

# REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW

ISSUE 17

## GRATITUDE

How to feel it  
How to show it  
How it will change  
*everything* in your life

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## Gratitude: Pathway to Permanent Change 3

"Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, it is also the parent of all the others." So said the ancient philosopher Cicero. Two millennia later, our study of thousands of Christians confirms that gratitude indeed spawns myriad elusive virtues, like joy, inner peace, patience, forgiveness, and self-control. This article unpacks the power of gratitude and reveals several proven ideas for becoming more consistently grateful.

## What Work Matters to God? Three Dangerous Myths 12

What work really "counts," from God's perspective? Some people mistakenly believe (or even teach) that God sees some work as contributory and holy, but is indifferent to "secular" work. This article sets the record straight, affirming that what we do is less important to God than why we're doing it.

## Rick Warren on "What Drives Your Life?" 17

Without a clear purpose, the author of *The Purpose-Driven Life* explains, you will keep changing directions, jobs, relationships, churches or other externals—hoping each change will settle the confusion or fill the emptiness in your heart. If this describes you even remotely, this article may very well be the cornerstone of lasting change.

## CHARACTER BUILDING CLASSICS: Time-Honored Advice for Coping with your Boss 21

"The only reason why criticism cuts you to the heart is that you are still ruled by your old nature. You take more notice of men than you should." In the fifteenth century, theologians didn't mince words or worry about people's self-esteem. They just told it like it is.

*Regent Business Review* is an electronic magazine published by the Regent University School of Business. The mission of RBR is "to equip and encourage Christians to be more God-honoring leaders and managers." As such, we offer practical guidance about what it means to be an authentic Christian in the workplace, as well as tools for better communication, for character development, and for other building blocks of leadership excellence. Driven by a calling to make disciples in the marketplace, we seek to exhort and coach Christians to "excel still more" (1 Thess. 4:1) in their roles as leaders and managers.

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# Gratitude Pathway to Permanent Change

Michael Zigarelli

It's a timeless question: *How do I become more like Jesus Christ?*

What can I do to develop authentic Christian character—to be patient and kind, to have joy and inner peace, to be gentle, compassionate, self-controlled, and forgiving? What can I do to truly care about people and to love them as God does? How can I finally—and permanently—become a better person than I am today?

There are a lot of answers to these questions. Good answers. Helpful answers. Theologically sound, exegetically elegant answers. Answers that can forever alter the trajectory of your relationship with God and people.

This article attempts to offer some further insight into this consummate discipleship question from an empirical angle. I studied the beliefs, behaviors and character attributes of 5,000 Christians worldwide, using a methodology applied regularly in the social sciences: Compare the “gold medalists” to the “silver medalists” and see what really distinguishes the champions. In other words, for this study I compared a group of what I call “high-virtue Christians” (i.e., people who consistently display “fruit of the Spirit” virtues) to a group of “average-virtue Christians”

to see what makes the high-virtue Christian different.<sup>1</sup>

What I found surprised me. Of all the possible explanations for why some Christians look more like Jesus than others, one explanation—one

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answer: Grow your  
gratitude**

characteristic—clearly stood out above the rest: gratitude.

In Christian circles, when we discuss the question of how to grow in godliness, gratitude is seldom identified as one of the usual suspects. Rather, we're quick to cite Bible study, prayer, worship, fasting and a host of other spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> If you are interested in the specifics of the methodology, including the measures of Christian character and how I distinguished high- from average-virtue Christians, please see my book, *Cultivating Christian Character* (Xulon Press, 2002). To review the instrument I used for estimating character (the *Christian Character Index*), please visit [www.assess-yourself.org](http://www.assess-yourself.org).

disciplines. And this is why the finding surprised me. In this research, the largest study on the subject to date (of which I'm aware), a mindset of gratitude dwarfed the practice of any or all such disciplines as an explanation for how Christians go from average in virtue to consistently high in virtue; that is, as an explanation for why some of us consistently display “fruit of the Spirit” virtues (Gal. 5:22-23) and others do not. Before I get to the evidence, let me explain why this happens.

## Gratitude is a “Parent Virtue”

Centuries ago, the philosopher Cicero argued that among virtues, gratitude is “the parent of all the others,” a virtue that begets other virtues. There seems to be a lot of truth to that claim. Growing one's gratitude appears to have a radical and transformational effect on character because it is one of God's primary vehicles for inducing (or “parenting”) other Christian qualities. Stated from a Christian worldview, gratitude is a vehicle that makes us better, more Christ-like people. Call it a “parent virtue,” call it “the gratitude effect,” call it miraculous, call it whatever you'd like. Regardless the label, gratitude is a powerful disposition that provides us with a very efficient, very

effective mechanism for developing myriad character traits. Want more inner peace? Work on gratitude. Want more patience? Work on gratitude. Want to be more compassionate? You get the idea.

Gratitude does all this by setting a new thought context for processing our circumstances in life—a context of an abundant life. A context where everything we have is a gift. A context where we see clearly all that we really do have in life, and where we recognize that things could always be worse. Within this context, our view of the entire world is different and we are suddenly empowered to be the people God calls us to be—to more deeply love God, to love neighbor, and to love our own lives. To be authentic salt and light at home, at work, at church, and everywhere else.

This theory of gratitude as a parent virtue derives not only from ancient philosophers like Cicero, but, not surprisingly, from theologians as well. Exegetes of the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament and even the Qur'an have all seated gratitude as central among virtues. What may surprise some people, though, is that contemporary social scientists have also advanced and empirically-tested this theory, concluding that gratitude "stimulates moral behavior" and encourages people to behave in a "pro-social manner." Stated more concretely, they have shown that gratitude is positively related to such critical outcomes as life satisfaction, vitality, happiness, optimism,

hope, empathy, and the willingness to provide emotional and tangible support for other people, while being negatively related to anxiety, depression, and overall disposition.<sup>2</sup> Collectively, such studies present credible evidence that feeling grateful generates a ripple effect through every area of our lives, potentially satisfying some of our deepest yearnings—our desire for happiness, our pursuit of better relationships, and our incessant quest for

## **In my study of 5,000 Christians, gratitude best explained why people remain consistently Christ-like**

inner peace and contentment.

Pop psychology has piggy-backed on these research findings, introducing gratitude to the mass market as a potential panacea. Simply peruse the self-help section of any major bookstore these days and you'll find that many of the best-selling books

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Michael McCullough et al., 2001: "Is Gratitude a Moral Affect?" *Psychological Bulletin*, 127:2, 249-266 and Michael McCullough et al., 2002: "The Grateful Disposition: A Conceptual and Empirical Topography," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82:1, 112-127.

propagate the premise that gratitude is a key to joy, to replenishment of the soul, to inner transformation, and to blessing others with our lives. "Gratitude journals"—diaries with little more than flamboyant artwork and blank, lined pages—flank these best-sellers on each side. Now these journals have become best-sellers, too.

Given all this, it should be clear that what I report in this article regarding the effects of gratitude is not new information. Quite the contrary, it's old and very public news. It's news that's been around for millennia. But that's a testimony to its merits. The advice to cultivate character through growing gratitude is time-honored wisdom that transcends generations, cultures, and religious traditions.

