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IN SEARCH OF MEANINGFUL WORK

BY TIM HENDERSON



IN SEARCH
OF MEAN-
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WORK

In 1983 Steve Jobs, founder and chairman of Apple Computer, knew he needed a proven leader with marketing experience to take over as CEO. He courted John Sculley, then vice president of marketing for Pepsi. The architect of the Pepsi Challenge marketing campaign, Sculley had a prestigious, secure, and extremely well-paying job—and little motivation to work for this upstart company. Sculley turned down repeated invitations until one day Jobs confronted him with the now legendary question “Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water, or do you want a chance to change the world?” With that question ringing in his ears, Sculley left Pepsi and came to work for Apple.

“Do you want to change the world?” That’s essentially the question I want you to ask when considering mission work. But before we consider it, let me make some important qualifiers. Almost any kind of work can be a vehicle to glorify God if you attend to it in an attitude of worship. Secondly, calling trumps everything. If you have clear leading from God to go into a specific vocation other than ministry, then do it and let nothing stand in your way—even this article.

What we are considering here, all things being equal, is the privilege and impact of spending the bulk of our waking hours devoted to kingdom labor. We want to apply the same reasoning employed by the

apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians as he thought through his future options, one being martyrdom and the other being continuation of his apostolic duties. “I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith” (Philippians 1:23-25, NIV).

Paul was conscious of and submitted to God’s leading, whether he was called to martyrdom or to further apostolic service. Yet his submission did not keep him from engaging in his own thought process, weighing pros and cons, and deciding that one of his possible options (apostleship over martyrdom) would have greater impact and influence than the other. And on that basis, he mentally moved forward, unless redirected by God. Put another way, in a Spirit of worship, all work can become meaningful, but clearly not all work is equally meaningful or influential in expanding God’s kingdom.

Now I want you to think about the question of influence and impact, in reference not just to your career but also to your entire future. To what will you devote your life?

NEW CREATIONS

Steve Jobs wanted to change the world. Throughout all of history we see that God, too, is in the business of changing the world. One person, one family, one community at a time. He is in the business of changing lives. Time after time, throughout Scripture, He invites us to come along and help change people’s lives. He wants to change lives because the world is not the way it was supposed to be. Estrangement, sin and misery, grief and loss exist in every community on the earth. God’s plan is to restore the world to the way it was meant to be.

If you’d like to see how He’s doing it, take a look at this:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconcilia-

tion: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Corinthians 5:17-20)

In this passage God describes His plan for changing lives. Look at verse 17: “If anyone is *in Christ*, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.” That’s a summary statement of the essence of how a life is changed. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. God’s fundamental plan for changing lives is introducing people to His Son. If a person has a relationship with Christ, this person’s identity is in Him, and all things are new. He gets rid of the bad and begins to replace it with good.

OTHER AT- TEMPTS AT TRANS- FORM- ING LIVES

There are other plans, but their effects are minimal. If you look at crime as an example, the typical conservative solution is stricter laws and harsher penalties. Liberals, on the other hand, might say, "No, we need to consider the sociological causes behind the crime and recognize that people are basically good; society is bad." But neither has been successful.

In the U.S. prison system, the recidivism rate is 75 percent. That means that three out of every four prisoners who serve their term and are released end up in jail again. Our best wisdom and top dollars are doing little to change lives: cycles continue and hopelessness remains. But let me show you something different. Listen to how genuine transformation can take place when a person is in Christ.

For the last 30 years Chuck Colson has directed Prison Fellowship, a Christian ministry dedicated to leading prisoners to Christ and reforming prison systems around the world. In 1993 Colson was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. While accepting that honor, he told a story about a prison in São José dos Campos, Brazil. The prison was turned over to two Christian laymen. They called it Humaita, and their plan was to run it on Christian principles.

According to Colson, the prison has only two full-time staff; the rest of the work is done by inmates. Every prisoner is assigned another inmate to whom he is accountable. In addition, every prisoner is assigned a volunteer family from the outside who works with him during his term and after his release. Every prisoner joins a chapel program or takes a course in character development. Colson comments:

When I visited Humaita, I found the inmates smiling—particularly the murderer who held the keys, opened the gates, and let me in. Wherever I walked I saw men at peace. I saw clean living areas. I saw people working industriously. The walls were decorated with biblical passages from Psalms and Proverbs.

Humaita has an astonishing record. Its recidivism rate is 4 percent compared to 75 percent in the rest of Brazil and the United States. How is that possible?

I saw the answer when my inmate guide escorted me to the notorious punishment cell once used for torture. Today, he told me, that block houses only a single inmate. As we reached the end of the long concrete corridor and he put the key into the lock, he paused and asked, "Are you sure you want to go in?"

