

Excellence In The Workplace

I. INTRODUCTION • EPHESIANS 6:5-8

A. *John Beckett*

1. When Peter Jennings and ABC News wanted to do a story on John Beckett's company, John's reaction was immediate and unqualified:
2. "No way. We're not going to let ABC News barge into the R. W. Beckett Corporation, shoot a lot of footage, extract a few sound bites and say whatever they want to say about us on national TV!"
3. But Beckett reconsidered and took a chance because he had a message, a message he wanted others to hear.
4. Earlier the same day that he got the call from ABC News, he had told his senior management team that they could do a better job of making an impact on the marketplace with their core values, which were integrity and excellence.
5. He had referred to a verse from Scripture that speaks about being salt and light in the world – that their company could be a "city on a hill that cannot be hidden."
6. This seemed like a golden opportunity, so he called ABC back and gave the go-ahead.
7. The next day the camera crews arrived along with the religion reporter, Peggy Wehmeyer.
8. They spent a full two days shooting footage and doing interviews for a piece that would end up being about 3 minutes long.
9. The night of the broadcast came, and Peter Jennings opened the story with these words, "We begin another season of 'The American Agenda,' and we start this September with our religion correspondent, Peggy Wehmeyer. It seems to us that everywhere you turn in America these days, millions of people are searching for greater meaning in their lives. Tonight we're going to concentrate on the growing tendency of business leaders in America to have their personal faith make an impact in their companies. In other words, they are using the Bible as a guide to business."
10. A couple stories were then told about employees at R. W. Beckett and the exceptional treatment they had received while working there.
11. Next came a short clip extracted from the over hour long interview Peggy had given to John Beckett.
12. She asked, "What is your life's purpose?"
13. His reply, broadcast to several million homes, was this, "My main mission in life is to know the will of God and to do it."
14. Peggy Wehmeyer ended the segment with these words; for R. W. Beckett and an increasing number of business people, "lasting rewards cannot be measured in dollars . . . satisfaction comes from building a business without selling their souls."
15. That program elicited the largest number of favorable calls in the history of ABC News.

B. Excellence In The Workplace

1. I've been assigned the task of speaking about *excellence in the workplace*
 2. Obviously, I don't know where most of you work
 3. I don't know the *specific pressures* you face -
 4. Or the *particular challenges* and *temptations* you encounter
 5. But I do know this: God has given every single man in this room a *holy calling!*
 6. You have a *divine vocation*, that is every bit as important to the Plan of God as that of President or Pastor
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7. Until the Reformation, most people thought that the only calling *God* placed on a person's life was into the *priesthood*
 8. They didn't fathom that God would call someone to be a butcher, a baker, or a candle-stick maker.
 9. But with the recovery of the Bible from the cloistered halls of churches and monasteries, it was discovered that God's call applies equally to all people
 10. The Reformation recovery of the *priesthood of all believers* means that there is no *special* calling that elevates one profession above another
 11. Rather, whatever our profession, as long as it's the Lord's calling, it's a holy and sacred trust
 12. This idea of *vocation*, of a holy calling to labor, is what gave birth to the Protestant work ethic and the lion's share of the prosperity and inventiveness of Western Civilization.
 13. As men realized they could serve God by bending iron at a smithie's anvil or fashion barrels in a carter's shop, they applied themselves with renewed passion to their work.
 14. The *work shop* became another *church*, and their *labor* a form of *worship*.
 15. Some of the finest craftsmanship ever wrought by the hand of man comes down to us from that period of time – when *excellence in the workplace* was considered the norm, because they worked for God.

C. Working For God

1. Excellence in the workplace begins with the understanding that we work for God, not man.
2. One of the primary passages we usually turn to when we're considering the workplace is Ephesian 6:5-8 . . .
 - 5 **Servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ;**
 - 6 **not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,**
 - 7 **with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,**
 - 8 **knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free.**
3. The work we do, the service we render, is to God
 - a. it may be performed *at* McDonald's or McDonald-Douglas - but it's done

for Christ

- b. we may be doing *what* the boss or foreman has told us – but we’re doing it *as* and act of obedience to the Lord
4. While Ephesians 6 is the passage we usually examine in this regard, it’s another passage I want to take a look at today as a model for excellence in the workplace.

D. Joshua

1. There’s an example from Scripture about excellence in the workplace that we can learn a lot from - It’s the story of Joshua
2. Your workplace is probably very different from his but the principles his life and calling illustrate are applicable to our lives today, no matter where we work or what we do

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

¹ **After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying:**

² **“Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel.**

1. How would *you* like to have been in Joshua’s sandals?
2. Moses, that mighty man of God, the one who had led the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt
 - a. the one who had stared down Pharaoh,
 - b. had led the people through the Red Sea,
 - c. talked with God face to face and had spent 40 days with Him in the mount,
 - d. is now gone, and the task of taking the people on the last leg of their 40 year journey falls to Joshua
3. How would you like to step into those shoes?
4. It’s pretty clear that Joshua was *not* chomping at the bit to get going
 - a. he was reluctant, fearful even
 - b. he didn’t know if he had what it would take
 - c. how can one man lead a company of so many – probably about a million people?
 - d. across the Jordan River lay the land of Promise, the land they were to go in and occupy
 - e. but as you know, it wasn’t empty – there were people living there who were of massive size
 - f. and they *liked* their homes and fields – they didn’t want to leave
 - g. so they had built fortified cities like Jericho and Hazor to protect against invasion
 - h. they had armies with well-trained soldiers
 - i. it was a formidable and daunting task ahead of Joshua, and he knew it
 - j. no wonder he was fearful

