

Unemployment and the Christian Life

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“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen 3:19) And from Genesis 3:23 we read, “Therefore the Lord sent him (Adam) forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.”

Those words from Genesis sound like an early directive that man is going to work. And it doesn't sound like a casual suggestion. It's like the ten commandments. If they were optional. God would have called them the Ten Suggestions. The ideal state of man is not one of indolence without responsibility. Work and duty belong to the perfect state.

Almost from the beginning, man has had to work. At first he worked for survival, to sustain life, and now many of us work for a “better” life. Work is so important to us, that many men die shortly after they retire. Why? Why is work so important? Why do we “need” work? And once we get the hang of it, why do we have to stop?

There are several things that cause a man to stop working: **Retirement, Injury, Layoff – Unemployment.**

Unemployment. We hear the unemployment figures and say “That's bad. But things are bound to improve.” It sounds different though, when it happens to you. Do you know the difference between a recession and a depression? When your neighbor gets laid off, we call it a recession. When YOU get laid off, it's a depression.

I'm here today to communicate some thoughts on unemployment and how it impacts the Christian Life. This is one job I wish I wasn't qualified for due to lack of experience. But I do have some experience in this now, and it's experience I could have lived without. But on second thought, there is probably a good reason I am going through this.

How many of us can remember 1959? I remember a couple of things that happened: We saw a Catholic prepare to run for president, we saw Vince Lombardi building his Green Bay Packers into the so-called “big Green Machine” which was to ultimately capture the sports attention of the country and many championships, and I saw myself entering the job market in earnest.

I have worked nearly every day of my life since then. I haven't taken enough sick leave to sneeze at. I even skipped some vacations, taking pay instead. Unfortunately, this did not make me invulnerable or bring me security, for in September of 1985, the axe fell on me, too.

How did I take it? Badly. Worse than that: Depression, shock, anger, disappointment, fear, worry, - the whole works. It's tough to cope with the idea that the company you've given so much to can just jump up and tell you you are no longer needed. I did not handle it well.

But I recovered. at least at the conscious level. and went to work finding a job. But what is work? Why do we work? And how important is work?

What is Work?

Work is what we do. It can be building cars, building houses, or building a business. It can be managing a household or a corporation. Work is the thing most of us do to earn a living or to help others. Work is fulfillment.

Why do We Work?

For Wealth? In James 1:9-11 we are warned against dependence on wealth. For Recognition? For Social Status? Or because you are so in debt you have no choice. Maybe you have seen the bumper sticker which says "I owe. I owe. so off to work I go." Most of us were not born wealthy, so we had to go to work. One option is to marry someone with money. There was the man who said "I didn't want to marry her for her money, but there was no other way I could get it."

The truth is, we are told, that most of us do not really know why we go to work! A study has shown that if you were to stop 100 people on the street and ask them why they went to work every day, 98 of them would not be able to tell you. Obviously, many go to work because they need the money, but have no real goals in their work life. No wonder there are so many dissatisfied, unmotivated workers. No wonder costs are high and productivity is low. No wonder so many workers spend their working hours dreaming of the things they will do during their leisure time.

I started work when I was about 12. I decided to sell peanuts at the ball park. Why? Not because I had to. Probably because I was like one of our recent heavyweight boxing champs who was asked by an interviewer how and why he decided to be a prizefighter. His answer was "Well, I looked down at my two hands, and neither one of them had any money in them." I just wanted some extra money of my own.

That's the reason most of us START WORKING. But that isn't what keeps us working. Once a man has satisfied the basic needs of his family, he becomes driven by a need for recognition, satisfaction, or a burning desire to do something no one else has been able to do. Work then can become an obsession.

I work for all the usual reasons, beginning with money. Like most people, I don't want to depend on someone else to take care of my family and me. On the other hand, I have told my wife on several occasions that I have never worked a day in my life for money. Yes, I need the money, but for me the real motivation is the challenge and the accomplishment. I've never had a job I didn't like, and I have never worked with anyone I couldn't get along with.