"Of course," I replied impatiently. "I've been in isolation cells all over the world."

Slowly he swung open the massive door, and I saw the prisoner in that punishment cell: a crucifix, beautifully carved by the Humaita inmates—the prisoner Jesus, hanging on the cross.

"He's doing time for all the rest of us," the guide said softly.

In that cross carved by loving hands is a holy subversion. It heralds change more radical than mankind's most fevered dreams. Its followers expand the boundaries of a kingdom that can never fail. A shining kingdom that reaches into the darkest corners of every community, into the darkest corners of every mind. A kingdom of deathless hope, of restless virtue, of endless peace.

Those men knew that God himself chose to be punished in their place and that there was no longer any wrath for them. Their experience of that kind of love changed their lives and gave them the ability to break free from their slavery to sin. That is what God is all about. If anyone is *in Christ*, he or she is a new creation.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SON

Going back to 2 Corinthians 5, “If anyone is *in Christ*, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (verse 17), notice that God’s fundamental plan for changing lives is introducing people to His Son.

We also see that the reason why knowing Jesus changes your life is that He reconciles us to God. To reconcile is to end the animosity between warring parties, to bring them together. Take a look at verses 18 and 19.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

(2 Corinthians 5:18,19)

What Jesus does is so critical because He reconciles us to God. He makes things back to the way they were always supposed to be. We were made for intimacy, for connectedness, for relationship. When we live estranged from the God who made us, knows us, and loves us the best, we can’t possibly experience life as it was meant to be. It’s like a wedding party without a bride. If the most critical person isn’t there, you

can dress it up however you want to, but it’s not what it’s supposed to be. (Thus the problem with societal solutions when societies are made up of individuals who have never been reconciled.)

So Jesus fixes that. He does what no one else can do. On the one hand He has us—living in rebellion against God, either breaking His laws or just plain ignoring Him. And on the other hand, there is the Father, who can’t tolerate our sin and whose justice demands that it be punished. What a mess!

To satisfy the Father’s wrath, Jesus died a horrible death on a cross. God took all the wrath and anger and judgment for all of our sin, narrowed it like a laser, and focused it on Jesus. As our substitute, He took all the punishment for our sin and paid it. There’s nothing left for us to do about it. The wrath has been spent, the penalty paid.

Then He comes to us and changes our heart. He shows us the cross so we can see how much He loves us, and He enables us to believe. Because He loves us, we are enabled to love Him back. He fixes the thing that is broken in us. And He reconciles us to God. It’s the most fantastic thing that can ever happen to a person.

AMBASSADORS

Notice that this process doesn’t happen in a vacuum. God uses people—us—to bring it about. Jesus reconciles people to the Father, but He uses us to introduce people to Jesus.

Take a look at the passage again:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and *gave us the ministry of reconciliation*: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And *he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*

He gave us the ministry of reconciliation. He has taken the central plan of human history and dropped it in our lap. He has given us the unfathomable responsibility and wonderful privilege of telling people about His love and power to forgive. We get to be the agents of change—it’s as if God were making His appeal through us!

I want to invite you to seize that. Invite God to make His appeal through you for the rest of your lives. Now, you can do that today—and I hope you will. And you can do it on your campus, in your neighborhood, and wherever you work. But I want you to consider giving the

best hours of your days for the rest of your life to this ministry of reconciliation. Specifically, I’d like you to think about graduating and going to work in full-time ministry, and yeah, why not with Campus Crusade, if God has used it as a major vehicle of growth in your life?

You may have majored in early education, engineering, pre-med, or business. If you have your career path all charted out, I’m still talking to you. What I’m asking is, are you willing to loosen your grip on your plans and see whether God might give you the privilege of being a full-time laborer, taking the message of reconciliation to the world? More radically, are you willing to initiate that with God?

Sometimes people say they will go into business unless God calls them into professional ministry. Maybe you could turn that around. Why don’t you go into ministry unless God calls you into business? He could do that, and He just might. But maybe you could flip your perspective and say, “I’m going to give the best hours of my days to telling people about Jesus unless God clearly shows me that He has another plan.” That seems to be more in line with Paul’s reasoning in Philippians.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Obviously, I don't know the specific plan God has for you. But I think He has one. Why not make the gamble that what He has for you is to play a role in the most exciting and significant endeavor in human history? What could be better than being an ambassador for God?

As you might imagine, the standards for such a job are high, as they should be. So prepare yourself for it. Be pure in your relationships. Develop accountability partners to help you beat sin. Trust God, share your faith, and undertake things that will fail unless He shows up—develop your ability to trust Him. Read and apply His Word. Give yourself experiences that will prepare you for ministry—go on a project, lead a Bible study, learn how to pray. Use this time to prepare yourself.