### **Growing Gratitude by Disciplining Your Mind**

Much of the above reasoning may ring true for you. We've all experienced moments in life when we suddenly become cognizant of the enormity of blessing in our life. A narrowly-averted collision with a tractor-trailer. A momentarily-lost child at the store. A news segment about some illness that's plaguing a third world country. A phone call at three a.m. that, contrary to our fears, is not tragic news, but only a wrong number. An eye-opening missions trip to a destitute area. A clarifying moment of watching our children sleep.



A wave of thankfulness quickly follows such events and lasts for as long as we remain mindful of the blessing. During that time, we experience significant manifestations of Christian virtues. We become more Christ-like in our disposition toward everyone and everything. But—and most of us have experienced this as well—the empowerment vanishes as suddenly as it appeared, and we’re back to being the people we were before. The transformation, while welcome and wonderful, was fleeting. That’s the nature of gratitude. It’s a generator of other virtues, but only so long as it exists.

I found that one of the major secrets to success for “high-virtue Christians”—those who are most consistently Christ-like—is that they have mastered the art of *maintaining* a grateful disposition. Gratitude is simply part of who they are, rather than being some sporadic, refreshing occurrence. How do they do it? How do they nurture and sustain a grateful spirit?

In a sentence, *they think differently from the way many of the rest of us think*. The mind of the high-virtue Christian, it seems, is a disciplined mind, a pure and godly mind. A mind that is adept at immediately clearing away sinful thoughts. It is a mind that is focused on what one has rather than what one does not have. A mind that refuses to think in terms of what’s missing from life—in terms of how much better life could be “if only...” Instead, the high-virtue Christians in

my study want what they have. They are fully content with what’s been conferred upon them, and they frequently thank God for their blessings.

Let’s look at the evidence regarding what goes on inside the heads of high- versus average-virtue Christians. First, more than half of the

## By setting a new thought context for our circumstances—the context of an abundant life—gratitude spawns other virtues

high-virtue Christians in my study (53%) say they *always or almost always* try to immediately clear sinful thoughts from their minds. That’s a tough thing to do, much less to do almost all the time! By comparison, this is true for fewer than one in five average-virtue Christians (18%). In other words, high-virtue Christians are about three times more likely to consistently insulate their minds from the junk that undermines most of us. Their minds are conditioned to eradicate the incubators for ingratitude—envy, jealousy, greed, lust, and so on. That’s one of their secrets to success. High-virtue derives, in part, from high gratitude and high gratitude begins with taking charge of the thought life.

That’s especially true for thoughts that drift toward envy, since envy is the chief assailant of gratitude. The more we desire what other people have, the less satisfied we become with what we currently have. Thus, in an envious frame of mind, we are blinded to God’s providence, ungrateful for what He has done, and ungrateful for what He continues to do in our lives.

In general, I found that high-virtue Christians, more so than others, reject this kind of thinking. Not all of them have completely repudiated envy, but more than two out of three high-virtue Christians (68%) say they “rarely” or “never” desire what others have. By contrast, more than half of average-virtue Christians (55%) report being envious “sometimes,” “often” or “always.” As such, many of them remain in a mindset that steals their gratitude and with it, the myriad virtues that are the descendents of gratitude.

What do high-virtue Christians think about instead of entertaining envious thoughts? Where are their minds during their day-to-day routines? Here’s a striking statistic that reveals one of the key differences between high- and average-virtue Christians: Four out of five high-virtue Christians consistently remember throughout the day how God has blessed them. Only two out of five average-virtue Christians say they do this.

One might reasonably ask at this point: Are these people thanking God more than others do because they are well-off financially? Because they have more material possessions? Because they have more temporal assets than do others? These are not the reasons for their gratitude. In fact, I found that gratitude may be related to having *fewer* worldly goods. By far, the most grateful group in this study are those who identify themselves as “black,” and given the generally lower socio-economic status of blacks as compared to whites, this is interesting evidence that material possessions are not what drives and sustains a grateful heart.

What does drive gratitude is proper perspective. Seeing clearly. Remaining mindful moment-to-moment of what God has bestowed upon you. High-virtue Christians are perpetually aware of their bountiful life, regardless of what that life entails. They have trained their minds to think about the abundance in their lives rather than the insufficiencies. And it is this habit—a habit of keeping perspective—that transports them to the next level of gratitude and of character.

This is information that can change our lives, as it has for many throughout the centuries. Everything can be different starting tomorrow if we begin implementing these recommendations. So to facilitate that transformation, it might be helpful to encapsulate these findings into a one-sentence, bottom-line summary: The most fertile

ground for growing gratitude is a thought life that purges sinful thoughts before they fester, that eradicates envy, and that replaces these thoughts with reminders of how richly blessed one really is. The Apostle Paul apparently had the same answer, but stated it more succinctly and more powerfully: “take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Indeed, perpetual gratitude begins with a renewed mind.

## There are some practical habits that Christians have found to grow and preserve a grateful disposition

### Practical Recommendations for Growing Gratitude

There is more that can be said, though. In fact, one must say more lest we make the common mistake of pointing people in a direction without furnishing the means by which they can traverse the journey. The question still remains: How does one gain this new mindset? Besides meditating on the blessings in my life and taking captive envious thoughts, what else can I do to train my mind to be more grateful? There are some practical habits that Christians have found to be valuable for growing and preserving a

grateful disposition—habits that sustain them to regularly see life in the context of what they do have rather than what they don’t have. Let’s look at a few of these.

### *Grow Gratitude through Keeping a Gratitude Journal*

I did not test this proposition in my study, but almost unanimously, commentators both in and out of Christian circles suggest keeping a “gratitude journal.” This is a daily diary that focuses exclusively on the blessings in your life thereby re-centering you on God’s providence. Beyond that, a journal permits you to look back over several days, weeks, and months to review the numerous blessings that you might have forgotten had you not written them down.

Donald Whitney speaks to this point in a fine chapter on the practice of journaling. Among his many helpful insights, he says:

Many people think God has not blessed them with much until they move it all to a new address (and have to pack up all their stuff)! In the same way, we tend to forget just how many times God has answered specific prayers, made timely provision, and done marvelous things in our lives. But having a place to collect all those memories prevents their being forgotten.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Donald S. Whitney, 1993, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, (NavPress: Colorado Springs), p. 201.

Moreover, from the world of social science we find budding evidence of the value of gratitude journals. In an experiment using undergraduate students, those students who kept gratitude journals on a weekly basis reported more progress toward their personal goals, exercised more regularly, were more optimistic about the upcoming week, and felt better about their lives as a whole compared to those who kept weekly journals of hassles or of neutral life events.<sup>4</sup>

Many claim there is power in the spiritual discipline of journaling, so to grow gratitude, you may want to give it a try. If you do, remember that there's no one right way to do this. Just use a format that you find helpful. You don't need to buy a special edition, full-color, twenty-dollar journal at your local bookstore. You don't need to be concerned about whether your writing makes sense. You don't need to worry about *why* you are grateful for these things. Just let the words flow.

The standard recommendation is to log five blessings per day. List more, list fewer. The exact number is not important. Just list some daily. For the first couple weeks, the blessings you list may be a bit repetitive from one day to the next. Over time, though, people generally find themselves including in their journal many new and

formerly unrecognized gifts from God.