Not all people see it that way. Luther covers the subject this way:

"Your work is a very sacred matter. God delights in it, and through it He wants to bestow His blessing on you....For the world does not consider labor a blessing. Therefore it flees and hates it... But the pious who fear the Lord labor with a ready and cheerful heart; for they know God's command and will."

We work because it is part of God's plan.

How Important is Work? Really?

Let's go back to Vince Lombardi again. Even though not a Lutheran, this legendary football coach had quite an impact on this country of ours. His teaching still goes on today, even though he's been gone these many years.

Vince Lombardi had a philosophy: He taught his players that the three most important things in a man's life were his Faith in God, His family, and the Green Bay Packers ... in that order. I don't know if he lived that concept 100% but it's a good plan. But most of us do it backwards. We put the job first, the family second, and God last ...if at all. That's why the loss of

a job is so devastating to a man. Our whole identity and purpose for living is centered in our work. When that is gone, our self image, our self worth is seriously in question. The more importance we place on our work, the tougher it is on us when we lose it.

One concept is that there are six major areas in our life: **Spiritual, Mental, Physical, Home, Business, Social**. Each of these six areas is important. Neglect of any of these areas results in an incomplete, unbalanced life. If we are to have a balanced, productive, satisfying life, we must devote equal time and effort to each of the six areas.

But what do we do? We bury ourselves in our work, or our social life, or whatever our special thing is, and tend to neglect the other areas. The typical success-oriented working man spends himself and all his resources in his drive to “make something of himself,” at the expense of his family...his health...and his spiritual well-being.

What’s the Biblical Stance on Work?

The Bible mentions work in many places. The fishermen, the laborers in the vineyard, the shepherds. Now work has been around since time began. Martin Luther has written on the subject:

“Christ teaches us that we should not be anxious about temporal food and about clothing but should think only of daily necessities. So he says in Matt 6:34: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” It would certainly be good exercise of faith to learn to pray to God only for the bread of today, so that one might trust in a greater God. Not that one should not work for temporal possessions and sustenance, but that one should not be anxious, as if we could not be fed unless we worried and were anxious. Work should rather be done to serve God by it, to avoid idleness. and to satisfy His commandments, since He says to Adam (Gen 3:19): “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.” We should not worry and be anxious about how we shall be fed, for God will certainly take care of this if in singleness of heart we go about our work according to His commandment.

Why can’t God take care of us without our help? He can. But Luther explains it this way:

No doubt God could create children without man and woman. but he does not intend to do so. Rather, He joins man and woman to make it look as if man and woman do the procreating. Yet He, hidden under this mask, is the one who does it. God bestows every good thing, but you must “pitch in” and “take the bull by the horns.” That is, you must work and supply God with a reason and a covering. You see, God wants no lazy idlers: but we should work faithfully and diligently, every one of us, according to his calling and office; then He will bless and prosper our efforts. On the other hand. I also say this to the presumptuous who imagine that their success comes or must come and be acquired through their industry and labor, through their ability and wisdom, and pay no attention to God.

Something I read has given me real confidence. It said “God and I are a majority.” And God tells us “Without me you can do nothing.” “With God, all things are possible.” And the real powerhouse comes from St Paul’s writing, “I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens

me.” But when we get successful, we are inclined to think “How smart I am!” You have perhaps heard it said that the problem with a “self-made man” is that he worships his creator. Luther again:

When riches come, the godless heart of man thinks: I have achieved this with my labors. It does not consider that these are purely blessings of God that at times come to us through our labors and at times without our labors, but never BECAUSE of our labors; for God always gives them because of His Undeserved mercy. God does want us to work... And, as they say, the harder I work, the luckier I get.

Luther looks to Solomon to Put work into focus:

Here Solomon wants to endorse work, but to condemn worry and avarice. For he does not say: “The Lord is building the house. so no one should work at its construction. Rather, he puts it like this: “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.” He says in effect: YOU must, of course labor, but the effort is futile if you do nothing but labor and imagine that you are supporting yourself...Labor you should, but supporting and providing for you belongs to God alone. Therefore YOU must keep these two very far apart - as far apart as heaven and earth, as God and man: laboring or building the house and supporting yourself.

