

## Intro

Guys define themselves by what they do. It's in the marketplace where we reach for those things that seemingly promise significance, worth and validation.

Listen to two guys introducing themselves for the first time. Once they get past their names and assorted pleasantries, the next question is, "What do you do?"



We spend the first part of our lives preparing for that question. We spend the next part answering that question and we spend the final part of our lives hoping that we answered that question correctly.

5-6 days a week, at least 8 hours a day.

"What do you do?"

Some of us love what we do, some of us see it as a necessary evil. We've got bills to pay, a future to prepare for and a Biblical mandate to satisfy.

**<sup>8</sup>If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim 5:8 [see also 2 Thess 3:10])**

Sounds pretty daunting, but the fact of the matter is, we love it!

We were created to work:

**<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Gen 2:15)**

**<sup>10</sup>For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph 2:10)**

And we find fulfillment in our work. We like to be told we're good at what we do, we take pride in a job that's well done and we enjoy the things we can do with the paycheck we receive at the end of the workweek.

**<sup>24</sup> A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, (Ecc 2:24)**

Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Fulfillment, satisfaction... Thing is, the paycheck we get never seems to be enough. Seems like we always need more. And it's not just about paying the mortgage or maintaining our portfolio, our sense of worth stems from the battles we win in the marketplace. And if we're not winning, we start to drag emotionally.

Whether you're the top dog in your organization or you're the lowest man on the totem pole, as men we gauge ourselves according to our most recent professional skirmish. If we come out on top, we feel ten feet tall and bulletproof. If we lose, we dust ourselves off and get ready to try again. But either way, it becomes exhausting.

As the victor, you're only as good as your last triumph and there's no guarantee you're going to come out on top next time. If you got sacked the last time you had the ball, you're facing an psychological uphill climb because if you're going to prove that you have what it takes, you're going to have to connect with your receiver this time. And if you don't, your fans will start to lose confidence in you and there's a good chance you're going to start losing confidence in yourself.

Yeah, we love it in terms of the thrill of the chase and the rush of having overcome, but the promise of significance, worth and validation – it's all a mirage. It's kind of like a 3-D movie. You see the image, but when you go to touch it, it's not there.

Now, before you start thinking that we're going to spend our time together this morning reviewing how the love of money is the root of all evil and we need to stop worrying about work and instead sign up to teach a Sunday School class, relax.



Obsessing over money is a sin and if your priorities are so out of whack that the only time you spend with the Lord is Sunday morning, that's a sin as well, but that's a different conversation.

Rather, in this discussion we're focusing on the way we spend the majority of our lives – the answer we give to the person asking, "What do you do for a living?"

It's not a sin to make money, nor is it a sin to take pride in the skill set that God has blessed you with. But there are two different ways to approach the workplace. One approach is based on your identity in Christ - unmoved by the emotional spikes and depressions caused by circumstances you can't control. The other approach, while it is the most common, is a fragile perspective that delivers only occasional moments of affirmation. It is this approach that must be continually reinforced with temporary triumphs and is always in need of repair. Like a balloon with a hole in it, the greatest lungs in the world will fail to inflate it and keep it from running out of air.

On the other hand, the methodology based on a Biblical worldview delivers authentic and lasting versions of the significance, worth and validation that we seek.

For some, this will be nothing more than a new way of applying familiar passages of Scripture. For others, it will be a gun shot transition – a "That's different"! change in perspective. But either way, it's a different kind of paradigm that speaks to the core of who we are as males and represents the contentment and fulfillment God has been offering since the very beginning.



**<sup>19</sup> Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. (Ecc 5:19)**

## **II) The Problem – Business Cards Don't Work**

**<sup>4</sup> I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. <sup>5</sup> I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. <sup>6</sup> I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. <sup>7</sup> I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. <sup>8</sup> I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem <sup>[a]</sup> as well—the delights of the heart of**

man. <sup>9</sup> I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. <sup>10</sup> I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. <sup>11</sup> Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. (Ecc 2:4-11)

<sup>10</sup> Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. (Ecc 5:10)

Regardless of what you do or how will you do it, there will always be another project along with another set of criteria that will be used to evaluate what it is you bring to the table. And what worked yesterday will not necessarily work today.

No matter what your job title is, there's always a need to accomplish more and with that comes the desire for more authority and more resources.



So, if you use your business card to define who you are, your sense of self will be dependent upon how well you negotiate each new challenge you encounter. And however qualified you may be to do a particular job; you cannot hope to anticipate all that a day is going to bring forth.

