

As we evaluate these views, you may be surprised to find the extent to which they have influenced your own attitudes about your work. If so, that would be helpful as a preparation for the material in Part II. It may also help to explain some of the tensions you may feel between your faith and your vocation.

In Part II, I'll develop the idea that your work matters to God. I'll argue that work has been given great value by God, and that the Christian has more reason than anyone else to work with a sense of purpose and satisfaction. I'll also explain the impact of sin on work.

Finally, in Part III, I'll set forth a number of important implications that flow out of this view of work. These include implications for where you work, how you work, how much you work, and even what you do with the money you make from your work.

So let's turn to consider what I call the secular view of work.

NOTES: 1. Actually, this split is probably part of a much larger schism in our culture between faith and the secular society. See, for example, Martin Marty, *The Modern Schism: Three Paths to the Secular* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), or Stephen Charles Neill and Hans-Rudi Weber, ed., *The Layman in Christian History* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), pages 250f.

2. The Church has not been totally silent on work. However, one must do a good bit of hunting to locate helpful material. Most of it is buried in obscure places: such as Carl F.H. Henry's extremely seminal chapter, "The Christian View of Work," in his book, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1964); or Dorothy Sayers' speech, "Why Work?" in a collection entitled *Creed or Chaos?* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1949).

In addition, a number of helpful contributions have come from writers in the Roman Catholic tradition, and the World Council of Churches. More recently, laypeople themselves have started to address this topic. See the "Suggested Reading" section for more information.

As for the Reformers' and Puritans' views on work, see Doug Sherman, "Toward a Christian Theology of Work," Th.M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984.

3. Actually, it makes little difference how much or how little one works. In our culture, work dominates the rest of life. It determines where we live, who our friends will be, and how we'll spend our time.

4. See Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin, 1985), pages 27-28.

5. See Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), pages xi-xxiv, for an excellent description of the feelings and perceptions of workers about the workplace.

6. See Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, page 32.

7. "Ethical Behavior Seen Declining," *Emerging Trends*, Volume 5, Number 10 (1983), pages 3-5.

8. "Ethical Behavior Seen Declining," page 5.

9. Or, "Dinks," which stands for "double-income, no-kids." Bill calls them "dinkys": "double-income, no-kids-yet."

10. I will say more about this in Chapter 2. But one of the best summaries of careerism and its tragic effects is Douglas LaBier, *Modern Madness* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1986), pages 25-36.

11. See Daniel Yankelovich, *New Rules* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982), pages 244-245.

12. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?*, page 56.

13. See Yankelovich, *New Rules*; Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1985); Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Warner Books, 1979); and LaBier, *Modern Madness*.

14. Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), page 449.

15. See Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1980), pages 207, 225.

CHAPTER 2

GOING FOR IT!

The Secular View of Work

In Chapter 1, I described a chasm that has opened up between the world of work and the world of religion. One of the most far-reaching consequences of that chasm is that many workers are left free to assume that what happens on the job makes not the slightest bit of difference to God, if there even is a God. Another way to say this is that God is irrelevant at work. Work exists on its own. It is purely secular.

Of course, it is somewhat simplistic to speak of "a secular view of work," as if there were only one, and as if such a view were well-defined. The reality is that workers bring a multitude of perspectives to their jobs that defy easy classification.

And yet I think we can detect some broad themes that blow through the work world, especially as it exists in urban areas. One unifying feature among them is the notable absence of God in the system. To that extent, many workers, perhaps most in our society, hold a fairly secular view of work.

In this chapter I want to explore some of these themes. I'll mention five, though there are unquestionably many more. Then I want to briefly show why these views are inadequate for the Christ-follower. You may be surprised to find the extent to which you have bought into one or more of the following ideas.

1. *The ultimate purpose of work is to fulfill yourself.*

As I pointed out in the last chapter, sociologists and psychologists have noted for some time the increasingly self-directed nature of our society. Daniel Yankelovich goes so far as to suggest that "the struggle for self-fulfillment in today's world is the leading edge of a genuine cultural revolution."¹

On the street this idea translates into a morbid preoccupation with one's "needs." Listen as Yankelovich goes on to describe Abby, a woman who typifies today's quest for self-fulfillment:

In talking about herself she refers to her "emotional needs," her "sexual needs," her "material needs," her "need to be challenged intellectually," her "need to assert herself." When she discusses her "unfilled potentials" and her "need to keep growing," she seems to take these metaphors literally—almost as if she believes the process of filling her unmet needs is like filling a set of wine glasses at a dinner party: the more needs filled, the greater the self-fulfillment.²

To the careerist, work becomes a uniquely intoxicating spirit with which to fill up the glasses and liven up his party/life. His career may contribute significantly to others. But whether it keeps him coming back for more depends on the contribution it makes to himself. The paycheck worth working for is not simply money, but meaning—personal meaning and significance.