The need is great: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few" (Luke 10:2). There is an endless line of people wanting a job for some firm that makes some product that I probably use and enjoy. But many people are qualified to fill those slots. Why get in line behind them when there are vacancies that only you can fill? God is unlikely to use non-Christians to introduce people to Christ—He's going to use us. He could use you. Give your life to something worthy of your life.

By the way, there's a postscript to that story about Steve Jobs. He's had an amazing career. When he was 25, he was worth \$100 million. He's now worth more than 40 times that.

But he was recently interviewed in *Wired* magazine. Listen to what he says in this interview about the potential life-changing capabilities of the Internet.

WIRED: What is the biggest surprise this technology will deliver?

JOBS: The problem is, I'm older now, I'm 40 years old, and this stuff doesn't change the world. It really doesn't.

WIRED: That's going to break people's hearts.

JOBS: I'm sorry, it's true. Having children really changes your view on these things. We're born, we live for a brief instant and we die. It's been happening for a long time. Technology is not changing it much, if at all. (*Wired*, February 1996, 106–107)

Those are sobering words from one of our era's great visionaries. He looks back at his life of wild success only to find that essentially he has spent his days selling what amounts to sugared water. Imagine if he were a believer and he had invested his drive in changing the world through a plan that really can change the world—God's plan. What could he have accomplished?

A better question is, what could *you* accomplish? What *will* you accomplish? When you are old and dying in your bed, God wants you to look back and see that you committed the best days of your life to something significant. Something that affects a change in the hearts of people. After all, people will live forever in either heaven or hell.

There are a lot of ways you could do that, but let me suggest three that are readily available through your current involvement with Crusade.

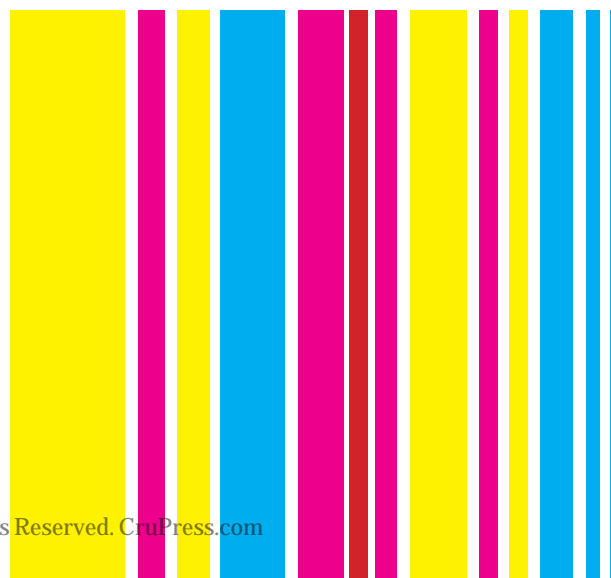
1. You could return to your school as an intern after you graduate. Make a one-year commitment, raise your support over the summer, and show up back at your campus. Just think about it. You could be at your school with many of your friends and be involved with Campus Crusade like you are now, only more so. You'd get paid to do it, so you wouldn't need to get another job. Plus you'd never have to go to class. It's like a dreamland. And all the while you are changing people's lives.

2. You could do that exact same thing, only overseas. You would be on a team with friends for a year, starting or strengthening a ministry in China or Kazakhstan or Venezuela or North Africa. It'd be a blast. Who knows what God would do?

3. You could skip the internship, join our full-time staff, and work on any campus or catalytic area in your region.

In any one of those three options God could use you to help people leave death and enter life.

So, will you consider this? Will you hold your plans for your career in an open hand and honestly tell God that you'll go anywhere, do anything with your life, including going into full-time Christian ministry? If so, and if you'd prepare for the task, we'd love to have you.





REFLECTION REFLECTION

1. If you could serve anywhere on staff with Campus Crusade, where would you serve?
2. God often calls us to serve in a ministry He used as the major vehicle of our spiritual growth. What ministry or church has been the most spiritually influential to you?
3. What are some areas in your life that you believe would need growth to be ready for full-time ministry?
4. A good way to perceive calling is to isolate the ministry decision from other issues. If you were independently wealthy and had no friends or family and could do anything you wanted, what would you do?
5. What is the great dream or project to which you feel God has called you to pursue and invest your life?
6. In light of your gifts, history, and abilities, what do you feel would be your greatest contribution to the kingdom of God?

Tim Henderson is the campus director at Penn State. He and his wife, Kellie, live in State College, PA, where they are raising their three sons and a daughter. Tim also directs Centerfield Productions, which produces field-born tools for Campus Ministry.