<sup>13</sup> Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money."  
<sup>14</sup> Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. (Jas 4:13-16)

So even if all your professional "i's" are dotted and all your practical "t's" are crossed, you're still subject to a host of uncontrollable variables that you cannot completely forecast. That reality coupled with the fact that no amount of completed tasks can ever satisfy one's need for fulfillment and you have a situation that is, in the words of Solomon, "meaningless."

Perhaps that's one of the reasons that the Bible warns against greed and states that a man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of his possessions.

**<sup>5</sup> Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle. (Prov 23:5)**

**<sup>15</sup>Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Lk 12:15)**

Fact is, there are a number of Scriptures that speak to the sin of materialism and being content with what you have:



**<sup>12</sup>I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup>I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Phil 4:12-13)**

**<sup>10</sup>For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Tim 6:10)**

**<sup>1</sup>But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. <sup>2</sup>People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup>without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, <sup>4</sup>treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— <sup>5</sup>having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. (2 Tim 3:1-2)**

**<sup>5</sup>Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Heb 13:5)**

But here's the problem: If you focus on these Scriptures alone, the resulting conviction is that you cannot excel in the marketplace without being guilty of greed and selfish ambition. Some will go as far as using these Scriptures to justify a lackadaisical disposition to any kind of work that's done outside the church. There's no "fire" in their belly when it comes to doing their absolute best at their job.

But there's a difference between being content and being complacent. One springs from a holy perspective, the other is a sinful perversion of the Truth.

### III) Get Some Paint on Your Helmet

**<sup>10</sup> Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, <sup>[a]</sup> where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom. (Ecc 9:10)**



**<sup>15</sup>To one he gave five talents<sup>[a]</sup> of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. <sup>16</sup>The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. <sup>17</sup>So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. <sup>18</sup>But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>21</sup>"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' (Matt 25:15-18, 21)**

**<sup>9</sup>I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. <sup>10</sup>"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. <sup>11</sup>So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? <sup>12</sup>And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? <sup>13</sup>"No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." (Lk 16:9-13)**

**<sup>23</sup>Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, (Col 3:23)**

These verses are not describing an anemic performer in the workplace. Taken together, these verses represent a Divine call to action. "Get out there and play! Get some paint on your helmet!"

But now wait a minute! Doesn't this sound like God's talking out of both sides of His mouth? On one hand, Scripture says to avoid anything that smacks of greed, yet there are other verses that advocate an aggressive pursuit of success.

Which is it?

#### IV) Balance

**<sup>16</sup> Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise—why destroy yourself? <sup>17</sup> Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool—why die before your time? <sup>18</sup> It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes. (Ecc 7:16-18)**

**<sup>16</sup> If you find honey, eat just enough—too much of it, and you will vomit. (Prov 25:16)**



A.W. Tozer once said that Truth has two wings. He said:

Truth is like a bird; it cannot fly on one wing. . . . Dr. G. Campbell Morgan said that the whole truth does not lie in "It is written," but in "It is written" and "Again it is written." The second text must be placed over against the first to balance it and give it symmetry, just as the right wing must work with the left to balance the bird and enable it to fly.

Many of the doctrinal divisions among the churches are the result of a blind and stubborn insistence that truth has but one wing. Each side holds tenaciously to one text, refusing grimly to acknowledge the validity of the other. This error is an evil among churches, but it is a real tragedy when it gets into the hearts of individual Christians and begins to affect their devotional lives.



Lack of balance in the Christian life is often the direct consequence of overemphasis on certain favorite texts, with a corresponding underemphasis on other related ones. For it is not denial only that makes a truth void; failure to emphasize it will in the long run be equally damaging.

And this puts us in the odd position of holding the truth theoretically while we make it of no effect by neglecting it in practice. Unused truth becomes as useless as an unused muscle. Sometimes our dogmatic insistence upon 'It is

written' and our refusal to hear 'Again it is written' makes heretics of us, our heresy being the noncreedal variety which does not rouse the opposition of the theologians."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, when approaching a particular issue, you have to deploy a perspective that is based on the whole of Scripture as opposed to a few select verses that can be easily taken out of context.

When you sit down to eat, you can follow the example of Christ and enjoy your meal without over doing it, or you can be a glutton and over eat.

The same thing applies in the workplace. Work hard, but stay within Biblically based boundaries. Be the guy who was able to earn another five talents over and above what he was originally given, but do so without compromising those priorities that are both holy and healthy.