No one can say what you'll discover through this process; however, one thing is almost certain. Through keeping a

**The findings are pretty clear:  
Periodic fasting, confession of sin, and praying for the poor will all grow our gratitude.  
Keeping a gratitude journal is probably helpful as well.**

gratitude journal, you'll probably grow your gratitude and through that, you'll likely grow many other Christian qualities as well.

#### ***Grow Gratitude through the Disciplines of Periodic Fasting and Confession of Sin***

I should note at the outset that one can certainly grow gratitude without fasting. In fact, looking at the most grateful one-third of Christians in my study, a high percentage (78%) say that they *do not* fast regularly. But I also found that fasting is one of the practices that can help people cultivate a strong and persistent feeling of thankfulness. Overall, there is a patent, positive relationship between periodic fasting and

one's level of gratitude. We see from Figure 1 that people who have lower levels of gratitude are not in the habit of fasting and that people who have higher levels of gratitude are much more likely to be fasters. In fact, by the time we get to the high-end of the gratitude spectrum, about fifty percent of these most grateful Christians say that they have made periodic fasting a habit.

This finding is consistent with traditional Christian theology which regards fasting as, among other things, a reminder that we do not live by bread alone (Matthew 4:4)—that it is not food that sustains us, it is God. And as we recall that teaching anew through fasting, we may feel more appreciative and more grateful to our Sustainer.

It is easy to experiment with this phenomenon for yourself. Just try going without food for a day and instead, use your mealtime for prayer or some other God-centered activity. You'll likely enhance your appreciation for the gift of food and the sustenance of God. Perhaps you'll better appreciate other things we take for granted as well.

The same linkage exists between confession of sin and greater gratitude. Why would this be? It is likely that regularly bringing our sin before God reminds us of both our flaws and God's grace. The combination of contritely admitting sin and knowing it has been cleansed will automatically generate feelings of thanksgiving. The relationship works the other way as well: A stronger spirit

<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Emmons and Cheryl A. Crumpler, 2000: "Gratitude as Human Strength: Appraising the Evidence," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 19:1, p. 64.

of gratitude toward God leads us to a greater willingness to bring our sins before Him ... which leads to more cleansing ... which leads to more gratitude on our part ... which leads to more willingness to bring our sins before Him, and so on. It's a theory of an upward spiral—a theory that is now bolstered by this finding of a positive association between confession and gratitude.

### ***Grow Gratitude by Habitually Praying for the Poor***

This study also found a connection between remembering the poor in one's prayers and growing in gratitude. Figure 2 graphically illustrates the almost linear relationship. The trend is remarkably consistent. Those who more frequently pray this type of prayer report being more grateful in life.<sup>5</sup>

This happens, in all likelihood, because when one prays for those who have less, one is reminded of how much tougher his or her life could be. The practice not only comports with a scriptural mandate for intercession (e.g., 1 Timothy 2:1, John 17), it essentially serves as a corrective to keep one's own life in perspective. Our frame of reference

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<sup>5</sup> Technical note: I have considered the possibility of the relationship going the other way—that being more grateful leads one to pray for the poor. I used a reasonably sophisticated statistical procedure (called a two-stage least squares regression) to examine this issue and found that prayer for the poor does indeed lead to gratitude.

becomes the impoverished widow, the hungry child, the jobless father, the disease-ridden infant, the refugee forced from home by war, the third-world neighbor without electricity or running water. Praying daily for these people is a practice that illuminates

## **It would be imprudent to engage in some gratitude growth program apart from God**

our own existence in the blazing light of God's providence, and as a result, we experience a stunning series of reversals. Envy gives way to fulfillment. Resentment gives way to contentment. Complaints give way to praise. The catalyst through it all is gratitude, borne of a clearer perspective that's generated by reflecting on the poor.

### ***Growing Gratitude by Creatively Developing Your Own Habits***

The common thread in these gratitude-generating habits is that they all yield fresh perspective on our life circumstances. With this in mind, you can develop other habits that work specifically for you—habits that will have a powerful effect on your own perspective. Habits that remind you of just how good things are, or of how much worse

things could be. And it doesn't matter if they seem like strange habits, if others might not understand their connection to gratitude, or if they are not sanctioned by some religious body somewhere. What does matter is that you develop habits that engender an attitude that you are richly blessed by God.

To stimulate your thinking, let me share two habits that I've adopted. Some might say they're peculiar habits, but I prefer to think of them as novel and pragmatic. Regardless the characterization, I offer them as examples of creative solutions that can grow gratitude daily.

**Novel Habit #1:** Whenever I see the number 518—whether on a digital clock, a license plate, an address, or somewhere else—I immediately thank God for my wife. Strange? On the surface, it might seem so. But the idea is prompted by Proverbs 5:18 which says: "Rejoice in the wife of your youth." So I make it a practice to rejoice, to give thanks to God for my wife, when I see the number. I could do this without the numerical reminder, of course, but I've found that for me, having a mechanism like "518" to trigger my thanks ensures that I rejoice this way more often than I would otherwise. In fact, it usually happens between five and ten times each week. And then, like a boomerang, the thanks comes right back to me. I actually feel more grateful for my wife through this simple expression of gratitude to God, and that positively affects my character in her presence.



If you're married, you might want to try something like this. Make it a habit to thank God for your spouse. It will likely grow both your level of gratitude and your marriage at the same time.

Novel Habit #2: This sounds morbid, I know, but it works remarkably well for me. I've made a habit of scanning through the obituary section of the newspaper every day or two. I look at the pictures of the deceased. I contemplate the pained words of their loved ones. I pay special attention to the people who have died early in life. Through this uncomfortable activity, I'm reminded of both the preciousness and the brevity of life. And my perspective is often different—clearer and perfected—when I turn the page.

In a similar vein, I've tried to pay closer attention when I hear or read some news story about people who have little, whether they are local folks or people on the other side of the globe. Occasionally I make some time to visit Web sites that illuminate the plight of those in dire straights. As I do, I make mental notes of the statistics cited on such sites (e.g., 800 million people in the world suffer from malnutrition and hunger; 24,000 die everyday from hunger or

hunger-related diseases). The strategy is the same as with the obituaries: I try to expose myself to moving reminders that I am exceedingly blessed.

### **The Connection to God-Centeredness**

As explained above, gratitude is a parent of the other Christian virtues. More so than with any other virtue I've studies in this project, people who have a grateful disposition are likely to also experience inner peace, joy, patience, kindness, faithfulness, self-control, compassion, and the ability to forgive. Similarly, without gratitude, one is less likely to see those other virtues manifest in his or her life.

I've also described some habits that develop the kind of disciplined mind that grows and sustains gratitude. However, it's important to remember that fundamentally shifting your outlook from "I want" to "I have" takes time and perseverance. For those of us who seek quick results (and that may be the majority of us), this endeavor is fraught with setbacks and frustration.

