

Boredom On The Job by Jeff Strite

Ecclesiastes 2:17-2:26

Back in 2009, a 16-year-old British girl was fired from her office job because her manager saw - on Facebook - that she had said her job was "boring". She was called into her manager's office and given the following letter:

"Following your comments made on Facebook... we feel it is better that, as you are not happy and do not enjoy your work we end your employment with (our company)."

She was fired because she was bored with her job? Well, it a good thing Solomon was King... because he said pretty much the same thing about his "job". He not only found his job boring, he wrote:

"I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." Ecclesiastes 2:17

Solomon found his job not only boring... but empty?
But he's the King. He's got everything a man could want.
How could he possibly be bored?

ILLUS: Lee Atwater, former Republican Party chairman, said this before he died:
"The eighties were about acquiring: wealth, power, and prestige. I know. I acquired more wealth and power and prestige than most. But you can acquire all you want and still feel empty."

Whoa! - you can have all the wealth, power and prestige - and STILL feel empty?

That's bad news for the younger generation. Back in 2007 Pew Research poll surveyed 579 young people between the ages of 18 & 25, and one of their findings was this:
81% of the young people said getting rich is their generation's most important life goal.
(http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-01-09-gen-y-cover_x.htm)

These kids want to be rich. They want to have money!
Why? Because money can buy things.
They think that the richer they are... the more possessions they can have.
And thus they can be happy!

But both Solomon and Lee Atwater are telling these young folks: that's a pipe dream.
Solomon and Atwater are telling us that EVEN if you had all kinds of wealth
(power/prestige) it wouldn't guarantee happiness and fulfillment in life.

ILLUS: One of the most extreme examples of this is the story of Howard Hughes. In 1966, he was named the richest person in the world. His fortune is estimated to have been worth more than \$40 billion in today's dollars.

On a trip to Las Vegas, Hughes had a disagreement with the owner of one casino. So, he

bought the casino and several around it. Money was his answer for everything. Hughes was also nicknamed the world's greatest womanizer. He dated various beautiful Hollywood actresses, including Ginger Rogers, Olivia de Havilland, and Katherine Hepburn. In his prime, Hughes was a daring aviator and tireless tinkerer who spurred science to new heights. He was an industrialist, entrepreneur, and world record setter.

He built the largest airplane ever to fly. Do you know what it was called?

That's right: The Spruce Goose.

Howard Hughes had it all. The power, the prestige, the possessions.

But despite all of that, for the last 20 years of his life Hughes lived as alone. He refused to appear in public or to be photographed. He became a hypochondriac, with an unnatural fear of germs. He refused to cut his hair, his beard or his nails. And the only people he saw were his doctors & his personal servants.

And when he died... he died alone.

And nobody cared.

And so Solomon says: "Work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." Ecclesiastes 2:17

So, what is it about a job that would make it boring?

- It's repetitious/tedious – same thing day after day
- It's dead-end. You're never going to get anything else.
- Unappreciated.
- No life outside of work.

Now, I maintain that boredom is all a matter of perception.

ILLUS: Just to prove my point, I want to share a popular set of rules for the office that in vogue back in the 1800's. Rules like this were common in most offices, and they all looked a little bit like these:

1. Office employees will daily sweep the floors, dust the furniture, and showcases. Each day they must fill lamps, clean chimneys, & turn wicks
2. Windows must be washed once a week.
3. Each clerk will bring in a bucket of water and a scuttle of coal for the day's business.
4. Make your pens carefully. You may whittle your nibs to your individual taste.
5. This office will open at 7:00 am and close at 9:00 p.m. daily, except on Sunday, on which day it will remain closed. Each employee is expected to spend Sunday by attending church and contributing liberally to the cause of the Lord.
6. Men employees will be given an evening off each week for courting purposes, or 2 evening a week if they go regularly to church.
7. After an employee has spent 13 hours of labor in the office, he should spend the rest of his time reading the Bible any other good books while contemplating the glories and building up of the kingdom.
8. Every employee should lay aside, from each pay, a goodly sum of his earning, so that he will not become a burden upon the charity of his betters.
9. The employee who has performed his labors faithfully and without fault for a period of 5 years and who had been thrifty and attentive to his religious duties, is looked upon by his

fellowmen as a substantial and law-abiding citizen, will be given an increase of 5 cents per day in his pay providing a just return in profits from the business permits it.