We all like to think we are earning our way. We feel that we have what we have because we have worked hard for it. And in most cases, I think, those who work hard do have more than those who are less ambitious. That’s what free enterprise is all about. We just have to remember that God says in John 15:5: “I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; FOR WITHOUT ME YE CAN DO NOTHING.” Then in verses 7 and 8: “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” Does that sound a lot like this promise from the sermon an the mount? “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matt 6:33).

It seems that ALL we need do is put our work in the proper perspective. But being man, and not God, this is easier to talk about than to do. Otherwise, it would not be so difficult to take the setbacks.

What Happens When We lose Our Work?

What is the initial reaction when a person is told his employer no longer needs his services... that he’s being laid off?

Reactions vary. Some take it better than others. Yet, no matter what shows on the surface, I think we all feel pretty much the same inside.

I had to lay off my salesman, shortly before I was ordered to close the division office I was running in Houston. He took it very well. “Times are tough ,” he said. “Business hasn’t been good. Most of our clients have no money to spend on engineering and construction. It had to come.”

I have another friend who had been caught in move to eliminate the Denver Office of a large engineering-construction firm. He said something like “First I was shocked. Then I was angry. Then I was afraid. And then I was all I three.”

Then there was my case. I had been with the company fifteen years, had finally moved into middle management, and a new chairman began reshuffling management. After being one of the first employees in that Subsidiary, he said I didn't fit. My job was eliminated. it was hard for me to take this from a newcomer... someone who had no background in our company OR our line of business. I too was shocked, angered, and frustrated.

Is this typical? I think so. But we somehow survive this, and begin to think about a solution.

After the initial shock we have to decide what to do. How do I tell my wife? What will my friends think? How will the kids explain it to their friends? I've really blown it. Maybe it wasn't my fault at all, but I'll still look like a loser...like I have failed myself and them.

It's easy to forget that there are thousands of others with the same problem. It's easy to think you have been singled out for this punishment. One trip to the unemployment office will tell you you aren't alone. It helps to know that your problem is not necessarily one of your own making.

Whose Fault is It?

Still, You can't help wondering whose fault it is. Whose fault is it that you got laid off? Yours? The boss's? Reagan's? The customers that stopped coming? The competitor's? These are just some of the questions that rattle around in the head.

Maybe it is MY fault. Maybe I didn't try hard enough. Maybe I offended the wrong people. We all hate office politics, but they exist in every organization. and play a bigger role than we like to admit. Maybe they don't need people like us because now there are younger men in the office, whose education is more up-to-date, who can be hired for lower salaries because of their youth. Is it our fault we got older? Did I rise to my level of incompetence? Maybe my expertise isn't needed as much as some other, and economic conditions demand that overhead costs be cut. Self doubt barges in.

Maybe you can blame it on the boss. Maybe there has been a management change and his style and thinking is out of step with yours. This can be painful if you are unwilling to change. If you are stuck with “the way we always do it” there is bound to be trouble.

You can blame the government, but that's a cop-out. I believe in the things Mr. Reagan is trying to accomplish. The state of our economy is hurting me, too. We all know our government is not perfect—but it's way ahead of whatever is in second place. Most of the people I know don't want handouts. They just want an opportunity to work. An opportunity to do what they do best. If we will just allow our government to stick to its game plan, our nation will emerge stronger than ever.

A young friend of mine had been working as an inspector at the Eisenhower tunnel as an employee of the State of Colorado. As the job neared its end, she told me she wasn't sure what would become of her when the tunnel was finished. She said “They haven't trained me to do anything else. They have to do something.” I quickly and not very diplomatically told her that it was not the State's responsibility to train her for anything. I told her no one owed her anything, and if she wanted to move ahead, she'd have to tend to her own training. The last time she called was a couple of years ago, when she was in her third year of engineering at Auburn. She finally realized that “If it is to be, it's up to me.”