① *A goal worth fighting for.* Studs Terkel perceptively describes the workplace as a venue of violence—violence "to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around."³

Why would anyone keep going back into such a world? What could compel someone to endure such an assault on his personhood? We gain a clue from, of all people, Rocky Balboa, who as a fighter embodies the careerist vision and articulates its ultimate slogan: "Go for it!"

The "it" means—what? A boxing championship? Lasting fifteen rounds, "going the distance"? The adulation of an adoring woman? Defiance—a refusal to "throw" the fight? All this and more for Rocky. His battle, like ours, is to authenticate himself: "It" means whatever it takes to make certain that 'self' really does exist and really does matter.

Obviously this is a highly subjective and elusive goal. Consequently, if you are a careerist, you define your goal, your "it," the outcome you want, no matter how ephemeral or senseless that may appear to others. What matters is that "it" makes sense to you. And like Rocky, you will endure incredible wear and tear on your body and soul because, in the end, you are fighting for yourself.

② *Master of your fate.* Whether or not you achieve "it" ultimately depends on you. Your destiny lies within yourself. No one else can achieve "it" for you.

This is the recurring theme promoted in the marketplace today by a host of popular, high-priced motivational speakers and consultants. They pitch

inspiring formulas that promise to help you get what you want.

They are fond of asking, Do you have what "it" takes? To get what you want, you have to want "it" badly enough. In other words, success depends on your intensity of desire. For instance: "You can never have riches in great quantities *unless* you can work yourself into a white heat of *desire* for money, and actually *believe* you will possess it."⁴

And yet "it" doesn't fall from the sky into the laps of dreamers. No, these prophets of positive thinking tell us that to get what you want you have to work hard and/or work smart. Success depends on your energy or your intellect, your strength or your smarts.

"It" requires determination ("There are many starters, but few finishers"); discipline ("Creativity is two percent inspiration and ninety-eight percent perspiration"); the right goals ("If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time"); savvy ("Success in life comes not from holding a good hand, but in playing a poor hand well"); perseverance ("Tough times never last; tough people do"); vision ("Some men dream dreams and ask, Why?; I dream dreams and ask, Why not?"); self-confidence ("Believe in God, and you're halfway there; believe in yourself, and you're three-quarters there"⁵). There is no end to the qualities that supposedly account for success. But all of them reflect human power to somehow "Go for 'it'" and get the job done: "Our rewards in life will depend on the quality and amount of contribution we make."⁶

2. Success in life means success in work. ✓

Almost everyone I know sees a close connection between the success of his work and the success of his life. I think this is normal and valid. But many today see personal success almost exclusively in terms of success at work:

Careerism has become the main work ethic of our times. At root, careerism is an attitude, a life orientation in which a person views career as the primary and most important aim of life. An extreme but not uncommon expression of this is found in the comment of a man who told me that he feared dying mainly because it would mean the end of his career.⁷

Likewise, a man might be a virtual alcoholic, his second or third wife may have just walked out on him, his kids might be on drugs, and his subordinates might hate his guts—yet if he is successful in his business, we still regard him as a successful person. In fact, he likely thinks of himself that way. And why not? People still crave his endorsement, his money, his name, or his participation.

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It's on the company. Of course, the majority of us work in fairly large organizations made up of many divisions and many layers of bureaucracy. Consequently, "To be a success at work means to advance up the hierarchy of such corporations by helping the corporation make a good profit. But how is this kind of success related to a more fundamental kind of success in life?"⁸

The answer is that the upwardly mobile corporate executive is no longer an "organization man." Instead he or she is a person who uses the company hierarchy as a vehicle for his or her own agenda. As we saw before, that agenda usually relates to self-expression and self-fulfillment.⁹

— The "career path." Furthermore, today's corporation must accept the fact that its workers, especially its white collar workers, have broadened the definition of "career" to include virtually all of life. People speak of a "career path" that maps out their personal destiny.