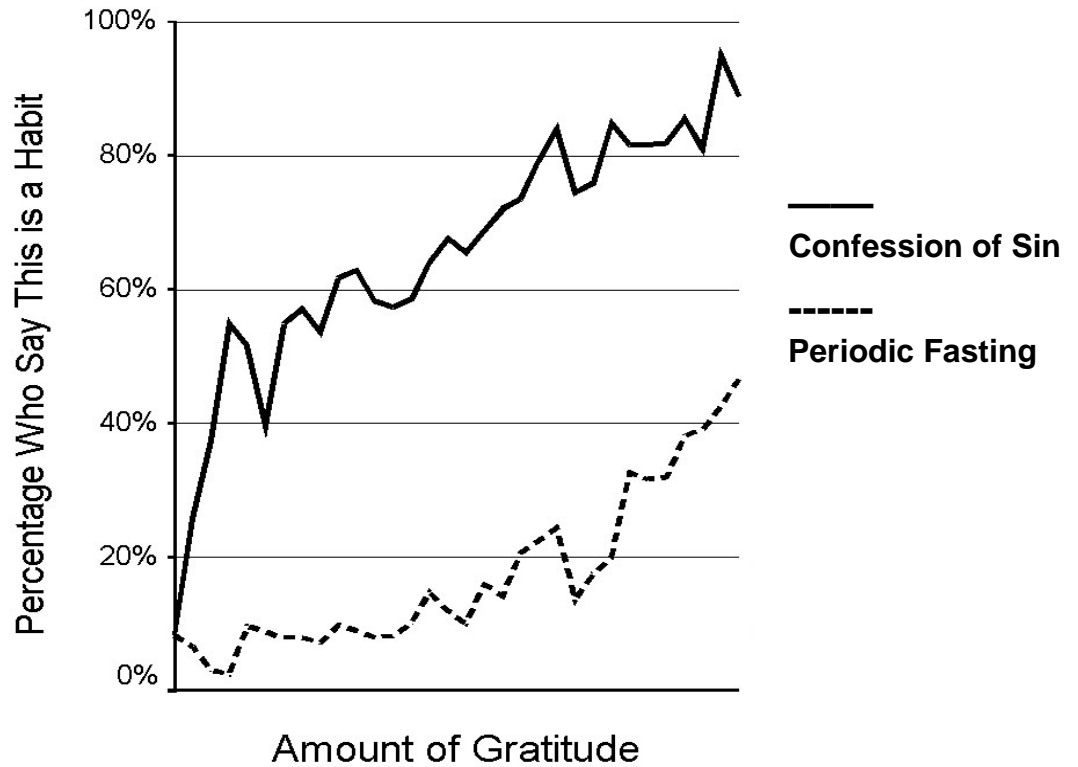
The good news, though, is that you need not pursue this change by yourself. God is your ally in this transformation. As you grow closer to God, the many habits that generate gratitude become

natural. For example, the recommendations advanced in this article—discipline your thought life, thank God throughout the day, keep a gratitude journal, fast periodically, regularly confess sin, pray for the poor—are an outgrowth of that divine relationship. So let me close with a word of caution: *It would be imprudent to engage in some gratitude-growth program apart from God.* Instead, if you want to become perpetually grateful—if you want to experience long-term transformation in your thinking—imitate one final strategy of high-virtue Christians: Engage in this gratitude-growth program in tandem with a broader agenda to become more God-centered than you currently are. As you do, you'll find that God's gift of gratitude is a pathway to permanent change and to the life you've always wanted.

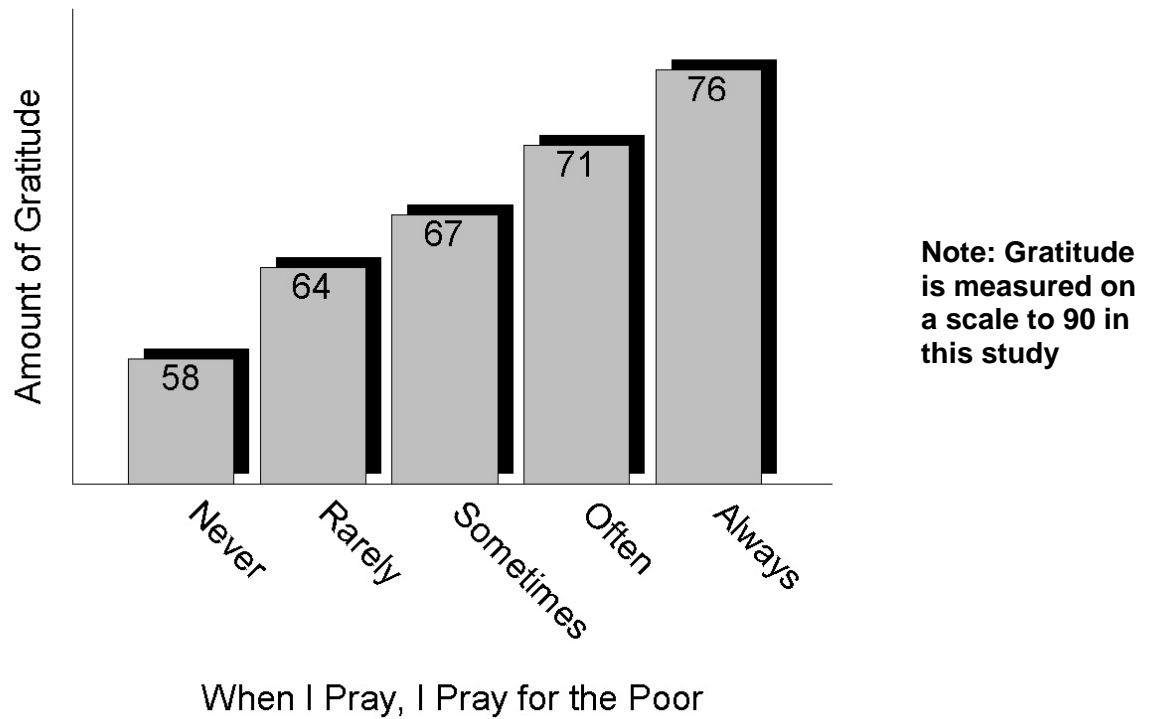
*Excerpted from Cultivating Christian Character: How to become the person God wants you to be and how to help others do the same (Xulon Press, 2002). Used by permission. All rights reserved.*

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**Figure 1: Regular Fasting and Confession May Grow Gratitude**



**Figure 2: The Connection between Praying for the Poor and Gratitude**



## **A Summary of the Recommendations for Growing and Sustaining Gratitude**

- ✚ Make a habit of thinking about the blessings in your life and thanking God for them. Make this a practice throughout every day. Consider keeping a daily “gratitude journal” to formalize this process of identifying the blessings.
- ✚ Watch for envy. Regularly examine yourself to identify where and when you are envious and work toward rejecting such thoughts when they creep into your mind. Replace those thoughts with thanks to God for what you do have in life.
- ✚ Practice the disciplines of periodic fasting and regular confession of sin with one aim being a clearer understanding of the gifts bestowed on you in life.
- ✚ Expose yourself to information about the dire condition of others around the world and make prayer for these people a staple of your prayer life.
- ✚ Create other habits that remind you of how blessed you are and of how much worse life could be.
- ✚ Engage in this gratitude-growth program as part of a broader program to become a more God-centered person.

# What Work Matters to God?

## Three Dangerous Myths

Douglas Sherman and William Hendricks

In many Christian circles, work is considered “secular.” It has no concern with God. In many ways, it even becomes an enemy to what God really wants done in the world. It takes away from worship, prayer, church activity, evangelism, and family life, which are “sacred” categories. In short, work is something to finish and get out of. There is no inherent dignity to it.