After a time we can stop thinking about whose fault it is. It really doesn't matter. It's water under the bridge. It's time for a fresh look at goals, assets, and resources. Maybe your career wasn't going where you really wanted it to go anyway. Maybe your job was destroying your health, your family life, your spiritual life. Now you have the time to reevaluate... time to correct your course. Time to shore up weaknesses. We can all improve, can't we?

Impact on Family Life

It's bad enough to have all this going on inside you, but your wife and family have to handle it too. What happens to them? Initially, there is tension. fear, worry. What's going to happen? Where will the money come from? Will we have to move? After a time, some of these things mellow. but they are always lurking. Little problems seem bigger, somehow, because of "the situation." Everything affects everything else.

If the way you handle this is the measure of a Christian, I think I failed the test. I know God promises He won't give us more than we can handle. I know that we are to give thanks in all things. I know that depression is destructive, and a terrible time-waster. We know these things on an intellectual level, but emotion easily overrides these facts. A Christian knows that when one door closes, it is because God has opened another one somewhere else. All we have to do is find it. That's a promise. All things work together for good for those that love God. But it takes faith to hold on. And this will test a person's faith.

C. S. Lewis makes a point: When asked why so many Christians seem less than perfect. his reported response was "You should have seen them BEFORE they became Christians."

There are good things and there are bad things about being unemployed. Good things include

There is finally more time to spend with the family. Now you have the time to spend with your wife. Private time. Renew your relationship. Try to make up for all the hours and weeks you ignored her for the sake of the job. Take a trip to the Mountains on a Wednesday. Did you know that there is hardly anyone on the roads on weekdays?

There is time to get additional training - more education. Time to prepare for a better career. Time to think.

There is time to get things done around the house. All those things you've been putting off until you got around to it. All of a sudden, you've been given a gigantic "Round Tuit."

Unemployment can be enjoyable. if you want it to be. If you can conquer the frustration of not having work to do, if you can shrug off the worry of where the money is coming from, there are real benefits. There have actually been times when I felt that I really didn't have time to work. Shortly before I got laid off, we became guardians for two grand-nieces, ages nine and ten. We enrolled them in school here at Zion. I had time to take the girls to school and pick them up. I had time to help them with their homework. Sometimes they felt I spent too much time on that, because I made sure they did their assigned work, and did it right.

And even though I devoted several hours a day to this, they still managed to not do some of their work.

I also had time to spend with our newest grandson. I was allowed to watch him grow and develop, day by day. This is something I hadn't been able to do with any of our own seven children, because I was always too busy...or working out of town somewhere.

I had time to spend a week with my mother and father to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary ... time I would not have had if I'd been working. My dad was 90 years old, and his health was slipping steadily. I have never had enough time for my parents since I left home after high school.

Then a few months later, we made another trip to see my parents. They live in South Dakota, 750 miles from here. At that time, we were very unsure how much time my dad had left. We happened to arrive at a very good time, for both mom and dad were in low spirits. Mom was working night and day taking care of dad, who was spending most of his time in bed by then. He didn't even want to get up to eat. I'm grateful for the time we were given to do this when they needed our help and moral support.

Then, three weeks ago, dad passed away. We spent ten days in South Dakota. We had time to be with mother, with the rest of the family, and to take care of all the things that need to be done when this happens. I am grateful for that time too. Now we have brought my mother to stay with us, permanently I hope. I have time to spend with her now when she really needs it.

It makes a person think that there is a reason he's not tied to a regular job right now. In God's plan, there is always a reason. Man can't always see the reason, tries to work things out by himself, and interferes with the plan. And there is always a plan. I know that when God is ready, the right doors will open once again. But that doesn't always keep us from being afraid. Afraid of everything. It's easy to fear something we don't understand and can't see.

Of course there are some drawbacks to being unemployed, too. Few of us are wealthy enough to go indefinitely without income. We have been more fortunate than some, and haven't missed any meals yet.

