

By John Swope

When I was a college student involved in Chi Alpha, God did some pretty neat things in my life. So much so that I began to become genuinely interested in putting Him first in all the aspects of my life. Then one evening, I sensed the Lord asking me, "Will you give up your career, your dreams and your ambitions in this world for me?"

It was a struggle, but eventually I submitted and said, "Okay." I didn't know exactly what that meant, but I was pretty sure it had something to do with some obscure jungle somewhere with people who spoke a tribal language and needed to know about Jesus.

When graduation grew nearer and my prayers about my future more fervent, I got another surprise. I had no peace about the jungle and only peace and a gentle nudge from the Holy Spirit that I was to enter into an engineering career. How could this be? If we are really close to God and really want to serve Him the best, shouldn't we spend more time "in ministry" and less time in a regular job? Not necessarily.

First of all, like it or not, God created the universe with the intent that the vast majority of us to work "mundane" jobs. God himself has the most toilsome job of all—tending the universe and putting up with all of us who don't understand Him. Scripturally, work was ordained (Genesis 2:15) before the fall (Genesis 3:6). Granted, the fall has made work more toilsome than before (Genesis 3:16-19), but either way, it is still required. Besides, God made the planets revolve and the weather system operates all without a touch from us. He made a tiny seed which, thrown to the dirt, produces a huge, complex tree. Yet when it comes to the last requirements for our physical needs, it's up to us. I'm pretty sure he could have made a seed that would make shelter, food, and water for us. The point is, the reason we work is not because God can't do it without us. We work because that's part of His plan. Work is not something that second class Christians do when they drop out of ministry. It's something most of us are meant to do, and is intended to have just as much purpose and fulfillment to those who are called to it as full-time ministry can have for those who are called to it.

Secondly, if our life is a book, then the workplace is where others get to read it. In America today, many people feel the Church is irrelevant to them. But when they encounter a believer who is truly living passionately for God in everyday difficult situations, barriers are broken down. And stop to think of it, isn't this really what most biblical heroes are all about? People don't remember Moses for leading temple services. They remember him for leading a nation out of the grip of an oppressive ruler. People don't remember King David for some temple duties either. They remember him for his defeat of Goliath, with faith in God as the enabling factor. In Jesus' day, people didn't run to Him because of His eloquent prayers. They came to Him because He healed the sick and gave sight to the blind. These heroes were extreme-

ly relevant to the people around them in the way their faith was lived out.

What I'm suggesting is that the question of workplace vs. ministry is not an either-or problem. It does not have to be either work or ministry. It can, and should be, work and ministry. And I don't just mean work 5 days a week, and ministry in the evenings and weekends. I mean both of them together, synergistically. We can worship God in and through our work. We can touch others in and through our work. But don't take my word for it. Study scripture with an eye for the workplace. In addition to all the workplace heroes (David, Joseph, Joshua, Caleb, Moses, Daniel, Nehemiah, etc.) consider this: of the 40 miracles

recorded in Acts, 39 of them occurred in the marketplace. Of the 52 parables that Jesus told, 45 of them were in the context of the workplace. Even Jesus (the ultimate Minister) spent a good portion of His life working as a carpenter.

So why did I have to take that mental detour with the jungle stuff before my graduation? Now I realize that God's question to me that night was not about a regular job being good or bad, but rather about the state of my heart, my motivation, and my purpose. He knew I would misinterpret the question, and that led me to just where I needed to be. I needed to have a heart to serve Him full-time so that when I went into the workplace, that's exactly what I would do.