Of course, few people would articulate this attitude in such a hard-boiled manner. But I submit that, in the right context, many of us would find ourselves in basic agreement—especially if they were isolated and hidden in a sermon, a book, a devotional guide, or some other religious format.

Many people believe that the only part of life that “really counts” to God is the part committed to religious activities like Bible reading, prayer, church activity, and the like. Day-to-day work itself has no intrinsic value. It contributes nothing to the work God is doing, which is of course, the only important work. If it has any value at all, it is only to meet survival needs or as a strategic soapbox to evangelize non-believers.

You may be like many laypeople I meet who sense that something is wrong in the church’s view of work as being separate from what “really

counts” to God, but you cannot quite put your finger on *what* is wrong with it. What’s wrong is that such a conceptualization of work adopts one or more of these unwarranted assumptions or “myths”: (1) God is more interested in the

**Many people mistakenly believe that the part of life that “really counts” to God is the part committed to religious activities like Bible reading, prayer and church activities.**

soul than the body, (2) the things of eternity are more important than the things of time, and (3) Christians should work in secular jobs primarily as a strategy for evangelism. Each of these myths culminates in a distorted, allegedly-Christian view of work. Let us explain.

### **Myth 1: The Soul-Body Hierarchy**

This view assumes that God is far more interested in the soul

than He is in the body. I can understand why. Relating to God, after all, is largely an unseen thing that takes place in our inner persona. Consequently, we tend to promote inner activities that nurture that relationship—“soul activities,” such as prayer meditation, Bible reading, etc.

But how does our body fit into our relationship with God? I am hard-pressed to find many people addressing that question. In fact, I suspect that many Christians would regard such a question as meaningless or irrelevant. The majority assumes that God’s primary interest is in man’s soul. It is this inner life, they feel, that connects us to God and that we must cultivate.

The implications for career are numerous. Our Christian teachings generally exalt the soul and neglect the body. As a consequence, we subtly rate careers by the extent to which they contribute to the soul. Careers in ministry come first, because those workers supposedly give themselves to “the souls of men and the Word of God.”

Then come careers in the “helping professions”—counselors in psychology and psychiatry, doctors, teachers, nurses, social workers, perhaps mothers. These are not involved as exclusively as ministers in “soul-work,” but



they certainly cultivate the inner life more than the third group.

The third group are the laborers and those whose primary goal (supposedly) is money. The farmer, the truck driver, the assembly-line worker, the repairman. These people deal with physical things and “work with their hands” (a description that presumes that they leave their minds at home, I guess). The money people are bankers, brokers, real estate developers, and entrepreneurs who traffic in all that green stuff—and we know how evil that can be!

This is a seriously flawed way of looking at things. In particular, it is an extremely sub-biblical view of the nature of man. It assumes that man is somehow made up of parts, a “soul” and a “body.” But this is not how Scripture portrays man: “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7).

God does not deal with you just as a soul. When He created you, He created all of you, as a soul and a body. Paul urges us “to present [our] bodies a living and holy sacrifice” to God (Rom. 12:1). Consequently, there can be no hierarchy of soul over the body. God wants to see the broad range of mankind’s needs met, not just the spiritual. If God were only interested in soul-work, then He needn’t have created a physical universe. He needn’t have sent Christ in a human body. And He needn’t bother

to resurrect the body after death.

So, if you work as a clothier, a coach, a physical therapist, a barber or in some other “physical” occupation, you should take heart. Your work is not spiritually inferior because it concerns itself with the body.

## **Our work is a form of worship because in working with all our strength for Him, we demonstrate our love for God.**

### **Myth 2: The Eternal-Temporal Hierarchy**

Many Christians assume that the things that really matter are the things that pertain to eternity. In fact, they would say that what happens here and now has meaning and significance only in light of eternity.

Perhaps you’ve heard the familiar refrain: “There are only two things that last for eternity: the Word of God and the souls of men. Therefore, if you want your life to really count, then you need to give yourself to the building the Word of God into men.” Or as a hymn puts it:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,

Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace.

In light of eternity, this view asks, what ultimate value could there possibly be in working for the “food which perishes”? To give one’s life to the manufacture of an automobile, or the advertising of toothpaste, or the buying and selling of real estate, is in essence to give oneself to a world that is passing away. By contrast, a life given to God’s work has intrinsic value because it concerns itself with what ultimately matters.

This concept of eternity and its implications for work are fairly widespread among Christians today. Yet is eternity what “really counts” to God? Is it the ultimate reality? Scripture suggests otherwise. It distinguishes between a seen world and an unseen world, and calls the seen world “temporal” and the unseen world “eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). So there are apparently two aspects—two sides to reality.

But the Bible goes on to declare that both time and eternity are very real and very important to God. The natural universe is just as real as the supernatural universe. One is not “ultimate reality” while the other is “just reality.” Both exist with absolute certainty, though of course each exists and operates according to its own set of laws and principles. This is evident from Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Because we start our existence in time and end up in eternity, eternity is our eventual or ultimate destiny. Knowing that eternity is our destiny, shouldn't that inform everything we do today? I think so. Does "doing everything we can" mean quitting our secular jobs and becoming evangelists? No. Such a view is mistaken. It automatically assumes that holding a secular job isn't "doing everything we can." But in fact, it may be.

If God has created you with a certain design, say as an architect, and placed you in a given opportunity, perhaps in a city that needs buildings, then working as an architect to the glory of God comes far closer to "doing everything you can" than quitting your job to become an evangelist. I don't think that anyone would have preferred that Handel or Bach had quit composing music and become evangelists. Or that Wilber Wilberforce had quit Parliament and become an evangelist. The work of men like these has surely been used mightily of God to point people's eyes toward eternity, even though it was not principally evangelistic.

So what *does* have value? There remains a question of eternal value. Why would so many Christians view the work of the architect as fairly insignificant? After all, he designs buildings that will pass with time.

As humans we tend to see a strong connection between *duration* and *value*. We feel that the longer something

lasts, the more value it has. Suppose the duration of something stretches to infinity. In that case we would say it has ultimate value, eternal value. Eternal duration presumes eternal value.

This connection between duration and value seems reasonable. But if we associate

## **I don't think that anyone would have preferred that Handel or Bach had quit composing music and become evangelists.**

value with duration, then we have to say that God's work of creation has no value. Why? Because it won't last into eternity (Mark 13:31; 2 Pet. 3:11-13; Rev. 21:1). He has already pledged to destroy it someday and to create a new heaven and earth in its place. Hence, if only the things of eternity count, then God's creation doesn't "count." But that is absurd.

When a salesman dies, the drills, presses or heavy equipment he sells won't really matter one way or another. But to say that they have no value is nonsense, because they have all the value they need given the category—time—for which they were created. Those drills may punch holes in airplane engine parts, and thus help produce

transportation for people and goods. They may put holes in air conditioners used by schools, hospitals, businesses or churches. It would be wrong to require them to last forever to have value. They would have to last forever to have *eternal* value, but not to have temporal value.