"The implication is that career should be equivalent with our identity." It even includes non-work categories. And the extent to which we have a "fulfilling" career is the extent to which we may regard ourselves as successful.¹⁰

3. You can tell how successful someone is by his material wealth, his professional recognition, or his positional status.

This follows from the principles above. I find that every career has its symbols of success that tell an individual and his associates that he's "made 'it.'" As a cadet in the Air Force, success to me meant the number of stars on an officer's shoulder. To many football players, success means a Super Bowl ring. To some lawyers, success means making senior partnership or having one's name added to the marquee. And in Washington, D.C., success means mounting a picture of oneself with the President, signed by the Chief Executive.

Such tokens are neutral in themselves. They are probably even valuable and useful. But for some people, they are not only well-deserved symbols of career achievement, but actually badges of personal worth. If you think this overstates the case, consider two tragic illustrations:

One senior executive jumped off the roof of his building when he walked into work one morning and discovered that his desk had been moved. A chemist who failed to receive a grant for a research project returned to his lab one night, concocted a poison, and drank it, dying where he felt most at home. And most betrayed.¹¹

These are extreme cases, to be sure. Yet they are not uncommon. And such extremes highlight in graphic terms what is inherent in more common

and acceptable expressions of a secular view of work. ^{HE DON'T}

If you can't buy happiness, buy pleasure. Along these lines, I am constantly amazed at how easily we confuse money with happiness. Often when I speak on the subject of success, I ask my audience, "How many of you think you would be fundamentally happier if you made twice as much income as you do right now?" Everyone laughs nervously and nods, catching the point, but invariably someone adds, "Make it three times as much and you've got a deal!"

Obviously money is necessary for us to purchase what we need. And most of us would accept the view that "you can't buy happiness." Yet how hard some of us work to prove that adage wrong! We think that if we could only have this or that thing, then we would be satisfied. ^{LUST OF THE HEART}

Americans have always made a strong connection between money and survival. But today, with the rise of careerism and the phenomenon of the two-income family, money means something more. It is the door to the enjoyment of life: "One needs money for possessions, for travel, for leisure, for the 'full, rich life.'" It is also valued as a symbol of social worth.¹²

The look. However, even though most of us would still define success in terms of riches, fame, or power, our actions show that what matters to us is not these things themselves, but what they say about us. They say we are successful, and that means more than being successful (whatever that means). Image counts more than substance.¹³

Og Mandino cites "the brilliant" Howard Whitman, who has written: "There are two main criteria of success: 1. Do others think you are a success? 2. Do you think so?"¹⁴ Here we have success as determined by human opinion: What you are matters nothing in comparison to what others and you *think* you are. This arrangement has all the objectivity of a beauty contest.

But in the judging, whose vote counts more—yours or your associates'? Whitman tries to argue that ultimately only you can pronounce yourself a success. But, he warns, "It cannot be composed of outward signs or appearances, but only of intangible personal values stemming from a mature philosophy."¹⁵ This is positive think-speak for "Do your own thing, and damn what anybody else thinks!"

It is curious, though, how astonishingly similar the "intangible personal values" of today's careerists have become. The more everyone does his own thing, the more everyone does the same thing—and evaluates success the same way. A certain watch, a certain car, a certain club, a certain address: Having them does not mean you are a success—but who cares? Others will *think* you are. And isn't that one of the two main criteria of success? In fact, in this view, isn't that really *the* main criterion of success?

Performance value. A final observation worth noting here is that when we base personal significance on career success and its rewards, it profoundly affects our perspectives on people. We begin to value others for their performance, for what they can contribute—especially for what they can contribute to our success.

Of course, the workplace is understandably a very task-oriented arena where performance counts. We hire people who can serve a particular function in the enterprise. But the secular worker often applies this utilitarian approach outside the workplace to life in general.

I have heard a father, for instance, complain that his son won't "amount to" anything. Upon investigation, however, I find that the father is highly motivated and successful in finance and deal-making, while the son has a far more artistic bent. You see what has happened. The father has, first of all, decided to evaluate (or devalue) his son according to the young man's deficiency in the father's area of expertise. Furthermore, he seems far more interested in what his son *does* than in who he *is*. And I can tell you that the relationship is unhealthy, in that the two have built nothing between them that has to do with something besides their work. Performance is all that matters.