5. But God reminded Joshua in v. 2, that it wasn't *Joshua* who was giving the land to the Jews – GOD was giving it to them.
 - a. by the way – we might want to note that
 - b. *God* gave the land to Israel
 - c. not the UN, or Madeline Albright, or Hafez Assad, or Yassir Arafat
 - d. God gave it to them – forever!

B. Vs. 3-6

3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses.

4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory.

5 No man shall *be able to stand before you* all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.

6 Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.

1. Here is God's *call* of Joshua – this is his commissioning service
2. The task is clear – this is his *vocation*, his *mission*
3. He is to lead the nation into the land and take possession of all that God has granted
4. In fact, where ever Joshua travels, where ever he treads, God has already given it
5. All they needed to do was step out by faith and take it!
6. God says, "Joshua, don't worry about those armies and great walled fortresses – no one will be able to stand against you,"
7. "As I was with Moses, I will be with you!"
8. "I will not leave you nor forsake you so be strong and of good courage."
9. "You have a job to do. Take the people in, conquer the land, take possession of all that I have given, and then divide the land up among the tribes, sending everyone out to plant themselves in their place."
10. While most of us aren't called to the same level of leadership and responsibility that Joshua was, we nevertheless are called by the same God to our own, unique work
11. And our calling is *every bit as important* as Joshua's
 - a. it may not be as *noteworthy*
 - b. it won't go down in the history books of this world as *momentous*
 - c. but from *God's* perspective, your calling is every bit as critical and important as any other
 - d. you see, God doesn't consider the "size" or notoriety of the task
 - e. what's important to Him is the *faithfulness* with which we do it
12. Consider Joshua and one of the unnamed foot-soldiers in the army of Israel
 - a. we read about Joshua's story and are inspired
 - b. but what about that unknown, unsung soldier who made up the end of the line when they went to battle the second time against the village of Ai?

- c. he held his position and didn't run when the fear of death tempted him to flee
 - d. and because he held his ground, the rest of the line held
 - e. because that line held, the flank held
 - f. and because the flank held, the battle was won
13. {The story of the horseshoe nail. Lazy horseshoer – didn't use a long enough nail or set it right}
- a. for want of a nail the shoe was lost
 - b. for want of a shoe the horse was lost
 - c. for want of a horse the rider was lost
 - d. for want of a rider the message was lost
 - e. for want of a message the battle was lost
 - f. for want of a battle the war was lost
 - g. for want of a war the nation was lost
 - h. the nation was lost, all for the want of a horseshoe nail!
14. The momentous usually hang on minor details
15. So God puts *each* one of us in a *key* place, all so that, *working together*, His master plan can be accomplished
16. The key to excellence in the workplace is to remember this
- a. to remember that there *are* no little jobs
 - b. there are only little men who think themselves too important to serve in some humble capacity
17. Maybe for you, the problem isn't a calling that seems too *small* but one that's too *big*
18. Maybe like Joshua, the task seems overwhelming
19. Remember what God told Joshua here . . .

I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage.

- 20. If God has called you, then He also gives you all that is needed to get the job done
- 21. You know the proverb – Where God guides, He provides!
- 22. The most important provision God has given is His presence!
- 23. He says, “I will not leave you nor will I turn my back on you in your hour of need.”
- 24. Therefore, “Be strong and of good courage!”
- 25. Listen, if you send me in to battle by myself, I am going to be quite fearful
- 26. But if you stick me in an M1-Abrams tank piloted by an expert driver and gunned by a crack gunnery team, I'm not going to fear much at all!
- 27. God is our shield and tower of strength, an ever present help in time of need
- 28. He is our rock - a sure foundation that cannot be shaken
- 29. And here is what He says, “I will not leave you nor forsake you.”
- 30. Is there any other response to that than “In that case, bring ‘em one!”

C. Vs. 7-9

- ⁷ **Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go.**

1. Note well where God told Joshua the key to success lay = In obedience to His Word
2. The strength and courage Joshua would need were not so much to face the fortified cities and giants of Canaan
3. It was to remain faithful to God's counsel – to abide in obedience to the Law.
4. Whether it was enemies from without, naysayers from among the people he was leading, or doubts from within, he would face a daily temptation to turn aside, however slightly, to a path less challenging, less exacting.
5. But God says – “No, Joshua. Don't turn aside. Don't deviate from the path My word proscribes. Stick to it no matter what the opposition. Then you will know success!”
6. Look at how the Lord reaffirms this in v. 8 . . .

