hate it part of the time. But the question i asked is, "When is it OK to hate your job?" Since this is a sermon you might think that this is a rhetorical question and the obvious answer is "Never." We should fight for contentment in our jobs and all of life but there is a place we can get to where we don't have to be fully satisfied with our jobs. "Hate" is probably too strong of a word but sometimes there is a natural, even God-given dissatisfaction with your job. But lest you think that hating your job is a good thing, let's start with the principle of contentment.

**4. When we properly steward our work we gain great contentment.**

Before we talk about contentment in our work, let's start with a worst case scenario from the book of Ecclesiastes.

***24*** *There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God,* ***25*** *for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?* (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25)

If that's all you had, then this verse looks somewhat promising. It sounds like Solomon is encouraging his readers to be content and enjoy the work that God has granted you. But the prior two verses give a very different context.

*What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?* ***23*** *For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.*

Some of you are thinking, "Now *that* sounds like my job!" Let's put it all together. Life is vanity and so is work. However, even with that as a foundation, we are told that work can be enjoyable. Solomon put God at the center of work life. Even if work is also toil, striving, sorrow and vexation, it is also something that can be enjoyable.

So this is the worst case scenario. Here we have King Solomon who wasted himself on endless worldly pleasures. he was probably near the end of his life, depressed and sorrowful and tryng to figure out why all of his pleasures did not give him lasting joy. Here was one of the wisest, richest and pleasure seeking men who ever lived yet he summed it all up as vanity. But even he was able to recognize the value of work done with a view toward God.

Here's the point I am trying to make. You and I can have a work life that is far more enjoyable than the one Solomon was advocating. Again, Solomon is our worst case scenario. You don't want to go lower than he was. But here's the problem--many of us are below Solomon and looking up and admiring him. "At least Solomon had got a little contentment, right? That's better than what I have." Let me say this much. If Solomon is the worst case scenario and you think he had it good, then you have a problem. It's not without hope but you need to realize from where you are starting.

Here's another key passage on contentment.

***6*** *But godliness with contentment is great gain,* ***7*** *for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.* ***8*** *But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.* ***9*** *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction* (1 Timothy 6:6-9).

Some of you might be thinking, "Well this doesn't apply to me because I am not desiring to be rich." Maybe riches are not your problem but what is it that you are desiring? What is it that you are missing from your work life that would bring you contentment? What magical piece is missing from your work pie that would satisfy you? Whatever that is, that is what you desire. Maybe you want more money. maybe you want more respect or more responsibility, or less responsibility. Maybe you want that annoying person to just go away. One or more circumstances at work are causing you to lose your contentment. These are barriers that you see most every day and you have convinced yourself that these barriers must be removed in order for you to be content at work.

Do you know what you have done? You have allowed these circumstances to have power and dominion over you. Whatever it is that you think will make you happy at work is the thing you are desiring the most. Whatever it is that you are desiring, I can tell you this much. You are not desiring godliness with contentment. If you did, you wouldn't be so miserable day after day. So how do you get contentment? let me give you several more principles which will move you toward contentment.

**5. WORK should be a means of sanctification not frustration.**

God uses two primary tools to bring sanctification and spiritual growth in your life--relationships and circumstances, and often these two overlap. Think about it this way. If you are spending 40-50 hours per week in your job, don't you think that God intends to do something in you and through you in all of that time? That's 2,000-2,500 hours per year. That works out to 100,000-125,000 hours over the course of your work life. Do you think God is just going to sit back and waste that time or might be intend it for your spiritual growth?

I have said several times that marriage and parenting are the top 2 sources of my own sanctification. Two things are continually happening within those relationships. The first is that I keep hitting up against my own pride and selfishness. As a husband and as a father, I mess up. I see my sin-sometimes-and have to deal with it. The second thing is that I continually run into circumstances that I don't like. Somebody has done something that I don't like. Then I have to deal with those circumstances and I have to deal with my response and reaction to those circumstances. My point is that my family life is an ongoing source of sanctification and I am convinced that this is what God intends.

In the same way, God fully intends to use those 100,000 hours of your work life as a means to move you forward in your relationship with him. The difficult circumstances and annoying relationships are there for your good. (And have you considered that you yourself may be on e of those annoying relationship to someone else?) But if you always see them as nothing but frustration, then they will be wasted hours. Every time you bump up against a frustration, at the very least remember that God intends this for your sanctification, not your frustration.

**6. Work is a means of provision for ourselves and our families.**

This is the typical view of our work lives. "I hate my job but at least it's a paycheck." That's true--but I want you to see that it is SO MUCH MORE than this! The classic text for this principle is 2 Thessalonians.