4. You've got to do whatever it takes to get the job done.

Expediency is probably the value most universally designed into the workplace. Whatever the task, it is defined in terms of the overall objectives of the enterprise as ordained by the needs of one's market.

For example, if you run a company that bulldozes paths for highways, expediency demands that you do or not do certain things. It demands that instead of hiring ninety-pound weaklings to run the equipment, you get guys who look like the front line of the Chicago Bears. It demands that instead of warehousing your machines in midtown Manhattan, you find a low-rent space with easy access to an interstate. Instead of issuing navy blazers and wingtips to your crews, you hand out coveralls and work boots.

In short, the nature of your business defines what you do and how you do it. Success demands expediency. It is not simply the case of the ends justifying the means, but of the ends dictating them. No one would question this type of expediency.

But what happens if expediency becomes the only value used in making decisions? Suppose doing *what* it takes to get the job done becomes doing *whatever* it takes to get it done? Are there any limits to expediency? For an increasing number of workers, the answer seems to be no, especially in the area of ethics.

Recently a lawsuit was brought against a major manufacturer of baby

food. The company had put sugar water in bottles and sold it as 100 percent apple juice to a large number of parents. One of the lawyers in the case commented that while this type of activity is detestable, it's merely "the tip of the iceberg" of what goes on in industry today.

No wonder *Time* magazine, always on the lookout for a newsworthy trend, recently ran a cover story entitled, "What Ever Happened to Ethics?"¹⁶ Surveying a landscape of scandal from Boesky to the Bakkers to the Iran-Contra fiasco, the magazine declared that America "finds itself wallowing in a moral morass," and wondered whether we are not wandering in a "values vacuum." Likewise, Malcolm Forbes notes that:

The hottest topic on Wall Street today isn't the spectacular gyrating and heady climb of the Dow Jones industrials. The most widespread concern about Wall Street is over its standards, ethics, morality—triggered by the multi-\$billions made from illegal machinations.¹⁷

What accounts for these ethics of expediency? The answer is obviously complex. But consider two aspects: the nature of the workplace today, and the implications for values of the cult of self-fulfillment.

The jungle. At the beginning of creation, work may have started out in a garden. But in our generation it has ended up in a jungle.

Christopher Lasch points out that middle-class society has in many ways taken on the character of the ghetto, whose language it has adopted.¹⁸ He means that we have become preoccupied with personal survival in a dangerous world.

As a consequence, work has become warlike, as workers seek competitive advantage over others. To survive and prevail requires "intimidating friends and seducing people." Consequently, distractions such as moral scruples must be left behind when one enters the jungle. A sort of moral Darwinism rules there: Survival depends on doing not what is right, but what works.

Imagine a person driven by a quest for self-fulfillment, whose entire self-concept rides on the success or failure of his work. In such a jungle, it seems predictable that he will do *whatever* it takes to achieve his goals:

What is good is what one finds rewarding. If one's preferences change, so does the nature of the good. Even the deepest ethical virtues are justified as matters of personal preference. Indeed, the ultimate ethical rule is simply that individuals should be able to pursue whatever they find rewarding, constrained only by the requirement that they not interfere with the "value systems" of others.¹⁹

This nullifies lasting commitment to anyone or anything outside of oneself. If a relationship (spouse, child, friend, subordinate) stands in the way, one sacrifices it. If a boss or board obstructs one's progress, one goes to work undercover. If legal or moral issues prove bothersome, one compromises them. All on the basis of expediency.

Such a principle is purely secular in that the individual himself not only sets his goals, but sets his rules as well. He sees no authority or value system higher than himself to which he will ultimately submit.

5. *"I just go to work to earn a living."*

On the face of it, this seems like a harmless, normal statement that any responsible wage earner might make. In fact, one of the major reasons any of us goes to work is to provide for ourselves and for our families. Indeed, as we'll see in Part II, this is one of the reasons God has given us work and expects us to work.

But is earning a living a good enough reason by itself to justify work? As I have said, there is a legitimate self-interest in wanting to gain a livelihood. But if that were the only reason one were to work, it would reduce one's job to a purely self-directed activity. This is inadequate from a biblical point of view, as we will see in Part II.

I also know workers who use this very rationale to justify highly suspect business practices and opulent lifestyles. "I'm just trying to provide for my family," one man told us. "Providing" for him required fraudulent deals, deception with investors, funny arithmetic with the government, and unfair dealings with employees. "Providing" for his family meant a prestigious German automobile, furs for his wife, private schools for his children, and expensive vacations overseas. Providing for the family? Who was he trying to kid?

