

THE HERALD

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How to Change a Home from Job-Centered to God-Centered

Rick Thomas

Biff loved his job. He loved what he did for a living too much. In time, he forgot the primary purpose for the gift of work. Instead of Biff using his career to fulfill the calling to lead his family, which is part of what it means to have a God-centered lifestyle, his work began to exploit and manage him. This travesty happens when a job controls a man rather than him controlling his job.

Going back to the Genesis account of creation and the purpose of work will help to bring clarity to this problem. After God created Adam, He gave him a job to do. Thus, Adam went to work, taking care of the garden. Working was one of the ways that Adam could make the Lord's name great.

After Adam and Eve chose to sin (Genesis 3:6), the motivations for garden-tending changed. Adam began to use his workspace for sinful purposes, like hiding from God in the garden that he was supposed to tend (Genesis 3:7). He took the privilege of work and transformed it into something to satisfy himself.

Sin has a way of exploiting us by taking the good things the Lord gives to us and using them for immoral purposes. Your vocation is one of the good things the Lord has given to you. How do you use it?

- Is your job a means to help your family put God's name on display?
- Is your job an instrument to glorify yourself by

enhancing your image and reputation?

I think if a guy were honest, he would say that he can be easily tempted to find his identity in what he does rather than who he is in Christ. It's a natural temptation for any man.

The Job-centered Man

You ever noticed when two guys meet for the first time, one of the initial questions is, "What do you do for a living?" There is a reason for this query. Adam was called to do something. Doing something is how the Lord wired the male population. Men are creators.

Because of the fall, what we do for a living can become too vital and controlling. Like Adam, we can take what God has called us to do and use it to promote ourselves. The garden Adam took care of soon became his new identity idol: a way to feel good about himself. God's fame was out, and there was a desire for Adam to step into the epicenter of his life.

One of the reasons Adam wanted to feel good about himself was because of how he felt after the fall. He had a deflated ego. Adam was ashamed of who he was, so he took matters into his hands. Inherent, Adamic shame is at the core of why a man would allow his job to become an idol, even to the point of destroying his family.

When One Becomes Two

When Biff and Mable were first married, you could discern a distinct one flesh-ness about them (see Eph. 5:31). They looked happy because they were. As Biff began to aspire for greatness on the job, his desire to promote Christ through his one flesh union waned.

After a couple of promotions, he began to see

his job as something more than a means to spread God's fame or provide for his family. It was not long before he became a slave to his career. His family began to suffer. Biff became a job-centered man.

Understand Your Man

Mable did not perceive the potential "job threat" to her union with Biff. She encouraged him to continue to strive for career advancement at work. Her appeals are not unusual. She saw the benefits of him doing well. What she did not know is how easy it is for man to succumb to the temptations of a job.

The two most natural allurements for a man to yield are his job and a woman. Instructively, these were Adam's two primary responsibilities in the garden.

And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed (Genesis 2:8).

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it (Genesis 2:15).

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him (Genesis 2:18).

Initially, Adam took care of the garden and his wife. There was no sin, no distraction, and no impediments until Satan walked into the garden to tempt the first couple. Sin came, which distorted everything.

Adam began to use his job to cover himself (Genesis 3:7) while accusing his wife of their problems (Genesis 3:12). He compromised his wife and career by transitioning his loyalty to himself.

It no longer desired to put God's fame on display by the work of his hands or taking care of his wife. Adam became a user—craving self-promotion while presuming on his wife's understanding and temptations.

A New One Flesh

Mable continued to applaud her husband's desires and his accomplishments, not realizing she was fanning his lust for self-glorification. She did not perceive the problem or know how to care for

Biff.

She chose to go along with him. After a while, she began to make mental notes, tabulating how many times his job was getting in the way of their home life. Long hours at the office and questions from the children began to mount.

As their kids became teens, they accepted dad working all the time and found interests in other things and other people. Their boys were into sports, and their girls were into boys.

Biff unwittingly gave up his parental authority, as well as his call to disciple his children. He never caught wind that there was a problem in his home until it was too late—three of his four children were angry and relationally distant.

This crisis escalated when Mable began to resent Biff. She was no longer excited about his job promotions; she disdained them. Mable saw her family coming apart at the seams.

Biff was at the height of his career, his real one-flesh union. He was intellectually dishonest about the whole matter, saying, "They need me; I'm providing for my family," which was his spiritualized way of hiding his sin. He could have provided for his family with a lot less, but he was in denial.

How to Stand By Your Man

The job was actually about Biff and his desire to be celebrated within the world that he had carved out for himself. He was the big man on campus, and he loved it. The more things came apart at home, the stronger the compelling to spend time at the office.

He was able to experience his craving for significance, power, appreciation, approval, fame, respect, honor, and acceptance fully. All it cost him was a little overtime, which he was willing to accept because to be home was to be nagged to death.

This battle put Mable in a difficult place. She was an accomplice to her husband's craving for self-actualization through his job: she applauded him for his accomplishments. Now she is guilty by criticizing and complaining about how much he works.

Her first mistake was how she aided him by encouraging him to work harder. Her second mistake was her criticisms, which pushed him further into

his work. The first mistake was born out of innocence and ignorance. The second mistake was born out of disappointment and discouragement.

I'm not saying that Mable is the primary contributor in their marriage mess. She represents the dual tension of the victim/sinner. Though she is not at fault primarily, like all marriage problems, there is always blame to varying degrees with both partners.

The Dog Should Wag the Tail

The result was the tail wagging the dog. Biff needed a new understanding of work, and Mable must understand his temptations as well as how to help him to stop turning work into a god.