***6****Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.****7****For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you,****8****nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.****9****It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.****10****For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.****11****For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.****12****Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living* (2 Thes. 3:6-11).

Are you truly thankful for what God has provided through your job? What percentage of your attitude about work is thankfulness and what percentage is complaining and grumbling? Why don't you ask your spouse to answer that question? What would he or she say? Are you more filled with thankfulness or with grumbling? So work is a paycheck but if that's all you see it as, I am suggesting that you are not really thankful for it.

**6.5 Work gives the opportunity to be generous.**

We'll talk about this in a future message on generosity.

**7. Work is a provision against idleness.**

This principle is the companion to the sixth principle on provision. Remember that the first thing God did after creating Adam was to put him in the garden to work. You were created t work, not to be idle. We have to go to Proverbs 6 for this principle.

**6** Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.

**7** Without having any chief, officer, or ruler,

**8** she prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.

**10** A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,

**11** and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man (Proverbs 6:6-8, 10-11)

This is why sloth and laziness are condemned in the Bible. It's not just because you aren't productive or because God doesn't like lazy people. Laziness is wrong because it's anti-stewardship. Lazy and idle people fail to see that work is meant to be stewarded and developed. God wants you not only to do the best job you can but he also wants you to develop and maximize your work. That's what dominion means. The word dominion includes development. If you're an engineer, you might find the next breakthrough in your product line. If you clean for a living, you, you might find a much more efficient and effective way to clean. If you are in daycare, you might find a helpful way to deal with rowdy children that other daycare providers could not manage.

This is also why welfare is such a problem. Welfare keeps people from using their God-given ability to be stewards of their lives and surroundings. Welfare removes dominion and stewardship. You are ruled by the handout. This is not to say that help from the government is always wrong. There are times when we need a hand up and a handout. The family who lost their home in the fire this week needs handouts. They needed people to come alongside of them and give them work boots, strollers, clothes, food and money. But if six months down the road this family still constantly needs constant handouts, something is wrong. And I'm sure it won't happen in this case.

**8. Stewardship prevents work from becoming idolatry and identity.**

Stewardship guards against idleness but it also prevents you from becoming a workaholic. Why would someone be a workaholic? Maybe you don't hate your work but you enjoy it too much, or you enjoy the financial benefits that it brings. For the workaholic, work has become an idol. It has displaced God in your life. Many people also gain their sense of identity from their jobs. After all, what is the first question people ask you when you meet them? "Oh, what do you do?" We so often identify ourselves by our jobs that they become one and the same. I attempt to avoid this in two ways. First, I rarely ask someone what they do and if I do, I wait until we are far into the conversation. And I always ask the question by saying, "What do you do to pay the bills?" And I never tell other people that I am a pastor unless they specifically ask me because from that point forward, they have pigeon-holed me into a certain type of person.

Work is important. That's why I am spending two sermons on the topic. But work does not define you. Once your work life begins to define you, you're headed for more problems. If I draw my identity from my work I am one short step from turning it into idolatry. There's a fine line here, though isn't there. On the one hand I am saying that you should be content in your work and draw satisfaction from it. You should steward it, maximize it, develop it and excel at it. But on the other hand you don't want it to define you and rule you. You were created to work and have dominion over the blessings that God has given you. You need to have dominion over your work instead of your work having dominion over you.

**9. Work stewardship increases our gospel witness.**

Once again, if you spend about 100,000 hours at work in your lifetime, that means you have 100,000 to share the Lord with the people with whom you work. Now the way that will look will vary but there are endless opportunities.

Kellyn went to the chiropractor for the first time last month. After her appointment she posted this tweet.

Right-who would have thought that these things would come form a simple neck adjustment, right? After all, that's all chiropractors do is crack you neck and crack your back and send you on your merry way. Not this chiropractor. Jack is a solid believer and each 30 minute appointment is always a great conversation about the Lord. Sure we end up talking about the Packers and such but the whole time he is adjusting me he talks about the Lord and good health. That's just what he does and it was impossible for Kellyn to miss it.

So opportunities to witness does not mean that you have to share the gospel every day. Many people who are gifted at evangelism have a long list of people they have led to the Lord. Again, some people are truly gifted by the Lord and are given great spiritual fruit and others work very hard at sharing the gospel with practically everyone they meet. But not everyone has these gifts.

I heard a great quote about witnessing many years ago: "Count conversations, not conversions."