EVALUATION

It would be nice to think that any Christ-follower could see the problems inherent in the five perspectives mentioned above. But this is far from likely. In the first place, these and similar ideas have become so commonplace that they sound normal and are virtually assumed without question. This passive acceptance indicates how much our culture has adopted a secular worldview.

Furthermore, many Christians have also adopted this same worldview without even knowing it. Oh, sure, on Sunday, as we saw in the last chapter, they go to church and affirm New Testament doctrines and creeds—teaching that is directly opposed to the secularism of our day. Yet what difference does it

make? For on Monday they switch gears and act the part of secular workers.

Consequently, it is necessary to offer some critique to the secular view of work. So let me begin with the positive. One of the best things we can say about the attitudes mentioned above is that they motivate workers from a positive direction. In other words, they present work as something worthwhile.

This is no small contribution. For billions of workers throughout history and throughout the world today, and even for many millions in our society, work seems terribly burdensome. It is oppressive or boring, like a curse on the back of mankind.

How do you deal with Gerson?

So it comes as good news that work might actually be a path toward a better life. The hope of personal prosperity is an amazing stimulus that taps unimagined reservoirs of human energy.

And without question, some have prospered who have adopted the secular view. Not all, but some. And those who get written up in magazine and newspaper articles or appear on "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" serve as inspiring heroes for countless others who are still "on the way up."

But these positive features are more than outweighed by at least three negative aspects.

1. *The secular view of work expects more of work and self than work and self can deliver.*

Imagine that I invent a game called "I Win." The objective of the game is for me to win. And the way for that to happen is for me to score points. I score points whenever I determine that points should be awarded. Furthermore, I set the rules of how the game will be played. And the playing field will correspond to whatever dimensions I deem appropriate at a given moment.

You would likely view such a game as nonsense. The arbitrary nature of the scoring, rules, and field of play render it absurd. And there is no objectivity to the game, nothing outside of myself that defines or interprets it. Indeed, this is not really a game so much as a pointless exercise in self-indulgence.

Yet this is the "game" that the careerist plays through work. By making self-fulfillment his goal, he turns work into a highly subjective enterprise. After all, what does it mean to "fulfill" himself? Only he can say. What proves meaningful to someone else will not satisfy him. Furthermore, what fulfills him today may not tomorrow. Consequently, he is constantly redefining the terms under which he finds himself, his work, and the rewards of work to be acceptable.

This arrangement has all the appearance of a psychological Mobius strip. The careerist uses work to define himself, yet he himself assigns whatever meaning and purpose his work ends up having. In short, he has invented a way

of life in which he must be both cause and effect.

Is this realistic? Not unless both humans and their work are capable of delivering far more than we have yet seen from them throughout history. Yankelovich comments:

On traditional demands for material well-being seekers of self-fulfillment now impose new demands for intangibles—creativity, leisure, autonomy, pleasure, participation, community, adventure, vitality, stimulation, tender loving care. To the efficiency of technological society they wish to add joy of living. They seek to satisfy both the body *and* the spirit, which is asking a great deal from the human condition.²⁰

This is an understatement! Yankelovich himself goes on to describe the severe limitations of adopting a self-fulfilling posture toward life and work. It puts the careerist in a triple bind. First, the subjective nature of fulfillment presents a person with an infinity of possibilities about what to do with his life. But how does someone know how to make the right choices?

Second, self-fulfillment sounds great in a growing economy in which one is making substantial money. But how does it relate to economic downturns and deprivations? When one's family is starving, doesn't it seem self-indulgent to worry about how one "feels" toward whatever work one can find?

