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Five Reasons What You Do Matters

By Tal Davis

Since 1894, the first Monday of each September has been officially recognized as a national federal holiday called Labor Day. When I was a boy, I don't think we thought of it as holiday at all. It was just the end of summer. School started back the next day. Of course, now most school districts start in August, so Labor Day probably makes even less sense to kids today than it did in the past. Most Americans really have no idea what Labor Day is all about anyway. Ask someone on the street what is the purpose of Labor Day and you will probably get a blank stare. A few cities still have parades and politicians have rallies, but that's about all.

Labor Day started when President Grover Cleveland convinced Congress to set that date aside to honor American workers. Leaders of various American labor unions requested it, and at that time millions of Americans worked in industrial jobs and were members of unions. So to President Cleveland and Congress it made sense to give them what they wanted to keep them happy. In the more than a century since then, the labor movement has faded – mainly because fewer Americans are now employed in factory jobs and unions are less powerful. Nonetheless, Labor Day remains on our calendar each year despite the fact that most of us don't pay much attention to its historical meaning.

In any case, since we are approaching that date, let us consider some key biblical principles involving human labor and work. Yes, the Bible does speak about how we should conduct ourselves as employees and employers. It is included in a biblical worldview. So this is good time to think about it. Here are five key reasons what we do for a living matters in God's sight.

1. God Created Humans to Do Work in this World.

The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it. Genesis 1:15

As we all know, after God created the world, He made Adam and placed him in the garden of Eden. But He didn't just put him there to relax and enjoy the sunshine. He gave him work to do. Adam was to tend the garden by planting vegetation and keeping it clean. He also was to have dominion over the animals that were on the earth. The point is that God intended, from the very beginning, for man to work in His world. It is an intrinsic part of our being.

Now understand, this was before the Fall of man into sin. However, after the Fall, human work did get more difficult:

17 And he said to the man, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'Do not eat from it': The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust." Genesis 3: 17-19 CSB

Today, work is still a vital part of our purpose in life. God intends for each of us to find meaningful and ethical jobs that will provide for our needs and benefit those around us. We should see our occupations as callings or vocations from God to serve Him in the world.

2. Work Is a Part of Christian Stewardship.

Work is also a significant aspect of a key Christian doctrine and practice: Stewardship. The word "steward" is translated from the Greek word *oikonomos*, which literally means "manager" (from which was derived the English term "economics"). The critical doctrinal principle is that God owns everything, and we are just the managers of the resources He puts in our charge. We don't own any of it!

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Most people think of stewardship as financial donations to a church, charity, or other kind of ministry. Yes, that is an important aspect of it, but stewardship as taught in Scripture stretches far beyond just that concept. It involves our entire relationship to the material world under the Lordship of Christ.

Jesus Himself indicated that stewardship of material resources is a critical dimension of our spiritual lives.

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ... 24 "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." (Matthew 6:19-21, 24 NASB)

There are at least six ways stewardship is applicable to our lives.

First, God cares about the work we do and how we earn our livings to get the material resources He puts in our charge. We should make our living honestly, ethically, and in ways that glorify the Lord. Now this means that there may be some occupations Christians should not do. For instance a believer should never be involved in any kind of illegal business such as stealing or selling drugs. Even some legal professions are not ethical from a Christian perspective.

Second, God cares how we use the resources and the wages we earn. We should only spend money on things that are glorifying to God. Also, where we spend it also matters. We shouldn't support businesses that promote activities that are clearly immoral or harmful.

Third, God desires that we put aside some of our resources for the future. We need to save a reasonable amount for special needs that may arise in the future. (Note: Saving, however, is not

the same as hoarding which is not good stewardship.) Things may occur that we do not expect, or we may want to plan for the educations of our children. Having a reasonable amount of health and life insurance would also fall under this principle. Taking time to make a good long term percentage savings plan is definitely good stewardship. So is the following related principle.

Fourth, it definitely matters to God how and where we invest our finances for the future. We want to draw the highest return possible, but, again, only in ways that are ethical and glorifying to Him. We should always consider the moral probity of a company when purchasing stocks or bonds. Is the business worthy of our investment? We should also exercise extreme discernment and caution when considering investing in business enterprises that do not have solid track records of success. Unfortunately, fraud and mismanagement are major current problems in America.