This is all well and good, but don't we want to give our lives to things that will have great value in eternity? If I lead some person to salvation, I'll be able to look on the fruit of my labor for eternity. But the architect who puts up a building must someday watch that building pass away. Wouldn't he rather give his life to what really counts?

I would reply that he actually is giving his life to what "really counts." What will ultimately matter in eternity is our faithfulness right now with the resources and responsibilities God has given us. So the architect who designs buildings to the glory of God, who works with integrity, diligence, fairness, and excellence, who treats his wife with the love Christ has for the Church, who raises his children in godly wisdom and instruction, who urges non-Christian associates to heed the gospel message—in short, who acts a responsible manager in the various arenas God has entrusted to him—this man will receive eternal praise from God. That is what really matters in eternity.

For within time, what really matters to God is that the various needs of His creation be met. One of those needs is salvation. But, we have many

other needs too. Just because many of them are temporal needs does not diminish their importance to God, nor does it diminish the value of the work done to meet those needs. In fact, God thinks they are important enough to equip a variety of people with various abilities to meet those needs. Furthermore, in meeting the legitimate needs of people, a worker is serving people who obviously have eternal value. In other words, the product of the work may be temporal but those who benefit from the work are eternal.

Let's consider now another myth about work commonly held among believers: the "Strategic Soapbox" model.

### **Myth 3: The "Strategic Soapbox" Model of Work**

This model argues that Christians participate in the mainstream of the culture primarily to set up strategic opportunities to share the gospel message with friends and associates. According to this view, Christians should work in secular jobs primarily as a strategy for evangelism. Those who hold the Soapbox view of work and life base their worldview on the Great Commission.

If you adopt this Strategic Soapbox model for your life, you redefine your job description. You are no longer a doctor, a teacher, or a salesperson. Rather, you become an evangelist in the field of medicine, education, or marketing.

Sounds compelling! The Soapbox model seems to have come up with a way of life that honors the Great Commission and offers us a meaningful cause, a purpose for living. And it gets results. So if you

## **Work is not something beneath God's dignity or concern. Nor is work a game we play with non-Christians to accomplish a more important agenda.**

hold this view, you would likely conclude that:

1. Your secular career is valid, but should be seen primarily in light of its strategic evangelistic value.
2. You should limit your time at work so as to maximize evangelistic efforts.
3. All of your decisions about career planning should be on the basis of how they will impact your evangelism of people.
4. Evangelists and missionaries hold the most significant positions in the Kingdom because they give their lives to the very spiritual work of evangelism.
5. The work of God in the world is primarily evangelistic.

The only reason God meets physical needs of people is to sustain them so that they can either hear the gospel or share the gospel.

To argue against the Soapbox position appears to be arguing against the Great Commission. Indeed, to even question it sounds like a devilish, subversive activity. So let me preface my evaluation of the view by emphatically stating: *Evangelism should be a priority!*

But should it be the only priority? That is, should we regard evangelism as the ultimate issue against which all decisions should be weighed? Here is where I part company with the Soapbox view. It is inadequate for three reasons: 1) the Great Commission is broader than evangelism, 2) life is broader than evangelism and 3) work is more than just a platform.

In the first place, the Great Commission doesn't support this view. Consider the text in full:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20, NIV)

The Great Commission is primarily about discipleship

and only secondly about evangelism. The main command is “make disciples.” Discipleship includes evangelism, but it extends beyond it. This is clear from the two tasks that flow out of the command to make disciples, namely baptism and teaching. I would include evangelism under the baptizing part of discipleship. But discipleship goes on into teaching—into a lifestyle of obedience to Christ.

This understanding of the Great Commission is borne out by the rest of the New Testament. Jesus’ disciples and Paul wrote these texts, and what they wrote suggests that this is how they understood the Great Commission. First, we find them in the book of Acts, principally going and proclaiming the gospel everywhere. Result: Thousands and thousands were *baptized*. Thus the disciples obeyed the first part of the commission. But Acts also records that, following baptism, the new converts “were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ *teaching*,” among other things. What was the context of that teaching? We find out in the books that follow Acts.

In those books, as in the Sermon on the Mount, we find that obedience to Christ involves every aspect of life (including work which is a major category). As Paul says in Colossians 3:17, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

Is the Great Commission the greatest of Christ’s commands? Curiously, when asked what was the greatest command, Jesus replied:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22:37-40, NIV).

To summarize, then, the Great Commission obviously includes evangelism. In fact, if we are not participating in evangelism, then we are not obeying Christ. But we can’t say that our only or even our primary purpose in life is evangelism, because the Great Commission doesn’t say or imply that. Instead, it tells us to evangelize and teach people to obey all of God’s Word, and God’s Word shows us a lifestyle much broader than evangelism alone.

Your work matters to God. Work is not something beneath God’s dignity or concern, as some contend. Nor is work a game we play with non-Christians in order to accomplish a more important agenda, as the Soapbox advocate holds. Instead, work is a major part of human life that God takes seriously.

Our day-to-day work is not “secular.” It has intrinsic value.

God has ordained work as a means of supporting our families. He established it as a way for us to earn money to help those in need. Through our work we meet the market needs of our community. And, it is a form of worship because in working with all our strength for him, we demonstrate our love for God.

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# What Drives Your Life?

Rick Warren

*"I observed that the basic motive for success is the driving force of envy and jealousy!"*

*Ecclesiastes 4:4 (LB)*

*The man without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder—a waif, a nothing, a no man.*

*Thomas Carlyle*

Everyone's life is driven by something.

Most dictionaries define the verb *drive* as "to guide, to control, or to direct." Whether you are driving a car, a nail, or a golf ball, you are guiding, controlling, and directing it at that moment. What is the driving force in your life?

Right now you may be driven by a problem, a pressure, or a deadline. You may be driven by a painful memory, a haunting fear, or an unconscious belief. There are hundreds of circumstances, values, and emotions that can drive your life. Here are five of the most common ones:

**Many people are driven by guilt.** They spend their entire lives running from regrets and hiding their shame. Guilt-driven people are manipulated by memories. They allow their past to control their future. They often unconsciously punish themselves by sabotaging their own success. When Cain sinned, his guilt disconnected him from God's presence, and God said, "You

will be a restless wanderer on the earth" (Genesis 4:12, New International Version). That describes most people today—wandering through life without a purpose.

We are products of our past, but we don't have to be

**People are driven by guilt, anger, fear, materialism, and the need for approval. But there's a much better way to live.**

prisoners of it. God's purpose is not limited by your past. He turned a murderer named Moses into a leader and a coward named Gideon into a courageous hero, and he can do amazing things with the rest of your life, too. God specializes in giving people a fresh start. The Bible says, "What happiness for those whose guilt has been forgiven! ... What relief for those who have confessed their sins and God cleared their record" (Psalm 32:1, Living Bible).

**Many people are driven by resentment and anger.** They hold on to hurts and never get

over them. Instead of releasing their pain through forgiveness, they rehearse it over and over in their minds. Some resentment-driven people "clam up" and internalize their anger, while others "blow up" and explode it onto others. Both responses are unhealthy and unhelpful.

Resentment always hurts you more than it does the person you resent. While you offender has probably forgotten the offense and gone on with life, you continue to stew in your pain, perpetuating the past.

