

One of the inevitable consequences of living on a fallen planet is the problem of perceptual handicaps. A perceptual handicap is the inability to perceive what God is doing right before our very eyes. The Pharisees were famous for this. Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath and all they could see was a violation of the Sabbath. But it's not just Pharisees who suffer from this ailment. Remember when a friend of Jesus took out her alabaster vial of costly perfume and poured it all over Him? Jesus was moved by this loving display of devotion because Mary was anointing him beforehand for his impending death. The disciples who were in the room missed the significance of her symbolic act. All they could see was a waste of perfectly good perfume.

Last Saturday was a blue bird day; temperature in the 70's, not a cloud in the sky, a slight breeze and I was riding in the Hotter Than Hell Hundred side by side with my daughter on an open road with no traffic in sight. When we stopped at a rest stop Jessica headed for one of the portable "rest rooms." I saw the line was long and I grew impatient. "Gotta get going. Gotta get to the finish line." While I waited impatiently I was unaware that the Holy Spirit had been riding with us. He tapped me on the shoulder and in that "still small voice" He said, "Hey, Lance Armstrong, what's your rush? Who are you competing against? Did you really think you were going to win a prize? How about prizing these moments with your daughter?" I hate it when that happens! I should have kept quiet but I said, "Well, I'm competing against myself. I have personal goals." He said, "Is that smart, competing against YOURSELF? In competition there is a winner and a LOSER. So, if you're competing against yourself, even if you win, YOU LOSE!" I shut up.

This Labor Day weekend I want to talk to you about work. I want to address some perceptual handicaps you may suffer from when it comes to this subject. Here are some things I think the Holy Spirit would say to you:

**I. "You were created to work."** Work was not invented by the devil. Work is good. In fact, in the beginning, God was at work creating the heavens and the earth. He spoke into that which was formless and void and filled the emptiness with life and beauty and when He paused to examine what He had made, He concluded, "That's good." Then, for a reason known only to Himself, God created people, a man and a woman, to share His image and likeness and to participate in His creative plan. And He put them to work.

**Genesis 1:27-28** <sup>27</sup> God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. <sup>28</sup> God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

In the beginning, there was work. And there will be work in the end as well. The apostle Paul even gives us a hint of what we will be doing in eternity. "Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? <sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you

not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life?" **1 Corinthians 6:1-3**

So if you ever had high hopes of sitting on a cloud playing a harp for eternity you can get over it. Just as Adam and Eve were working with God in the beginning, we will be working with Him in the end. We will be engaged in meaningful, fulfilling, God-honoring work.

**II. "Work is hard because of an ancient unwise partnership."** Adam and Eve decided to go to work for someone else. **Genesis 3:6-7**, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." Convinced they could cut a better deal with a new employer, they entered into an unwise partnership.

But notice that with a new employer came a new occupation? Or should we call it a PREoccupation? "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings." (v. 7) They were no longer working purposefully for God and harmoniously with God and with one another as co-regents over all that God had created. Now their work was completely self-centered; they were putting all their energies into solving their sin problem. They developed serious perceptual handicaps with respect to their work and life became much more complicated.

"Cursed is the ground because of you. In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup> Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you and you will eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you will eat bread until you return to the ground because from it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return." **Genesis 3:17-19**

This is not some dusty old fable. We experience the consequences of Adam and Eve's foolish choice every day; when work is hard or unfulfilling; when you hate work AND even when you love your work too much; when you confuse what you DO with who you ARE. The only thing worse than going to work is to have no work at all. Many who are out of work struggle with feeling of worthlessness or inadequacy. (Hire Focus) When Adam and Eve lost that vital connection to the God who created them, they also lost sight of what they were created to do and to be. Their work became toilsome as it was divorced from its original intent. Solomon knew it:

<sup>22</sup> For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun?

<sup>23</sup> Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity." **Ecclesiastes 2:22-23**

So we slog through a long, difficult day at work, get home late and fall in bed exhausted. Occasionally, just before you nod off, you are confronted with a nagging question, "What did I just do today? What did I accomplish? What am I living for?"

Is there any cure for our perceptual handicaps? Sure, the same cure that I experienced last weekend. The Spirit of God can transform our perspective.

**III. “I can breathe life into your work.”** Let’s return to the Garden. **Genesis 2:7-8** <sup>7</sup> 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. (amazing what God can do with a little dust?) <sup>8</sup> The LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed.” It is the breath of God that makes all the difference between life and death; purpose and purposelessness; meaning and meaninglessness.

By any accounting the disciples suffered from some serious perceptual handicaps, especially at the end of Jesus’ life. When He needed them the most, they were finished. Confused, discouraged, fearful, helpless. Then an amazing thing happened: Jesus appeared to them. He said, "Peace *be* with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." <sup>22</sup> And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.” **John 20:21-22**

He didn’t just employ them, He empowered them. And that makes all the difference. You have been chosen by God and sovereignly placed in a particular job in a particular place to do what Jesus did; to reflect the character of God in all your behavior and to pursue the mission of God in all your relationships. That’s what Jesus did and that is what He has commissioned us to do.

I want to close a little differently today by inviting some people up here who are representatives you who are faithful representatives of Jesus Christ in the market place....

*Where do you work?*

*How have you seen God show up at work?*

*What advice would you give to those who want to glorify God in their work?*

So then, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily,(with your soul – psuche - not just your body) as for the Lord rather than for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” **Colossians 3:23-24**

Communion