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Your Job and Your Calling

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As we think of how our Christian faith plays out in life, there are a lot of possible distinctions we could make. But there are two which I have found helpful to more fully understand how our faith touches every part of our lives.

As human persons, God, when he created us, put us in two worlds – the material and the spiritual. The essential essence of our personhood is spiritual, and we are able to, literally, transcend the physical world as we interact with God and with other persons. At the same time, our spirit is housed in a physical body which is bound by the constraints of the material world. To make navigating this dichotomy even more difficult, the sin which infiltrated the material universe at the Fall works against our spirit as we seek to interact with a holy God.

Of course, there are a lot of different ways this plays out in daily life, but I want to make a particular distinction today in this article. To do this, I want to distinguish between what I am identifying as our "calling" and our "job." The fact of this distinction is not meant to imply that the two different parts of our life are separate in actual fact; it is only meant to distinguish between the two different parts of reality that we, as human beings, must negotiate in daily life.

In my definition, for the purpose of this article, our "calling" refers to our spiritual interactions, while our "job" relates to the physical activities we do as we live life (both our occupation and all of the other activities we do in life). Let's take a brief look at these two and explore the distinctions.

Our Calling

Calling is a big-picture concept that relates to what God wants to do to accomplish his purpose in the world. To grasp that, we must first know what that purpose is.

When God created the world and mankind, he had a particular purpose in mind. That purpose was to create a creature in his own image who would be capable of interacting with him in a personal relationship. As a Trinitarian being, this is not something God had a "need" for, but because of his loving nature, he wanted to share his love further. So, he created man.

When sin entered the world and human beings ended up separated from God because of sin, God created a solution to that problem. By his own initiative, he provided a way for us to have our sin forgiven, and offered it to us. But he also determined to involve those who entered into relationship with him in that process. So God issued a calling to all his followers to share the good news of his saving love with those who don't know him. So our calling is to partner with God in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ to a world lost in sin.

What is important to understand is that the means by which we partner with God in this enterprise is not the same for all people. In fact, it can even be expressed differently in a single individual's life in different circumstances. Individuals live in all kinds of places and situations, and God wants to reach out to all of them. As such, believers who live and work in the various places and situations in life will have the opportunity to use their personal circumstances to fulfill God's calling to share the gospel. What we need to grasp is that

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EVERY believer has the same calling from God – to share the good news of Jesus Christ. It is not the calling that is different for individual Christians, it is the method of fulfilling that calling.

Our Job

This, then, brings us to the topic of our job. Our job is more individual and relates to the work we do as we live life in the world. It should certainly be an instrument we use to fulfill our calling, but the job and the calling are not the same.

A job is an expression of our material existence. We are physical beings with physical needs to eat, rest, interact with other people, and a whole host of other things. To live life in the world, it is necessary for us to work in order to take care of our various needs.

Our job and our calling should not operate in opposition to one another. Of course, there are some jobs which are, by default, contrary to God's purposes. We can easily think of activities which are, in and of themselves, sinful. Christians should not even contemplate actions which engage those activities (ex. organized crime, porn star, gambling industry, and the like).

But most jobs are not inherently sinful. God created a material world which is designed in a way that includes work which has its own purpose. For the physical world to work, we must do things which allow us to make money, wield power, create things, work with people, and generate many other results).

One of the struggles many Christians have in living their lives out in the world is that it often seems that our job is something secular, whereas our calling is spiritual work. As such, it is easy to separate this in our minds in ways which

make it seem like the two areas are completely independent.

There is, actually, a way in which the calling and the job are separate.* Most of the work we do out in the world is not "church work." This does not, though, mean that the "non-spiritual" work is not ordained of God. He wants believers to penetrate the entire world in order to be salt and light, and to create a society which is orderly and just. This happens as believers do their work in the world with their calling in mind. God wants to be Lord of all.

[*There are jobs where individuals do work in Christian ministry where the calling is directly related to the job. This might be serving on a church staff, working as a professional missionary, and the like. But even in these situations, not all of the job involves doing spiritual ministry; for instance, a pastor must also do administration and conduct meetings to keep the organization working properly.]

So, there will be some people who serve in government. There will be others who serve in the military. Still others will be bankers, business owners, store employees, plumbers, bakers, business managers, homemakers, medical professionals, and the list could go on and on. Each believer in each job should do the very best they can, and reap the rewards of their labor. Then, they should use the fruit of their work as faithful stewards of God. As faithful stewards, we should discern from God how to use the resources we get from our job to accomplish his purposes in the world (our calling). We can do this by supporting kingdom ministries, by taking care of personal and family needs, by helping those in need, and the like.

There is, however, one way in which the calling and the job are not separate. Every Christian should do their job in a way that reflects God's will for their lives. God has called us to work as if he were our boss. And we should

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do that by working hard, having a good attitude, building people up, and in pursuing excellence in what we do. In other words, the work we do should bring glory to God.

Combining Calling and Job

While understanding the difference between our calling and job is important, it is not the most important thing. What is most important is to figure out how to incorporate both into daily life based on a biblical worldview perspective. We must serve God by promoting his purpose in our lives while, at the same time, living out our daily lives in the world. Most people tend to emphasize one while pushing the other to the side. A true biblical worldview cannot do that. The two must be put together in a way that promotes God's kingdom AND allows us to work effectively in the world.

Discipleship Training

To make that a reality, we must start at the beginning point. We cannot do what we don't know how to do. So, if we intend to be faithful in both arenas, we need to, somehow, be trained in both. Most people get good training for their job, but very little for their calling. I think it can also be legitimately stated that most who do get training in both areas are people whose job is directly related to their calling – religious workers. The reason for that is because when they go to Bible college or seminary to train in their job, it includes subjects which also give training to be effective in their calling. Most people who are not in religious work get the opportunity to train for their job, but training related to God's calling on their lives is not a part of the curriculum. That being the case, those who are in jobs which are not church related must put forth special effort to gain training for their calling. Ideally, Christians ought to be able to get this kind of training in their churches. Sadly, very

few do. There are couple of reasons for this.

One reason is that most churches either don't have the resources or the desire to make this kind of discipleship training a central part of their church program. It takes a lot of time and effort to run a church organization and provide a great worship opportunity week in and week out. Most churches simply don't have the personnel with the time or expertise who are able to devote time to making discipleship training a priority.

But there is another reason which is, perhaps, even more daunting. The truth is, only small percentage of Christians are even interested in getting this kind of training. Even churches which try to incorporate discipleship training into their programs tend to have a very small number of participants. This kind of training simply cannot be neglected for any Christian who wants to be effective in fulfilling the ideals of both their calling and their job.

Becoming a Disciple

But we also know that simply being smart is not enough in God's economy. We cannot avoid the necessity of learning the basic foundational knowledge of our Christian faith, but we must also learn how to incorporate that knowledge into daily life – and this is the tricky part. There are circumstances where it is no problem to speak of our faith as we work out in the world. But there are other circumstances where faithfully living out our faith has to be done in more indirect ways. Of course, there is no way to spell out all of the possibilities in an article like this, as every circumstance has its own need. Thus, we must have the right attitude, learn to be sensitive to the individuals we interact with, lean on the Holy Spirit to guide us, and intentionally touch the lives of those he wants us to influence.

Your Job and Your Calling

The bottom line we face as we seek to faithfully live out God's calling on our lives, is that we must put ourselves into a position where we are prepared to

serve God in every circumstance. Additionally, we must be willing to live every part of our life in God's calling. When we do that, we become able to be all God wants us to be.

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