Listen: Those who have hurt you in the past cannot continue to hurt you now *unless* you hold on to the pain through resentment. Your past is past! Nothing will change it. You are only hurting yourself with your bitterness. For your own sake, learn from it, and let it go. The Bible says, "To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do" (Job 5:2, Today's English Version).

**Many people are driven by fear.** Their fears may be a result of a traumatic experience, unrealistic expectations, growing up in a high-control home, or even genetic predisposition. Regardless of the cause, fear-driven people often miss great opportunities because they're afraid to venture out. Instead they play it safe, avoiding risks

and trying to maintain the status quo.

Fear is a self-imposed prison that will keep you from becoming what God intends for you to be. You *must* move against it with the weapons of faith and love. The Bible says, “Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love” (1 John 4:18, The Message).

**Many people are driven by materialism.** Their desire to acquire becomes the whole goal of their lives. This drive to always want more is based on the misconceptions that having more will make me more happy, more important, and more secure, but all three ideas are untrue. Possessions only provide *temporary* happiness. Because these things do not change, we eventually become bored with them and then want newer, bigger, better versions.

It’s also a myth that if I get more, I will be more important. Self-worth and net worth are not the same. Your value is not determined by your valuables, and God says the most valuable *things* in life are not things!

The most common myth about money is that having more will make me more secure. It won’t. Wealth can be lost instantly through a variety of uncontrollable factors. Real security can only be found in that which can never be taken from you—your relationship with God.

**Many people are driven by the need for approval.** They allow the expectations of parents or spouses or children or teachers or friends to control their lives. Many adults are still trying to earn the approval of unpleasable parents. Others are driven by peer pressure, always worried by what others might think. Unfortunately, those who follow the crowd usually get lost in it.

**I don’t know all the keys to success, but one key to failure is to try to please everyone. Being controlled by the opinions of others is a guaranteed way to miss God’s purposes for your life.**

I don’t know all the keys to success, but one key to failure is to try to please everyone. Being controlled by the opinions of others is a guaranteed way to miss God’s purposes for your life. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24, New Living Translation).

There are other forces that can drive your life but all lead to the same dead end: unused

potential, unnecessary stress, and an unfulfilled life.

## **The Benefits of Purpose-Driven Living**

There are five great benefits of living a purpose-driven life:

**Knowing your purpose gives meaning to your life.** We were made to have meaning. This is why people try dubious methods, like astrology or psychics, to discover it. When life has meaning, you can bear almost anything; without it, nothing is bearable.

A young man in his twenties wrote, “I feel like a failure because I’m trying to become something, and I don’t even know what it is. All I know how to do is to get by. Someday, if I discover my purpose, I’ll feel I’m beginning to live.”

Without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope. In the Bible, many different people expressed this hopelessness. Isaiah complained, “I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing” (Isaiah 49:4, New International Version). Job said, “My life drags by—day after hopeless day” (Job 7:6, Living Bible) and “I give up; I am tired of living. Leave me alone. My life makes no sense” (Job 7:16, Today’s English Version). The greatest tragedy is not death, but life without purpose.

Hope is as essential to your life as air and water. You need hope to cope. Dr. Bernie Siegel

found he could predict which of his cancer patients would go into remission by asking, “Do you want to live to be one hundred?” Those with a deep sense of life purpose answered yes and were the ones most likely to survive. Hope comes from having a purpose.

If you have ever felt hopeless, hold on! Wonderful changes are going to happen in your life as you begin to live it on purpose. God says, “I know what I am planning for you ... I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future” (Jeremiah 29:11, New Century Version). You may feel you are facing an impossible situation, but the Bible says, “God ... is able to do far more than we would ever dare to ask or even dream of—infinity beyond our highest prayers, desires, thoughts, or hopes” (Ephesians 3:20, Living Bible).

**Knowing your purpose simplifies your life.** It defines what you do and what you don’t do. Your purpose becomes the standard you use to evaluate which activities are essential and which aren’t. You simply ask, “Does this activity help me fulfill one of God’s purposes for my life?”

Without a clear purpose you have no foundation on which you base decisions, allocate your time, and use your resources. You will tend to make choices based on circumstances, pressures, and your mood at that moment. People who don’t know their purpose try to do too much—and *that* causes stress, fatigue, and conflict.

It is impossible to do everything people want you to do. You have just enough time to do God’s will. If you can’t get it all done, it means you’re trying to do more than God intended for you to do (or, possibly, that you’re watching too much television). Purpose-driven living lead to a simpler lifestyle and a saner schedule. The Bible says, “A pretentious, showy life is an empty life; a plain and simple life is a full life” (Proverbs 13:7, The

**You weren’t put on earth to be remembered. You were put here to prepare for eternity.**

Message). It also leads to peace of mind: “You, LORD, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you” (Isaiah 26:3, Today’s English Version).

**Knowing your purpose focuses your life.** It concentrates you effort and energy on what’s important. You become effective by being selective.

It’s human nature to get distracted by minor issues. We play *Trivial Pursuit* with our lives. Henry David Thoreau observed the people live lives of “quiet desperation,” but today a better description is

aimless distraction. Many people are like gyroscopes, spinning around at a frantic pace but never going anywhere.

Without a clear purpose, you will keep changing direction, jobs, relationships, churches, or other externals—hoping each change will settle the confusion or fill the emptiness in your heart. You think, Maybe this time it will be different, but it doesn’t solve your real problem—a lack of focus and purpose.

The Bible says, “Don’t live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants” (Ephesians 5:17, The Message).

The power of focusing can be seen in light. Diffused light has little power or impact, but you can concentrate its energy by focusing it. With a magnifying glass, the rays of the sun can be focused to set grass or paper on fire. When light is focused even more as a laser beam, it can cut through steel.

There is nothing quite as potent as a focused life, one lived on purpose. The men and women who have made the greatest difference in history were the most focused. For instance, the apostle Paul almost single-handedly spread Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. His secret was a focused life. He said, “I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead” (Philippians 3:13, New Living Translation).

If you want your life to have impact, focus it! Stop dabbling. Stop trying to do it all. Do less. Prune away even good activities and do only that which matters most. Never confuse activity with productivity. You can be busy without a purpose, but what's the point? Paul said, "Let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us" (Philippians 3:15, The Message).

**Knowing your purpose motivates you life.** Purpose always produces passion. Nothing energizes like a clear purpose. On the other hand, passion dissipates when you lack a purpose. Just getting out of bed becomes a major chore. It is usually meaningless work, not overwork, that wears us down, saps our strength, and robs our joy.

George Bernard Shaw wrote, "This is the true joy of life: the being used up for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clot of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

**Knowing your purpose prepares you for eternity.** Many people spend their lives trying to create a lasting legacy on earth. They want to be remembered when they're gone. Yet, what ultimately matters most will not be what others say about your life but what God says. What people fail to realize is that all achievements are eventually surpassed, records are broken, reputations fade, and tributes

are forgotten. In college, James Dobson's goal was to become the school's tennis champion. He felt proud when his trophy was prominently placed in the school's trophy cabinet. Years later, someone mailed him that trophy. They had found it in a trash can when the school was remodeled. Jim said, "Given enough time, all your trophies will be trashed by someone

**Without a clear purpose, you will keep changing directions, jobs, relationships, churches or other externals—hoping each change will settle the confusion or fill the emptiness in your heart.**

else!"

