

THE BEAUTY OF JOY-FILLED WORK**By Rick Boxx**

My great-grandfather lived into his mid-90's. Wade (his first name) was primarily a roofer and a part-time farmer. He loved to work hard and enjoy life. I remember when Great-Grandpa Boxx was 89 years old, he leaned over toward me and with a twinkle in his eye, whispered, "Don't tell your parents, but I just finished roofing the church on the corner yesterday."

Can you imagine many people at that stage of life taking on such an arduous project? To the contrary, many people speak often about how much they anticipate the day when they can retire, when they can cease the day-to-day grind of going to work. But not my great-grandfather. For him, work was a joyful pursuit; he regarded it as very important, even beyond the typical retirement age.

All around the world we can see awe-inspiring examples of people who threw themselves wholeheartedly into their work. There are the great and wondrous churches in Europe, the Great Wall of China, the Taj Mahal in India, the modern towering architectural marvels of Dubai. The United States just celebrated the 250th anniversary of its founding, and numerous buildings in the capital city of Washington, D.C. attest to the hard work and dedication of many people.

The story is told of a stonemason in Paris, France centuries ago, laboring on a small section of wall. Someone asked him, "What are you doing?" With great enthusiasm the worker responded without hesitation, "I'm building a cathedral!" His part might have been small, but he knew it was important.

Most of us will not have the opportunity to participate in constructing amazing landmarks that will last for centuries, but we all can draw satisfaction – and joy – from whatever form of work we perform.

For much of his life, King Solomon had explored every type of pleasure, entertainment and ambitious project he could imagine. Ultimately, he concluded "all of them are meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 1:14), a phrase he repeated numerous times in that Old Testament book. However, the king had a revelation that showed him there is purpose in the midst of life's seemingly futile pursuits.

Solomon wrote, "So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?" (Ecclesiastes 3:22). He also advised his readers, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

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In the Bible we discover that rather than being a burden, from the beginning God intended for work to bring satisfaction, fulfillment – and joy. In the Genesis creation account, we find that His first command to Adam and Eve was to, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air.... I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food” (Genesis 1:28-30).

Theologians called that the “cultural mandate,” God appointing the men and women He had created to serve as stewards – managers and workers – to cultivate and maintain all He had made. This is why people like my great-grandfather can find fulfillment in “whatever their hands find to do.” Do you have a joyful attitude about your work?

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. When you go to work, does retirement ever cross your mind? Are you merely striving to survive until the day you can retire and become freed from the daily demands and responsibilities of working? Explain your answer.
2. Even if the job you currently have is not ideal, not your “dream job,” are there some aspects of it that bring you fulfillment, a sense of joy? Think of one or two things about your work for which you are thankful, even during times of difficulty. What are they?
3. Can you think of someone who truly enjoys the work that he or she does, and it is evident just by observing them and how they approach what they do? What can you learn from them in trying to find more enjoyment in your own work?
4. Imagine that the job or career you currently have is exactly where God wants you to be – at least for the time being. And He wants you to serve as His representative right there. Does that change your perspective on your work? Why or why not?

Challenge for This Week

Take sometime this week to assess your work and your attitude toward it. Are your thoughts about it more negative than positive, or do you genuinely enjoy what you do?

If you find your thoughts about your current job are primarily negative, share those feelings with a good friend, mentor, trusted advisor or a small group of people with whom you can speak honestly and in confidence. On the other hand, if you do find joy and fulfillment in your work, perhaps you can serve as a sounding board for someone who is struggling

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Proverbs 12:11, 18:9, 22:29; 1 Corinthians 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Colossians 3:17, 23-24

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