## **V) A New Paradigm**

The last section pertaining to "balance" represents a great segue into the final point of our discussion.

### **A) The Sweet Taste of Success**

If you are currently enjoying the sweet taste of success, remember this: With every cup of abundance comes a teaspoon of poison.

**<sup>7</sup> "Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die:  
<sup>8</sup> Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD ?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God. (Prov 30:7-9)**

**<sup>10</sup> When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. <sup>11</sup> Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. <sup>12</sup> Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Dt 8:10-14)**

The moment you start believing your own press, Scripture says you are headed for some hard times.

**<sup>18</sup> Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.  
(Prov 16:18)**

In addition, if you become too attached to your wealth – in other words, you've become more preoccupied with the gift you've been given rather than the One Who gave it to you – then you'll experience a level of stress that will keep you up at night.

**<sup>12</sup> The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep. (Ecc 5:12)**

On the other hand, if you feel like you have yet to really make your mark in the marketplace, keep these things in mind:

**<sup>10</sup> I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. <sup>11</sup> Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.  
(Ecc 2:10-11 [see also Ecc 12:13])**

The amount of your paycheck rarely reflects the influence God is having on others through you. It is who you are that makes the difference more so than what you do.

**<sup>23</sup> Above all else, guard your heart, it is the wellspring of life.  
(Prov 4:23)**

Notice it doesn't it doesn't say that your "hands" are the wellspring of life.

**<sup>33</sup>"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. <sup>34</sup>You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup>The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.  
(Matt 12:33-35)**

Money and other apparent indicators of success is a lot like yardage. On September 13,th, 2009, the Denver Broncos squared off against the Cincinnati Bengals. When it was all said and done, the Bengals had gained a total of 307 yards, the Broncos, 302. Yet the Broncos won.<sup>2</sup> While the

Bengals had more in the way of total net yards, it was the Broncos that came out on top.

Fact is, while yardage is an indicator of sorts, in the end the only thing that really counts is the scoreboard.

In life, we tend to fix our focus on "yardage." We measure ourselves by things that make us appear to be successful. But at the end of the day, it's the scoreboard – those things that are eternal – that qualify us as being truly successful.

But your actions do count. You don't turn a deaf ear to whatever it is that qualifies as "excellence" in the workplace because it's through your actions that your "light" shines and the Person of Christ becomes visible to your peers.

**In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matt 5:16)**

People are drawn to those with winning records more so than they are to the ones whose victories are few and far between. You want to use worldly wealth to point others to Christ. Work hard, make a difference!

But how do you process that season when the number of professional losses are more than those times where you were victorious?

## **B) The Agony of Defeat**

### **1) Comparing Yourself to Others**

First of all, avoid comparing yourself to others. Paul talks about that in 1 Corinthians 12 when he illustrates the way God has distributed spiritual gifts to the way the human body functions. Everybody plays a unique role that is crucial. Never mind who has the ball on this particular play. You need to be asking yourself, "Am I doing what God would have me do? Am I doing it to the best of my ability?" If your answer is, "No," then get your nose in the Word and your knees in the dirt. Pray about what it is that God would have you do, and when you get a clear direction, get on your feet and get busy.



If your answer is, "Yes," then keep moving forward. No coach puts a player on the field that lacks the ability to do what needs to be done. He is first going to invest a significant amount of time and energy into that person and develop them into that player who can perform when it matters most.

**<sup>32</sup> It is God who arms me with strength makes my way perfect. <sup>33</sup> He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights.**

**<sup>34</sup> He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. <sup>35</sup> You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great. <sup>36</sup> You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn. (Ps 18:32-36)**



**<sup>1</sup> Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. (Ps 144:1)**

Training is never easy and the regiment that is most demanding is the one that affects both ability and character. But the prize is worth it.

**<sup>8</sup> You will again obey the LORD and follow all his commands I am giving you today. <sup>9</sup> Then the LORD your God will make you most prosperous in all the work of your hands and in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your land. The LORD will again delight in you and make you prosperous, just as he delighted in your fathers, <sup>10</sup> if you obey the LORD your God and keep his commands and decrees that are written in this Book of the Law and turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Dt 30:8-10)**

**<sup>8</sup> Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Josh 1:8)**

**<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. <sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. <sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prosper. (Ps 1:1-3)**

**<sup>8</sup> He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are**

**always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." (Jer 17:8)**

**<sup>33</sup>But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt 6:33)**

## **VI) Not So Fast**

As you review the last collection of verses, you may be thinking, "Well, that's easy! I'll just ramp up my devotional life, volunteer a little more frequently in church and I'll be gold."