Third, a preoccupation with how work affects self makes a person less effective in contributing to life, not more. This is because he never gets beyond himself, never considers life and others objectively. He becomes the measure of all things.²¹

All of this translates into a very dark side for many workers. The quest for self-fulfillment turns into a tortuous descent into self-destruction. One of the best surveys of this condition and its causes comes from Douglas LaBier. In his book *Modern Madness*, he notes the following as some of the symptoms of the pathological outcome of careerism:

Loss of self. By equating self-worth with career success, the careerist builds his life on a very shaky foundation. Any setback or change in the workplace acts like a psychological earthquake, damaging if not demolishing his sense of identity and value. This leads to some obvious tragedies such as suicide, and to some less obvious ones as we will see below.²²

I would especially point out the spiritual tragedy, though. The careerist seeks to gain the world, but ends up losing his own soul. By seeking to save himself through work, he loses himself instead.²³

Compromise of integrity. Earlier we looked at the careerist's ethics of

expediency. LaBier points out that in the individual this registers as a vague sense of self-betrayal, a gradual chipping away of integrity. This is particularly true for the corporate worker:

The price of successful careerism is feeling trapped and caught as they navigate upward through layers of hierarchy, fueled by visions of recognition, power, and position that lie just ahead. But smack in the midst of their career steepchase they find themselves semiconscious of criticisms about themselves and what they do in their work. Particularly, values which disturb them and leave them feeling uncertain and anxious about what to do that would help.²⁴

A related condition is the feeling of having sold out for position and comfort over time. One corporate manager describes a recurring dream in which "I'm running in a marathon race, and all the other runners are people I recognize from my office. Then all of a sudden I realize that I don't know why we are all in the race, or where the finish line is."²⁵

This reminds me of a student I once trained. In the middle of an extended flight, I observed that he was drifting off course. So I asked him if he knew where he was going. He replied, "No sir—but we're sure making good time!" The same could be said for the careerist.

Inflated notions of importance. Having placed enormous demands on work, the careerist must somehow deal with the reality that his job is a bit less significant than he would like it to be. This is particularly problematic for many corporate workers, whose positions seem somewhat minor or expendable.

One strategy for coping with this is to inflate the importance of what one is doing all out of proportion to its true value. Consequently we find some workers battling for power, puffing up the strategic nature of their contribution, or becoming preoccupied with applause and appearance.²⁶

Hopelessness and stagnation. It may take a while, but many workers eventually realize the futility of careerism. Unfortunately, by the time they discover this they are in over their head and see no escape:

They see no alternatives which might be more fulfilling but also realistic. This underlies much of the joylessness and semi-depression that has become so rampant in our society. The feeling that no one can really win; that there is no way out. Though well-adapted to our high-tech, fast-track culture, many feel emotionally numb and without a sense of purpose or overall framework for guiding their lives.²⁷

Rage. LaBier reports that those who work with the psychological problems of today's workers observe an extremely high degree of anger and hostility. Many successful executives, for instance, enter therapy because they are brimming with anger and hate their jobs. They feel that they have reached a level in their careers at which they don't have anything else, and consequently they experience tremendous rage.²⁸

Sometimes the roots of such anger lie in the soil of fundamental, lifelong unhealthiness. But not all angry workers are emotionally sick. Nor do all of them express their anger in obvious ways:

Anger at the workplace is often masked by other behavior or symptoms, like violence, depression, physical problems, passivity, or sabotage. And there is no question that it has tremendously destructive effects on the person, emotionally and physically. For example, anger has been linked with cancer, chronic headaches, and heart disease. There is some evidence that chemicals released into the body during the experience of anger and rage can literally wear down the system. Some people can be described as "anger junkies" because they know it is destructive, yet they can't stop it. They feel addicted to it.²⁹

Alcoholism and drug abuse. One way to cope with the problems caused by the self-defeating demands of careerism is to narcotize the pain:

Typical, now, among some fast-track careerists is the extensive use of cocaine, particularly among people in high-pressured careers, such as financial areas like securities, commodities, and the financial service industries. In a survey by a national drug treatment service, 75% of the workers reported using drugs at work, of whom 83% use cocaine. Twenty-five percent reported using drugs every day. The survey also found that corporate executives and other high-paid professionals use twice as much cocaine as those who make less. In fact, alcohol and cocaine have become the twin escape routes of the '80s, providing artificial aliveness to the inner dead, and mellowed-out numbness to the self-betrayed.³⁰

Loneliness. It seems obvious that anyone who turns work into the self-indulgent game of "I Win" will sooner or later find himself alone in the world. This happens because the careerist pays scant attention to forming and maintaining relationships. After all, career matters more than people. As a consequence, many of the careerists comprise the twenty-five percent of the

population that live alone, and the fifty percent of marriages that fail. Along the same lines, twenty percent of all children now live with only one parent.³¹

By the way, it is worth noting the close connection between the careerist's loneliness and his view of freedom. Freedom has always been prized by Americans. But the careerist defines it to mean the right to pursue his personal destiny exclusive of all outside authorities and values. This means the right to be left alone by others. Or conversely, the right to walk away. In practice, this freedom to be left alone results in being left alone.³²

In short, the secular view of work is an inevitably self-defeating approach toward life. It demands that the person accomplish feats that, according to Christian theology, only God can do. This brings us to a second flaw in the secular position.