Not knowing what will happen is distressing. There's no doubt about it! Even though I know that God has promised to provide ... and I will be quick to say that our family has had difficult times in the past, and that God has ALWAYS provided, He has never failed us - it is easy to become anxious. Call it concern, call it worry, or call it fear. Fear is real.

A real man is never afraid of anything, right? Wrong. You don't believe that, and neither do I. Fear is one of the most powerful and motivating emotions we experience. And even if we are able to mask our own fears, what about the family? Do you think they won't be afraid? Wondering if they'll have to move to another city? Another state? Do you think your wife will start worrying whether there will be enough money? Do you wish now you hadn't taken that expensive vacation?

Is fear a demonstration of lack of faith? Sort of, I think. But that does not mean a Christian won't be afraid at least for a while. Then, if he turns to God instead of to his own resources, he remembers that God knows there will be fearful times in our lives. "Fear not," He says. How many times have YOU seen those words in the Bible? 365 times, says one researcher. That's one for every day of the year. That seems to tell us that God knows we are going to be afraid, but that He is there to see us through.

We can't outrun fear...we have to handle it. We have to meet it and whip it. There are a couple of verses that are special to me when it comes to handling fear. One of these verses comes from Psalm 46 - one of my Dads favorites me - the one my mother requested I read at Dad's funeral two weeks ago. The other comes from II Timothy 1:7. Put them together and you have a powerful fear fighter:

Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea...For God hath not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

Fear is real, and this verse, used as an affirmation, helps overcome fear. I learned this, not from a clergyman, but from a businessman. A businessman who has, as he puts it, gotten the money thing behind him....so he can now do the important things in life. Now he does seminars on success and self-improvement, all based on scripture. There are many self-help books available, and seminars and tapes. Some of them are very bad. They advocate stepping on others for personal gain. The good ones all have their roots in scripture. I am convinced that some of the authors don't know this, and that they are expanding on and paraphrasing the work of others. But every sound principle of success and self-improvement can be traced back to the bible. The "self-fulfilling prophecy," for example, is nothing but a statement of faith, and faith is what? Paul tells the Hebrews, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.: (Hebrews 11:1).

The impact of unemployment on a Christian is not much different than on a non-Christian. The difference appears in the way we handle it. We would all like to think that a Christian's life is easier than that of the non-believer. But God doesn't promise that at all. We will have trials. We will have tragedy. We are all going to have our share of troubles. The difference is, that a Christian doesn't have to handle it alone. Not only do we have the loving support of our family and fellow believers, we have God himself on our side. That means you can't lose... no matter what ... IF YOU TRUST GOD. On the other hand, if we let the worry get the best of us (weak faith again), and try to handle everything ourselves, the situation can and probably will get worse.

My job was important to me, maybe too important. Because when I lost it I thought I had lost everything. What did I have left? A wife who loves me. A family who loves me and needs me. My health. My friends. My home and car. My church And most of all God, who promises to love me and take care of me even though I'm not perfect.

All I really "lost" was a job. A job working for someone who didn't need me, appreciate me, or care what happened to me. Who needs it? Maybe God is waiting for me to get my house in order and my head on straight. Maybe He has something else in store for me...and He's waiting for me to get ready.

Your Job Now is to Get a Job!

When you don't have a job, you have some choices to make:

- You can retire. For most of us that's not really an option.
- You can seek employment in your basic profession or calling. That's what most of us do.
- You can seek a job in some other vocation. That takes retraining in some cases, and many employers aren't eager to give you a chance if your background doesn't match their needs fairly closely.
- Take a "menial" job to keep the peanut butter on the table. Many have had to take this route, but it severely interferes with an intensive job search, and it doesn't look very good on a resume.
- You can give up ...don't try anything...and accept doom. And sooner or later, this could lead to starvation.

When you don't have a job, and you need a job, your job is to find a job. That means you work as hard at finding a new job as you did at your old job. At least 40 hours a week. And now that you are self-employed, working overtime can be very profitable. And the first step is to straighten out your attitude.