Now, how many of you would sign up for a job like that?

Yeah, that's what I thought. Compared to those who worked there... we've got it pretty good.

But my point is this: Boredom is a matter of perspective.

It's all in HOW you think about your job.

A job is boring if you DECIDE that it's boring.

You see, when Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes his intention was to paint a picture for us. The main focus of his picture was to expose you the things of this world that entice us - the things that we THINK will make us feel fulfilled and happy. And once he painted the picture for us... he pointed out why those pleasures in this world will disappoint us.

Everything on this earth that you treasure will eventually bore you.

They'll all seem empty and worthless in the end.

And they'll seem empty and worthless UNTIL we put one thing in our lives: GOD

In the next to last verse in Ecclesiastes, Solomon writes:

"Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

But when Solomon dealt with this issue of work, he didn't wait until the end of the book to tell us the key to turning our workplace existence into an exciting place to be. In Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 Solomon wrote: "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, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?"

In other words:

If you put God at the center of your life and everything else will fall into place.

If you don't... it won't.

In Psalm 127:1 (also written by Solomon) we're told:

"Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."

It's the same message.

If God isn't the center of your life, it won't matter what you build. It will all be in vain.

But by contrast, in 1 Corinthians 15:58 Paul says:

"... be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is NOT IN VAIN."

Paul wasn't writing to a bunch of Bible College students at Corinth.

Paul was writing to fishermen, and merchants and farmers and sailors.

People from all kinds of walks of life.
People who had to work for a living.

And Paul wasn't talking JUST about Churchy stuff, because in Colossians 3:17 he writes:
"whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus..."
So Paul's telling us if we do - what we do - in the name of Jesus NOTHING we do will be in vain.

Now, how does that work?
How can we do what we do in the name of Jesus?

Well, 1st let's contrast "doing things in Jesus" with what it's not.

ILLUS: A preacher named Steve Ridgell told of riding next to a guy on an airplane. "We had been having a polite conversation about where we were from and what we did for a living. I even think he enjoyed what he did for a living, but he did not enjoy the fact that he felt like he had to work. He just could not see a reason or purpose for it. He made it seem as if work was a "nose to the grindstone" existence, filled with drudgery and meaninglessness.
(heartlight.org, 5/30/12)

That man didn't know what it was to do all that he did in the name of Jesus.

But IF you do what you do in the name of Jesus, this is what it will look like.

- 1st - if you do what you do for Jesus, your primary objective will NOT be to gain possessions/power/prestige.

Not, that there's anything wrong with having possessions, power or prestige, it's just - that's not why we work as Christians. Our work belongs to Jesus. Not to us! As a result, our jobs are NOT what defines us. Our jobs are NOT the most important thing we do. Our jobs are NOT how we measure success.

Our jobs are our way to make a living, it is not how we make our lives.

- 2nd - if you do what you do for Jesus, you'll work because it feels good to work.

It was what God designed you to do. In the Law of Moses, God not only commanded His people to rest on the Sabbath but He also commanded them: "6 days will you work."
We weren't designed to sit back and be lazy. When we do that our bodies begin to decay and fall apart.

ILLUS: My dad worked hard all of his life. He started as a share cropper and eventually bought a cabin court with 20 acres of farm-able land which he turned into one of the finest trailer parks in northern Indiana. Then he sold the trailer park and "retired". He sat around and watched TV until he grew tired of that, and then he went into the kitchen and bothered mom. In that short time of retirement, dad nearly died.

But then he went back to work. He pumped gas, was a meat inspector, drove the Amish around. But he did something even more important. He became more involved in church - became an Elder and the Sunday School Superintendent.

That's the kind of thing "retired" folks can do. They can work harder for God. We are honored here to have the Varney's. Jim retired years ago, but every year he goes on a mission trip. This year he's taken a group from church down to a mission school in Virginia.

- 3rd – if you do what you do for Jesus, you'll work to supply for your family.