Living to create an earthly legacy is a short-sighted goal. A wiser use of time is to build an eternal legacy. You weren't put on earth to be remembered. You were put here to prepare for eternity.

One day you will stand before God, and He will do an audit of your life, a final exam, before you enter eternity. The Bible says, "Remember, each of us will stand personally before the judgment seat of God ... Yes,

each of us will have to give a personal account to God" (Romans 14:10b, 12, New Living Translation). Fortunately, God wants us to pass this test, so he has given us the questions in advance. From the Bible we can surmise that God will ask us two crucial questions:

First, "*What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?*" God won't ask about your religious background or doctrinal views. The only thing that will matter is, did you accept what Jesus did for you and did you learn to love and trust him? Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, New International Version).

Second, "*What did you do with what I gave you?*" What did you do with your life—all the gifts, talents, opportunities, energy, relationships, and resources God gave you? Did you spend them on yourself, or did you use them for the purposes God made you for?"

Preparing you for these two questions is the goal of my book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. The first question will determine *where* you spend eternity. The second question will determine *what* you do in eternity.

*Excerpted from The Purpose Driven Life (Zondervan, 2002). Used with permission.*

*Rick Warren is the founding pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California and the author of The Purpose Driven Church and The Purpose Driven Life.*



# Time-Honored Advice for Coping with Your Boss

Thomas à Kempis

*Thomas à Kempis, a fifteenth century believer, was known by his fellow monks to be a man "filled with love for the Passion of the Lord, and a wonderful comforter of those in temptation and trouble." In his master work, The Imitation of Christ, à Kempis reaches through centuries to offer workplace Christians surprisingly relevant advice to comfort us in our modern day temptations and troubles.*

*In The Imitation of Christ, à Kempis phrases his meditations as conversations with God. The following are excerpts of what he imagines God says to us, his disciples.*

## On Dealing with Accusations from Bosses and Coworkers

If you are guilty, say to yourself, "I will gladly correct my faults;" if your conscience is clear, say, "I am glad to bear this injustice for God's sake." It is not much that you should sometimes bear hard words, seeing that you are not yet strong enough to bear hard blows.

The only reason why such little things cut you to the heart is that you are still ruled by your old nature, and take more notice of men than you should. It is because you are

afraid of men's contempt that you are unwilling to be taken to task for your mistakes, and try to cover them up with excuses. Look at yourself carefully, and you will see that

**The only reason why criticism cuts you to the heart is that you are still ruled by your old nature. You take more notice of men than you should.**

worldly interest are still alive within you, as well as a foolish love of pleasing men. When you try to run away from the shame and humiliation that result from wrong-doing, it is quite clear that you have not learnt real humility, that you are not really dead to the world, and that the world does not stand crucified to you.

A man is easily upset by censure when he does not keep his thoughts centered within him and his eyes fixed on God; but the man who trusts in me and does not attempt to stand by his own judgment will be free from the fear of men. I am

the Judge from whom no secret is hidden—I am aware how each deed is done; I know who commits a wrong and who has to bear it. I allowed that word to be said; that thing was done with my permission. And so the thoughts of many hearts shall be made manifest.

How can you complain when men find fault with you? What defense can you make? You have offended God on countless occasions, and have earned the punishment of hell. Yet your soul was precious to me, and I looked down and spared you, so that you should acknowledge my love, live in continual thankfulness for my benefits, strive towards true subjection and humility, and submit patiently when you are treated with contempt.

Whenever judgment is passed, you must flee to me and not make your own decisions; for God will not let anything befall the just man to do him hurt.

## On Submitting to Your Boss

Anyone who tries to escape from obedience is really escaping from grace, and anyone who pursues private schemes loses communal blessings.

If a man does not submit to his superior gladly and willingly,

it is a sign that his old nature has not yet learned complete obedience, but is kicking and murmuring still. You must learn to submit to your superior quickly, if you desire to bring your old nature under control. The enemy outside is defeated sooner, when the man within is not in chaos. There is no enemy more dangerous and troublesome to your soul than you are to yourself when you and your spirit are not in harmony. You must learn a real indifference to self if you want to win the victory over flesh and blood. It is because your self-love is still undisciplined that you are afraid to abandon yourself to the will of others.

I became the humblest and lowest of all, so that your pride should be broken by my humility. Learn obedience, for you are only dust. Learn to

humble yourself and to put yourself beneath the feet of all, for you are the clay of the ground. Learn to crush your own desires, and surrender yourself in complete subjection.

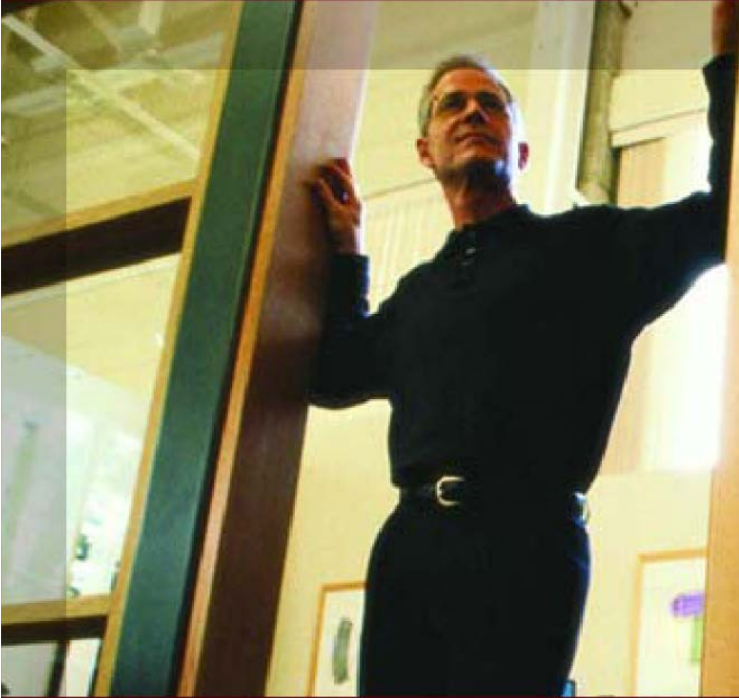
You must not say, "I am quite unable to submit to this sort of thing, coming from a man like that; and it is not the sort of thing I should be asked to accept—he has done me a great deal of harm, and accused me of something that never entered my head. Still, I would accept if from another man, provided I thought it the sort of thing I should be asked to accept."


This kind of thinking is very foolish. It is always weighing up what injuries it has received from which people, instead of keeping it in mind that there is a virtue in patience, and that a

reward awaits it from God. A man is not really patient if he is only prepared to submit to what he thinks right from the person whom he chooses.

The really patient man does not mind who it is that puts him to the test—whether it is his superior, or an equal, or a subordinate; whether it is a good, holy man, or a wicked and unworthy one. Whenever anything happens that is hard to bear, however difficult it is and whoever causes it, he accepts it all with thanks as a gift from the hand of God. In his eyes it is a great benefit, because God will not let anything that is endured for his sake, however small it is, pass by without reward.

*Adapted from The Imitation of Christ, translated by Betty Knott, Wm. Collins and Co., 1963.*





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