No.



First of all, let's confirm that the word, "prosperous" in Joshua 1:8 means exactly that. The Hebrew word is "salah" and it means "victory, success, succeed, prospered." It means exactly what it says. But to "meditate on your Word" also means exactly that and it entails more than a 30 second "devotional thought." The qualifier in all these verses entails more than just actions, it's a matter of character, and that's why it works.

Wealth and abundance, when processed through the filter of godly character is not guarded, rather it is given. The godly man doesn't concern himself so much with how to get, as much as he's looking to give. And when tempted to compare himself with others, he reminds himself that the only man he needs to compare himself to is Christ. This is why it's possible to be both godly and wealthy.

To pursue godliness as a means to secure more in the way of material blessings is not godliness at all. That's just a sleazy way to camouflage greed and the end result will be less than satisfying if not disastrous (see Acts 8:18-21; 2 Cor 2:17).

That's why, although it looks potentially easy to measure up to the terms outlined in verses like Joshua 1:8 and Deuteronomy 30:8-10, it really isn't. Godly character comes about as a result of training and refining. It takes time and like any other type of training, it's not easy nor is it comfortable.

Consider Romans 5:

**<sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we<sup>[c]</sup> also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Rom 5:3-4)**

Notice that the character we're looking to attain happens after "suffering" and "perseverance." You see that same dynamic in James:

**<sup>2</sup>Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, <sup>3</sup>because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. <sup>4</sup>Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (Jas 1:2-4)**

Don't be intimidated by these verses. Words like "suffering" and "trials" don't typically inspire passion and enthusiasm. No one wants to hurt. But, the "pain" of training is different. When you are working towards a goal, whether you're an athlete or a businessman, you are not "hurting," rather you are "straining..."

**<sup>12</sup>Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:12-14)**

Yes, it is "pain," but it's pain with a purpose and that makes all the difference.

And that one word, "purpose," represents the bottom line, "take-home" of this discussion.

Your purpose is not to make money, rather your purpose is to make a difference by doing the things that God has designed you to do. While that to do list includes the things that need to be done in the church, it also includes what you do at home and in the workplace.

**"A saint is never consciously a saint; a saint is consciously dependent on God."**

(Oswald Chambers elaborating on John 21 in "My Utmost for His Highest, November 14<sup>th</sup>)

You're not going to accomplish the list of tasks that need to be done without first being trained and developed into the "player" that can go out on the field and run the plays the way they need to be executed. And by the time you're ready to suit up and be handed the ball, you're not concerned about the number of yards you're going to get on this carry. Rather, you're focusing on the score.

That kind of perspective happens only after your character has been shaped, beaten and molded into a Christlikeness that translates into a man that has both strength and skill.

“What do you do?”

However you answer that question, whether you’re a CEO or support staff, whether you’re the employee of the month or you’re not employed at all, regardless of what it says on your business card, the foundation upon which you build your resume, your future and your job title must be: “I do as I’m told!”

By that I’m not referring to the relationship you have with your supervisor, I’m talking about your relationship with Christ because it’s in the context of obedience, not abundance, that you find the validation, the worth and significance we all crave.

There will always be another bill, another project, another reason to fret, reach, worry, celebrate and despair, but there will not always be another chance to obey and to do what God would have you do right here, right now with excellence and confidence that He is working, guiding, shaping and blessing you.

What you make financially is subject to change and the trophies and titles you attain will one day be obsolete. So as you work “with all your might” in the marketplace do so in the context of this “new paradigm” that we’ve discussed today, remembering that it’s not the money you earn, it’s the difference you make and the impact you have is the result of the training you’ve done.

So...

*Get your nose in the Word  
And your knees in the dirt  
Roll up your sleeves  
And let's get to work*

*Run fast and with passion  
And when you get hit  
Know it's a part  
Of becoming more fit*

*Your life has a purpose  
You'll hurt but you'll win  
So long as you listen  
To the Words of your King*

## Notes

1. "That Incredible Christian" by A.W. Tozer, 1964, Christian Publishers, Harrisburg, PA, p 59
2. "Game Center," <http://www.nfl.com/gamecenter/2009091303/2009/REG1/broncos@bengals/recap#tab:analyze>, accessed June 4, 2010