The change process will begin when they stop accusing each other of how they got to where they are. Biff and Mable need to admit their sins in the marriage humbly.

They will never change as long as they insist on launching grenades toward each other. They will never change if they try to parse out the other person's sin. It does not matter who sinned at this point. They share in each other's guilt because they are one flesh.

If my right hand has a cut, my whole body hurts. I don't slap my right hand with my left hand because my right hand did something dumb. The proper thing to do is use your left hand to help your right hand. This common-sense notion is what a healthy body will do to itself.

A healthy marriage is less about blaming each other and more about helping each other. A couple who understands one flesh-ness correctly will seek to do what is necessary to bring healing to the marriage union. Competitiveness within the one-flesh union will lead to irreparable harm.

It doesn't matter who did what at this juncture. What matters is there were mistakes made by both partners. Biff and Mable need to move on from who's right and who's wrong to mutual repentance before God and each other.

New Game Plan

Part of their repentance will be a new perspective on the purpose of work. To gain this fresh perspective, they will have to rethink and redefine

why God gave us jobs. The job is supposed to be a means to fulfill the purposes of a God-centered marriage, a marriage that puts God on display in their lives, family, and community.

As their thinking changes about work, they will be able to make practical adjustments to his work. One of these changes should mean fewer hours at work. Biff needs to make plans to be home more than he has been in the past.

Perhaps they will need to sell some things or downsize if they are in debt. The borrower is a slave to the lender, and if they have accrued debt, it may be necessary to alter their lifestyle by unloading some stuff. (See Prov. 22:7; Matt. 6:25-34.)

As they adjust their lifestyle, and Biff is at home more often, he will need to learn what it means to be at home. Being a couch potato is not the way to be at home. He wants to live out the gospel practically.

One of the applications of the gospel is planning. God planned our redemption. God always plans how He interacts with us; He does not do it willy-nilly. Biff will need to put as much effort into how he spends time with Mable and the children as he placed into planning his workday.

Fixing the Dog

As they begin to change, they should be willing and able to go to their children and repent. They must have a unified front and a practical plan when they do this.

Not only does Mable need to see a new kind of seriousness from Biff, but the children need to see it too. The more Mable experiences leadership care from Biff, the more she will be compelled to join him in their new-found mission of putting God on display through their marriage.

The ages of the children and their spiritual maturities will determine whether they will respond biblically to God and their parents. Again, how the children respond is not in the parent's hands, and should not be their central purpose for changing. Repentance is a gift from the Lord.

The main objective for Biff and Mable is to get their marriage in order by repositioning themselves to serve their union. Once God's fame is first, and the job is a means to that end, the marriage will change, and it will impact their children.

Differences Between Humans and Animals

Satire by Andrew Lansdown

Are there differences between humans and animals, or are we free to be animals like our evolutionary ancestors—as low-down as snakes, and to make pigs of ourselves, and to act like donkeys?

'No single, essential difference separates human beings from other animals.' So began a feature article on evolution in *TIME* magazine ('How Man Began', March 14, 1994). The more I thought about this sweeping statement the more I began to warm to it.

For example, like humans, apes have well formed rational faculties. Their ability to develop an argument, follow a line of logic, draw conclusions and frame hypotheses is quite remarkable.

Also like humans, apes have a marked faculty for language. (This, of course, is intertwined with their powers of reason.) Their vocabulary is enormous, their grammar complex, and their conversations deep and meaningful.

The apes' ability to codify language in writing is further proof of their close relationship to humans. In this respect, it was most gratifying to see the number of apes who wrote o *TIME* magazine in response to the article on 'How Man Began'. I was particularly interested to follow the line of reasoning of the orangutan who argued that apes had evolved from humans, not vice versa.

Like humans, apes also have a strong spirit of inquiry. Their research in the fields of astronomy, mathematics, medicine and physics is noteworthy.

Apes also (again, like humans) yearn for meaning in life. This is why they devote so much of their time to philosophy, theology and ethics. The religious sentiments and practices of all apes can be traced back to their intense and endless quest for meaning.

Apes are concerned about questions not only

of origin but also of destiny. The best proof I can offer for this claim is the maxim by one famous ape philosopher who said, 'Whether my life leads ultimately to the dirt or to the Judgment, either way, I've got a problem.'

Apes also have, like humans, a refined aesthetic sense. They admire beauty and long to surround themselves with it. When an ape cultivates a garden, puts flowers in a vase, or hangs up a painting, what is it doing if not expressing a love of beauty?

Again like humans, apes have a strong creative impulse. This is seen in their poetry, painting, dance, drama and music. To a lesser extent their creativity is also evident in the way they gather in weekly craft groups to weave baskets, spin wool, knit shawls, and cover photo albums.

The sense of humor shared by all apes is another proof of their close kinship to humans. Their delight in the ridiculous and their love of a good laugh is plain from the popular ape jokes they tell.

Reason, language, inquiry, wonder, longing, religion, morality, aesthetics, creativity, imagination, aspiration and humor ... such intangible but fundamental qualities are by no means unique to humans, as I hope I have conclusively shown. Therefore, in the profound words of *TIME* magazine: 'No single, essential difference separates human beings from other animals'.

This being the case, Christians are plainly wrong to insist that humans and animals are vastly different. And they are also obviously wrong to insist that this difference arises from the fact that God created us humans in His own likeness. And if they are wrong to insist that God made us in His own likeness, then they are wrong to insist that God has any claim on us.

Furthermore, if God has no claim on us, then we are free — free to be animals like our evolutionary ancestors—free to be as low-down as snakes, and to make pigs of ourselves, and to act like donkeys.

Did I say 'free'?

Hiss! Oink! Hee-haw!