I Timothy 5:8 tells us that a man who doesn't supply for his family is worse than an infidel. But some people confuse supplying for their family with working to give POSSESSIONS to their family.

ILLUS: Years ago we bought a water purifier for our home from a local company. That company eventually sold out to another company in a larger city nearby. One day the "bladder" went out and the repairman from that larger city came to replace it. I struck up a conversation while he working and made the comment "I guess you much prefer doing business with folks from (large city). They have more large businesses that pay higher wages."

"Oh no," he replied. "We much prefer doing business here in Logansport. You folks pay your bills." He went on to explain that the workers in that other city did make more money, but they felt they had to spend it on "things." If their neighbor got a new car... they got a new car. If the neighbor bought a boat, they bought a boat. If their neighbor went for a vacation in the Bahamas, they'd go on a similar vacation. "Before you know it," he said, "they've put themselves so far in debt that they HAVE to work overtime just to pay the bills."

Those folks had confused getting bigger and better things for their families, with supplying for their families... and their children rarely saw them.

- 4th – if you do what you do for Jesus, you'll work to have money to give to God.

Proverbs 3:9-10 tells us "Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine."

Giving to God isn't an afterthought for these folks. The more money they can make at their job... the more they can give to God.

ILLUS: That's what I keep telling the Elders here: if they gave me a raise, I could give more to the church. :)

ILLUS: KFC was founded by a man we call "Colonel Sanders". Colonel Sanders at one time owned a profitable restaurant that was forced out of business when a superhighway siphoned traffic away from his location. One of his popular dishes at that restaurant was his chicken and so he set out to franchise his unique blend of "11 herbs and spices". But before he did so, he sat down and had a talk with God. He promised God that, if He would make him successful, Sanders would donate 50% of his profits to God. So the Non-Instrumental Church of Christ that he belonged to benefited greatly. So did the Bible Colleges that received gifts and endowments, as well as the young men whose tuition and books the Colonel paid for in order to send them through training to become ministers. Colonel Sanders made money so he could give money to God.

- 5th – if you do what you do for Jesus, you'll work so that you can provide "something to share with those in need" (Eph. 4:28).

ILLUS: Richard Wurmbbrand, the author of "Tortured for Christ," was imprisoned by the Communist govt. of the USSR. And he said that - while in prison - he saw fellow Soviet believers practice generous giving. "When we were given one slice of bread a week and dirty soap every day, we decided we would faithfully 'tithe' even that. Every tenth week we took the slice of bread and gave it to the weaker brethren as our 'tithe' to the Master."

- 6th – if you do what you do for Jesus, you'll see yourself as a Secret agent for God.

ILLUS: Dave, one of the men in our congregation shares that, before he became a Christian, he was a very difficult man to be around. He hated Christianity and the church and was offensive as he could be with Christians. Then he went to work for Subaru, and one of the men he had to work for was called "Jesus". "Jesus" was a long haired, bearded believer in Christ who was very open about his faith and Dave couldn't get away from him. "Jesus" was a gentle man who talked all the time about what the real Jesus meant to him and Dave and he had long talks over the weeks. Dave will tell you... the reason he became a Christian was because of "Jesus."

Wherever you are – at work, at family gatherings, at community affairs – you can talk to people who wouldn't think of talking with me. And if you share your faith gently and confidently, you too could be a secret agent for God.

- 7th – if you do what you do for Jesus, you'll work as servants of others. We're told in Ephesians 5:5-6 "... obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man."

That passage is saying that when you go to work, the person behind the main desk or in the main office is Jesus to you. You're not working for the "man", you're working for Christ, and so everything you at the shop or the office is done as if you were doing for Christ Himself. And when you learn this kind of "servant attitude" you impress God. Jesus was once asked by his disciples who would be greatest in the kingdom of God. And Jesus replied: "The greatest among you will be your servant." Matthew 23:11

- Lastly, if you do what you do for Jesus, you will work so that we can be you can bring praise to God.

Jesus said: "Let your light so shine before men... that may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16

People should be able to watch us work and see how well we do our job and just KNOW that we are Christians. And that should make them a little jealous of what we have with God.

CLOSE: Martin Luther King Jr. made this powerful observation:

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or as Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry.

He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well."