8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

7. Do you want your work to be excellent? Then be a diligent student of the Word of God
 - a. read it, study it, memorize it
 - b. and then – JUST DO IT!
8. But be careful.
 - a. you see, the enemy is experienced enough to know that as you make a commitment to excellence in your work
 - b. you are unlikely to fall for a major full frontal attack, so he comes subtly
 - d. while you're watching for some big temptation, he slips in a small one
 - e. it's easy to miss it and fail to see it for what it is
 - f. an attempt to get you to turn to the right or left; it doesn't matter, just so long as it's a deviation from the path
 - g. once diverted, and never corrected, it can lead to great tragedy
 - h. just as the airliner deviates from it's course by half a degree
 - 1) for a while the difference in the flight path is negligible
 - 2) but an hour later, the plane is totally off course and in serious danger of crashing into a mountain
 - i. this is the way the enemy works
 - j. get you to compromise in some seemingly insignificant way
 - 1) like fudge a report or two
 - 2) shade the truth in a meeting
 - 3) water down the product
 - 4) skip the task
 - 5) shave off an hour
 - 6) sweep it under the rug
9. The pursuit of excellence permits none of these things
10. And if you make a commitment to excellence in your work, they are the very things the enemy will likely try to get you to hedge on.
11. Finally, the Lord says . . .

9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid,

nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

12. Three times now, God has told Joshua to be strong and courageous.
 13. That’s a clue he was anything but strong and courageous!
 14. It’s a bit hard to imagine Joshua as fearful and tremulous
 - a. after all, look at what he did!
 - b. led a million people who were divided among a dozen tribes who didn’t always get along so well
 - c. took them into enemy-occupied territory
 - d. conquered several fortress cities
 - e. defeated well trained and equipped armies
 - f. and then divided the land up into regions allotted to each tribe
 15. What we would expect is a man of dynamic and forceful personality – a real “take the bull by the horns” kind of guy
 16. Joshua certainly wasn’t that – not in himself anyway.
 17. Left to himself, Joshua would have been dismayed by the daunting nature of the task before him
 18. So God reminds him – “Joshua, you are not by yourself. I will go with you wherever you go.”
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19. In himself, Joshua was reluctant to go do the job God had set before him
 20. In telling Joshua to be strong and courageous, God is telling him to change his attitude about his job!
 21. How many of you absolutely love your jobs?
 - a. how many dislike your jobs?
 - b. how many go reluctantly?
 22. Listen brothers – let’s go to work with the *right attitude*
 - a. strong & courageous
 - b. looking at our work, not with reluctance but with a positive outlook!
 23. The secular attitude prevalent in our culture that work is a necessary evil is not biblical.
 24. Most people have the idea that work is something you do to fund your leisure pursuits
 25. So we see the bumper sticker, “I owe, I owe, It’s off to work I go.”
 - a. or, “I’d rather be fishing.”
 - b. “Work fascinates me – I can sit and watch it for hours.”
 - c. “Thank God it’s Friday”
 - d. Hard work may not kill me, but why take a chance?
 - e. “I’m not lazy – I just don’t like to work.”
 26. All of these express a prevalent world mindset toward work
 27. But that is not what scripture says
 28. Work, my work and your work, is a vocation, a calling – and so, an opportunity to glorify God and make an eternal difference.

III. CONCLUSION

A. I Will Be With You

1. What God told Joshua He says to you as well – “I will be with you!”

2. Whatever your job, whatever your vocation, God is there
3. Whatever the task, where ever your desk or work-station is, so is God.

B. Excellence In The Workplace

1. Excellence in the workplace is found in living faithfully with whatever the Lord has put before us
2. Whether your vocation is sweeping floors and emptying trash or you're the CEO of a major corporation, be strong and of good courage, for God is present and He has something very special for you do to.
- 4 In His eyes, the CEO and the janitor are the same in importance in the Kingdom.
5. What He is looking for is faithful obedience in each and every thing we do
6. Our work, our labor needs to take on the dimension of worship
7. It is something we offer up to the Lord, and so it ought to be the very best we are able to render

C. Brother Lawrence

1. Nicholas Herman was born in 1611 in Lorraine, France
2. Showing no promise or skill at any craft or trade, he enlisted in the French army where he spent the next 30 years
3. Even in the army his seeming ineptitude resulted in his failure at promotion and when he finally retired from the army after 30 years, he was still a lowly foot soldier
4. Not knowing what else to do, he became a monk and entered a Carmelite Order in Paris, where he was christened with a new name – Brother Lawrence
5. Even there his fellow monks found it hard to find a place for him
6. He was known as “a great awkward fellow who broke everything”
7. Finally, they put him where they thought he could do the least damage – in the kitchen, washing dishes.
8. It was at this post as dishwasher that Brother Lawrence spent the remaining 30 years of his life.
9. After his death, his fellow monks collected his possessions and began to read his journals and the things he had written during his life as a monk
10. They were so moved, they compiled them and published them so that others could be blessed
11. Titled, *Practicing The Presence of God*, they contain Brother Lawrence's reflections on what it means to live for God
 - a. they stress the need to do everything, even washing dishes, for the Love of God
 - b. to perform each task with the awareness of the immediate presence of God
12. If we could maintain an unbroken sense of the presence of God, what difference would it make it our homes and in our workplace?