Fifth, and this one often gets overlooked, is that we should take time to prepare a final will and testament. If a person dies without a valid will, the estate usually winds up in court with much of it going to the state. A good Christian steward should make a will well in advance of his or her possible death. We want to make sure the resources we leave behind go to places and people that will continue to use them to honor God. Many Christians will include churches and ministries in their wills instead of having the money go to the state.

Finally, and sixth, stewardship definitely includes giving. As we mentioned, giving is the one aspect of stewardship most people know something about. Unfortunately, a lot of what they believe about it is not based on sound biblical teaching. We don't have time and space to deal with those issues here. In any case, good stewardship includes giving to support the work of God's kingdom. In fact it is of great spiritual benefit to generously give of our financial resources to support ministries that are legitimately doing God's work.

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The starting point for that giving should be our local church. Churches necessarily depend on the regular donations of members to operate their ministries, to pay their pastors and staff, and to maintain their buildings and grounds. In addition to our local congregation, we can also give to parachurch ministries and ministers that work outside the purview of the local church. These would include missionaries and mission organizations, evangelistic ministries, Christian relief organizations, Christian schools, Christian universities, and evangelical theological seminaries.

In all cases we should make sure our donations are going to biblically sound and ethically managed causes. Christian ministries should be totally transparent about their financial practices and be open to review by independent auditing firms and agencies like The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) and Ministry Watch (<https://ministrywatch.com/>).

Many people believe tithing (10% of one's income) is the biblical standard for giving. Actually, nothing in Scripture mandates tithing or any other set level of giving. However, giving little or nothing to support one's church is poor stewardship and indicates a spiritual problem.

Yes, giving is an important part of Christian stewardship. One that most professing Christians do not practice very well. That being said, the idea that stewardship is limited only to one's giving practices is erroneous. Christian stewardship is an all encompassing lifestyle that applies to just about every area of a believer's life.

3. Our Work Is a Way That We Express Our Worship of God.

The truth is, the distinction of secular and sacred vocations is entirely artificial and unbiblical. For Christians, all work and all vocations are always sacred! So the third principle is simply that we need to think of our job, no matter how important or mundane, as a divine calling. It is not just an occupation to make money, it is a vocation (a calling). We should see our work as

an extension of our daily worship of God. As the Apostle Paul told the Colossians:

22 Slaves, obey those who are your human masters in everything, not with eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord and not for people, 24 knowing that it is from the Lord that you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. Colossians 3:22-24 (NASB)

4. Our Work Is a Way That We Testify to Our Faith in Jesus Christ to the World.

In many cases, Christians have to work for and with non-Christians. In that case our work should be a witness to our supervisors and co-workers. Our diligence will demonstrate the sincerity of our faith and give glory to God.

We all desire to work among friendly people. We want good employers and managers who care about their employees. Unfortunately, it is not always that way. People have various kinds of personalities and may be difficult to work with. Nonetheless, the Apostle Peter says Jesus is our example of how to endure in any environment.

21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 1 Peter 2: 21-24 (NASB)

5. Our Work Will Have Repercussions That Will Resonate for Generations to Come.

When I was in 10th grade in high school I worked the Christmas break of 1967 as a brick mason's laborer on the campus of Florida State University. It was hard work. Two of the

buildings we constructed were the double sided Lecture Hall on the west campus and an adjacent five story office/classroom building. Several years later I took classes in the that same lecture hall. And for years after when I passed those two buildings, I felt a bit of pride that I actually contributed to their construction. I still think of the generations of FSU students who have studied in those two buildings. Most were not even born when they were built.

I think this illustrates another principle of work we need to keep in mind. That is, that what we do now will have effects far into the future in ways we cannot now know. The houses we build, the books we write, the students we teach, the letters we compose, the machines we design, etc, will have lasting impacts on people, some who may not yet be born. That being said, we should do our jobs remembering that the things we do flow outward like waves on the sea, touching shores far beyond our vision. As Christians, our testimonies for Jesus may echo forward to those in the future who need to hear even in the legacy of our work.

No, Labor Day is not a Christian holiday, and most people don't give it much thought. Nonetheless, as you pray over your Labor Day barbecue, take a minute to thank the Lord for your occupation, and ask Him to bless the quality and meaning of your daily work for the glory and honor of God.

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