Attitude and Self-Image

It's not what happens to you that's important, but how you FEEL about it that counts. That's true. As someone has said: "It's Your ATTITUDE, not your APTITUDE, that determines your ALTITUDE." At a time like this we need to know that our mental attitude is more important than our education, our skills, or our experience. Certainly education and experience are important. Those are the things that enable us to do the job. They are useless, though, if our attitude is not what it should be. And attitude is related to self-image.

When you lose your job, the damage to your self-esteem can be devastating. When your whole self-image is based on your work, your ability to perform and be accepted for what you can do, the loss of that opportunity to perform can really wound you. And when no one jumps up to give your life purpose again, you can begin to think that NO ONE needs you, and that you really aren't worth very much.

So much emphasis has been placed on working and being useful that it is no wonder that millions of unemployed Americans are discovering that when they lose their work they run out of self-esteem. WE HAVE TO REALIZE THAT WE ARE WORTH MORE THAN OUR WORK. We must not fall into the trap of works-righteousness.

The first thing is to get our head on straight: give your attitude a tune up and work on your self-image. Most people have a terrible self image. All the positive thinking in the world can't help you if you think you are not worth anything. That's why it's nonsense to think about what you want to do until you decide who you want to be. And we can be anything we want to be.

We Need a Plan

After you've evaluated your alternatives and made a choice, you need a plan. Plan your work. Work your plan. Trite, but true. And necessary. A plan can't be made without goals. God wants us to have goals. If you have no goals, you are forever doomed to be at the mercy of

someone who has. If you don't know where you're going, you will wind up somewhere else. And, as Robert Schuller puts it, if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.

Most people set goals backwards. They think that future achievements are limited to past accomplishments. Goals must be set based on what we WANT to do, not on what we HAVE done. Not "WHAT can I DO?" but "What CAN I do?" But how can we set goals?

Do we know what God wants us to do? In James we read,

Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain; Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is a sin. (James 4:13-17)

All plans, all goals should be made as statements of faith. Any statement about tomorrow is a statement of faith. We shouldn't try to take our lives into our own hands. Remember that all we do is dependent on God's will. We'd better not forget who is in charge.

But how can we know that our choice will be God's will? We don't. Not for sure. Do we sit and wait for a signal? No. We must move forward. Life is like rowing a boat in a river. Either we go forward or we go backward. There is no standing still. And as long as we are moving, God can correct our course.

We have a friend who raises dogs, of several varieties - not several distinct varieties, but mixed breeds. "Heinz" we call them. They do have some good breeding, but not enough to bring the prices she gets. I asked her how she is able to get such high prices for dogs that can be picked up at the pound for next-to-nothing. She says, "First, I pray a lot." And she means it. She prays about everything. The whole family has a "working faith." Her husband was laid off a few years ago, and decided to use that time to build their house. But when you're not working, you have no income. And since they usually give about half of their income to the work of the Lord, there was little money to buy materials. But believing that God would provide, they began, and it turns out that a large quantity of used two by fours was given to them, several truckloads of insulation from another source, and on and on. Faith seems to work well for them. They have handled unemployment quite well.

So we begin with prayer, and rely on these promises from God: Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established. (Prov 16:3) Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (Prov 3:5-6) Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and He shall bring it to pass. (Psalm 37:4-5) What this says to me is that God will help me get where I want to go if I make a commitment to Him, if I let him help, if I can stop trying to handle it alone. "Let go, and let God," as some would say.

It's Time for Action

There is a catch to everything. Goals and plans are worth nothing without action. "Plan Your work, work your plan." A job hunt, like any other task, must be organized. Time must be used properly. The job of job-hunting must be pursued with as much diligence as working for an

employer. Remember, now you are working for yourself. Now you are the direct beneficiary of all your efforts.