I really like that idea. The Lord wants us to talk about him, to encourage believers with his Word and nudge unbelievers along to the truth. Do you think you could count your spiritual conversations in a week? I won't even ask you if the last 3-4 weeks had any at all, but going forward, could you count them? When people are around you, is it possible for you to use your job in the same way my chiropractor uses his? He does still crack necks and backs but that's not what gets him out of bed in the morning. Helping people and testifying to the Lord gets him out of bed. What gets you out of bed? A paycheck? The drive to succeed? Or are you driven by these stewardship principles in all of their facets?

All 9 of these principles work together. The ones I shared today so far also help you with your level of contentment. If you are truly thankful for the provision of a paycheck you will be more content. If you see the 100,000 hours of work as God's tool of sanctification this will help you with contentment. if you understand that every day at work is an opportunity to share the Lord with others, this knowledge and this purpose will bring you more contentment. If you deep down understand that you were created to work and created to have dominion and stewardship over your work environment, contentment will be waiting for you. if you can discover new ways to maximize and develop your work life, satisfaction and contentment will come looking for you. If you finally realize that you have dominion over your work and your work does not have dominion over you, contentment will beat down your door to find you. All of this is part of seeing your work through the eyes of Biblical stewardship.

I have two final principles and with them, I will finally answer the question we started with. When is it OK to hate your job? Or the better question-when is it Ok not to be content in your job?

**10. Vocation is a calling.**

The English word vocation comes from the Latin word *vocatio*, which literally means to be called or summoned. When do we usually use this word calling in terms of a career? We usually apply it to pastors and missionaries, don't we. I felt called to become a pastor. Ben and Jen Wood who were with us last Sunday truly feel called to be missionaries. It's not some mystical thing where God suddenly hits you with a lightning bolt front he sky and says, "Be a pastor. Be a missionary." It is something that happens over years of serving, study and all around faithfulness. But it's not just pastors and missionaries that have a calling. Every vocation, by definition, is a calling. Each of you has a calling to do what you are doing and if you think you don't have a calling, I hope these two message on work as stewardship will help you discover your calling.

So when is it OK to not have contentment in your present job? When God gives you a sense of futility to pry you lose toward a different calling. I have seen this in many people over the years. Some of you remember Jeff Gordon who moved here as a missionary and associate pastor to help start thus church. He as a manager in a chemistry lab in Madison. He liked his job but at one point, God gave him a strong sense of futility about what he was doing. All of a suden he felt like what he was doing was not worth doing.

The same thing happened to the Seeleys. In that case, God laid off Tim from his career as a plumber to force them to think about coming to Living waters to serve. Then God used their ministry at Living waters to move them to the Bahamas. Now is there anything wrong with being a lab manager or a plumber? Does God call people to serve as lab managers and plumbers? Absolutely. That's what I have been saying for the past two Sundays. But sometimes God gives you a sense of futility in your job in order to pry you loose to do something else he wants you to do.

The same thing happened with me. I felt a calling to church planting so when I started at my last church, for the first year, I was thinking about church planting. "OK God, when am I going to plan a church?" I was thinking about it too much and guess what happened to my contentment. It went away. If I was called to plant a church--and I was convinced that I was--why was God keeping me away from that calling? After about a year I realized that this preoccupation with church planting was not right so I decided to let it go. Can you guess what happened? I got my contentment back! Then, five years later when I wasn't thinking about it, quite suddenly, God released me to think about it again. Two weeks later, the director of church planting for the district called me out of the blue and asked if I was still thinking about church planting. I said, "Ray, you have no idea. All I have been doing for the past two weeks is thinking and praying about church planting." And that's the reason I'm standing here today.

So that's the only reason to have a lack of contentment in your job, but whatever you do, don't rush to that solution. Don't immediately conclude that God is calling you to something else. . Don't say, "Well I hate my job so it must be God's fault!" If you are not being a good steward of the job you have right now, I guarantee you that he is not going to call you to something else.

**11. Biblical Stewardship motivates us by joy instead of fear.**

Accountability and stewardship go hand in hand. 1 Cor 4:2 says, *it is required of stewards that they be found faithful*. God will hold us accountable to the way we steward all of life, including our work lives. Instead of only living in the fear that "God will hold us accountable" for the stewardship of all of his resources, I want us to think of stewardship in terms of reward and benefit. We don't *have* to be good stewards, we *get* to be good stewards. The whole thing is one giant blessing. We get to maximize God's blessing for his glory and for our benefit. And that starts tomorrow morning when you get to your work place.

Rich Maurer

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