2. The secular view of work tends to make an idol of career.

You may think of an idol as a little figure of stone or wood that some faraway pagan bows down to. But anthropologists define an idol as anything that is sacred such that it defines our self-worth, becomes the controlling center of our life, and is the last in a series of priorities to go.³³

By this definition, work has become an idol for many in our culture. How about you? Does your work define who you are? Pamela Pettler has written a brilliantly funny little book called *The Joy of Stress*. See if you can find yourself in this section entitled "They're Getting Ahead of You":

A True Story

One day in late 1969, in the research library of the University of California at Berkeley, a young man went berserk. He ran through the library, shouting hysterically at his astonished fellow students, "Stop! Stop! You're getting ahead of me!"

He was arrested. But what was his crime, really? *Being in the wrong decade.* As we all know, the sixties era, and its childish preoccupation with peace, good sex, and battered VW buses, was little more than a black mark, a shameful demerit in the History of Stress.

Now, of course, in the stress-filled eighties, this concept of "getting ahead of me" has regained its rightful place of importance. In fact, it is one of the basic precepts of stress.

Simply stated, *people are getting ahead of you.* All the time.

While you're at your desk, people working out at the gym are getting ahead of you.

While you're at the gym, your co-workers are getting ahead of you.

If a friend gets a promotion at work, she has gotten ahead of you.

If a colleague reads a book you haven't read, he has gotten ahead of you.

The entire U.S. swim team has gotten ahead of you.

While you're reading this book, *everyone* is getting ahead of you.

The beauty of this concept is that it can be applied across the board, anywhere, anytime.

On the road? Drivers of more expensive cars have gotten ahead of you.

Watching TV? All the writers, actors, and technical crews have gotten ahead of you.

At Marine World? The *dolphins* have gotten ahead of you.

Always judge yourself, and your intrinsic moral worth, in terms of specific achievements as compared to others.

Always judge any situation in relation to how much the people involved have gotten ahead of you, and in what ways.³⁴

The work world bristles with comparisons! And you and your intrinsic moral worth are constantly measured by your accomplishments in relation to those of your coworkers. As the authors of *Habits of The Heart* put it, "However we define work, it is very close to our sense of self. What we 'do' often translates to what we 'are.'"³⁵

If your work controls your identity, it probably controls everything else in your life. A 1981 *Psychology Today* study on "Money and Self-Esteem" discovered that one's career is probably the most important influence on one's perception of "quality of life." It means more than having a good social life, parenting, money, or having fun. In fact, this study found it to mean twice as much as religion in its influence on life.³⁶

And why not? For where we work determines where we live, who our friends will be, and how we'll spend our time. Work has therefore become a priority for most of us, and the number-one priority for many of us. In fact, I recently read an article suggesting that career has replaced sex as the main interest for people in our society.³⁷

As we saw earlier, many workers today are sacrificing themselves on the altar of work. They tolerate immensely harmful symptoms such as anger, chemical dependencies, and loneliness in a blind pursuit of self-fulfillment through career success. This may be pathological—but it is also idolatrous! Such a person *worships* his career as though it were a god.

But like all idols, work is impotent in the face of true human need. As Psalm 115:4-7 puts it:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man's hands. They have mouths, but they cannot speak; they have eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but they cannot hear; they have noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but they cannot feel; they have feet, but they cannot walk; they cannot make a sound with their throat.

In other words, idols are powerless. And work as an idol is just as powerless. Worst of all, those who worship work as an idol are defenseless in the face of true need. In the psalmist's words, "Those who make them will become like them, everyone who trusts in them" (Psalm 115:8).

I have seen this happen. I have sat with grown men, exceptionally powerful men in business, and watched them weep as they told me their tragic stories, some with personal lives shattered, others with families in shambles, perhaps their character debased or their business in doubt or their circumstances out of control. None of their professional accomplishments, none of the machinery of their companies, none of their wealth is of the slightest help. They are in deep trouble and their god is impotent.