A job search is usually conducted from the home, and homes are full of distractions. There is always something else to do. That's why written goals, a formal work plan, and time scheduling is so important. We never outgrow our temptation to laziness either... and to sleep late. These are the first obstacles to overcome. And fight procrastination. Procrastination will kill the best of intentions. It has been said that the smallest thing done is better than the grandest thing planned. Action: that's what does it.

There are obstacles without number when you are hunting for a job, or trying to accomplish anything worth while. Responding to want ads is one of the worst. A nationally advertised job opening produces 1000 to 1200 responses. 10% of those are qualified. Of those 120 people, 8 or 10 will be interviewed. The mathematical chances of being hired are minute. I have applied for hundreds of jobs. Dealing with rejection is a daily task. You have to have a thick skin and the right attitude. No one owes you a living. Companies don't normally create jobs, although they can if they really want you. The company that let you go rejected you ... told you that you are no longer useful to their goals. Each time we apply for a job we don't get, we are rejected again. Soon the FEAR OF REJECTION is foremost in our minds. We feel that there must be something wrong with us. We must not perceive rejection as a personal affront. Much of it has to do with the economic condition of our Country. Large companies are shrinking now, restructuring for survival. Some have closed the door. Small companies are trying to diversify. Everything is changing.

A lot of life is rejection and failure. Crass statement? Ted Williams, the greatest hitter of all time in American baseball. set a record by hitting the ball four times out of ten times at bat. But the other side of the coin is he MISSED, he FAILED, six times out of ten! And how did he become such a good batter? By learning how to overcome the mistakes he made when he was hitting much worse. He practiced! And he kept on trying. Life's situations are similar. We start out, roads get blocked, doors get closed, tires go flat, things don't work out as we planned, but we go on, because we know that when one door closes, it's because God has opened another for us. We have to keep on keeping on until we find it.

That's why I love the parable of the sower:

Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell an stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. (Matt 13:3-8)

Christ goes on to explain that He is talking about people hearing the Word. But if only every salesman, every manager, every teacher everyone who deals with people....if we all understood what this means, we'd know that if we have good seed and keep on planting, if we are persistent, and are patient, our efforts must be successful. It's a promise from God!

Jesus was positive. The first question Jesus asked the man by the pool was, "Do you want your health restored?" (John 5:6) An important question to us all. Do we want to be well?

Successful ? Do we want to live up to our potential? To do good things, the right things? If so , then every one of Gods marvelous resources is at our disposal. Just for the asking.

Making it Work

Putting it all together takes persistence. And faith. Luther talks about persistence and faith:

Work on, though success is slow in coming.. There stand God's word and command; they apply to us as well as to St Peter. With them, God orders us to work and to do whatever our calling requires. Therefore he who looks to his calling and continues to work diligently, even if good fortune is against him and success fails to come for a while, is bound to fare well in the end. For God cannot do otherwise. He delights in obedience and blesses it with success, even though He may delay doing so for a while and may test us to see whether we intend to hold fast to His command. Therefore no one should become disgruntled or unwilling, even if, like Peter, he does fish in vain for a night.

When we're talking about the value of persistence, the words of Calvin Coolidge may be more familiar:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not. Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not. Unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education alone will not. The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

To this all we need add is "With the help of God."

When you mix real effort with faith, anything is possible, "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31b). And Paul says in his writing to the Philippians: "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God" (Phil 4:6). God has told us we will work. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread ..." It is his command. And God gives us the opportunity to work, and the ability to work. But at the same time, we are to do so without care and anxiety. These words from the sermon on the mount say it best:

Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what shall ye put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin. And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, "What shall we eat?" or, "What shall we drink?" or, "Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek). For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek

ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matt 6: 25-34).

I urge you, and challenge each of you to train, motivate.. nurture, and support Christian leaders in business. We desperately need the Christian influence in business. Let's not buy the notion that all business is lying, cheating, and stealing, and that it has to be to survive. We can change business, and change the average person's perception of business, if we try. The everyday contact, the routine relationship, provides thousands of opportunities for real Christian witness. More than we can ever accomplish through formal evangelism programs. We need it, and it is possible. We should do it. We can do it. We must do it.