I grieve with such men and women. They have chosen the wrong god. Of course, I also respect the fact that the same thing could happen to me as to anyone. It happens when we take God's gift of work and begin to worship and serve it rather than Christ. This brings us to a final flaw in the secular view of work.

3. The secular view of work leaves God out of its system.

This is really the flip side of what I just described. You may be able to avoid turning your job into a idol. But nothing is gained by that if you still leave God at home. Either way, a major category of your life is being lived apart from Him, and that is unacceptable if you intend to be a Christ-follower.

Of course, you may just assume that God takes no interest in what you do all day. Consequently, you never think about relating your work to Him. If so, you'll be interested to find that just the opposite is the case. Your work matters to God, and because it does, it is of critical importance that you not leave Him out of it. I will expand on this idea in Part II, and that material will serve as a further response to the secular view of work.

CONCLUSION

Before leaving this discussion, though, I want to stress again that you don't have to be a nonChristian to have a very secular attitude toward work. In fact, I find that a majority of Christians I know have bought into many of the values

of our secular culture. I hope that in pointing out some of these values and their deficiencies, I will challenge you to examine your own posture toward your career. As we're going to see, God has so much more for us than working merely for our own agendas.

However, the secular view is not the only one that separates work and God. Some of the most deeply religious Christians have adopted an alternative that I call the Two-Story view, which I'll discuss in the next chapter.

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- NOTES: 1. Daniel Yankelovich, *New Rules* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982), page xix.
 2. Yankelovich, *New Rules*, pages 50-51.
 3. Studs Terkel, *Working*, page xi.
 4. Napoleon Hill, *Think & Grow Rich* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1937), page 37.
 5. Denis Waitley, *Seeds of Greatness*, (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1983), page 199.
 6. Waitley, *Seeds of Greatness*, page 71.
 7. Douglas LaBier, *Modern Madness* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1986), page 25.
 8. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, page 22.
 9. Often at the expense of others' similar agendas. See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Warner Books, 1979), pages 119f.
 10. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, pages 25-26.
 11. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, page 27.
 12. Yankelovich, *New Rules*, page 53.
 13. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, pages 116-120.
 14. Og Mandino, *Og Mandino's University of Success* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982), page 10.
 15. Mandino, *University of Success*, page 11. Whitman cites Faulkner, Schweitzer, Gandhi, and Thoreau as his examples of successful individuals with a "mature philosophy." One wonders how books like Mandino's and those of similar writers (Napoleon Hill, Clement Stone, Denis Waitley, Michael Korda) produce or promote anything remotely approaching the philosophical maturity of such men. The contrast between the values and practices of these two groups couldn't be more extreme. For instance, Whitman (mis)quotes Thoreau's proverb that "a man is rich in the proportions of things he can let alone." This is like finding the phrase, "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world," in *Mein Kampf*. Whitman is quick to recognize this inconsistency, so he qualifies his statement with an understatement, "This is not to say that poverty should be the goal . . ." I should say not!
 16. *Time* (May 25, 1987), pages 14-29.
 17. Malcolm Forbes, "Fact and Comment," *Forbes* (July 13, 1987), page 33.
 18. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, pages 129f.
 19. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, page 6.
 20. Yankelovich, *New Rules*, page 8.
 21. Yankelovich, *New Rules*, page 56.
 22. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, page 27.
 23. Luke 9:23-26.
 24. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, page 27.
 25. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, page 28.
 26. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, pages 28-29.
 27. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, page 30.
 28. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, page 31.
 29. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, pages 31-32.
 30. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, page 35.
 31. LaBier, *Modern Madness*, page 35.
 32. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, page 23.
 33. J.A. Walter, *Sacred Cows* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979).
 34. Pamela Pettler, *The Joy of Stress* (New York: Quill, 1984), pages 22-25; permission to quote from Pamela Pettler and William Morrow & Company, Inc./Publishers.
 35. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, page 66.
 36. Carin Rubinstein, "Money and Self-Esteem," *Psychology Today* (May 1981), page 31.

37. The specific context was a *Wall Street Journal* item on the closing of the Playboy Club in New York City. The article quotes a writer, Barbara Ehrenreich, as saying, "People today are more interested in their cars and their careers than they are in sex." The article continues, "In an era of aggressive careerism—by both sexes—the company no longer gets much mileage out of the so-called Playboy philosophy." See *Wall Street Journal* (September 12, 1985), page 1.