

Discovery Series

Nepotism Lessons

[illegible]

HOW CAN I FIND SATISFACTION IN MY WORK?

Am I Satisfied?	2
Labor Pains	3
How Can I Find Satisfaction In My Work?	4
Know who you're working for	5
Put your job to work for you.	7
Keep work in its place .	9
Look for a better fit . . .	11
Is It Time To Quit?	12
The Terms Of Work. . .	13

Is there any way that I can find significance in a job that seems to be going nowhere? What if I feel overworked and underappreciated? Do I care too much or not enough about my job? What does God think about my work? Does my job really matter to Him? These are the kinds of issues that *Our Daily bread* managing editor Kurt De Haan addresses in this booklet. As you read these pages, you will be encouraged by what the Bible has to say about work and your attitude toward it. *Martin R. De Haan II*

AM I SATISFIED?

How do you feel about your job? Take a few minutes to evaluate your current situation.

Review the last 6 to 12 months (not just the recent exceptionally good or bad days). Think carefully about why you are satisfied or not. Review your responses. Are you generally satisfied or not? What would have to change for you to be more content? Are you being realistic about your job or are you expecting more than it can deliver? Do you think you are working at the right place or in the right occupation? It could be that you love everything about your work—but

I doubt it. Nobody's job is perfect. Even in the best of situations you and I have to work with imperfect people in an imperfect system. To top it all off—and this should not be big news to us—we're imperfect too!

JOB SATISFACTION CHECKLIST + + -- + -

Checklist Key: + very satisfied + – somewhat satisfied – + somewhat dissatisfied – very dissatisfied

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| • Hours <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | • Recognition/respect <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Pay/Benefits. <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | • Interest level of work <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Co-workers <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | • Stress level <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Location <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | • Challenge <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Management competence <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | • Skill development. <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Relationship with supervisors <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | • Working conditions <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Use of skills. <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | • Responsibility <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Sense of accomplishment <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | • Job security <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Advancement opportunities <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> | • Other: . . . <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you checked many of the “dissatisfied” boxes on the previous page, the reasons may include these factors: lack of challenge, an irritating boss or co-worker, extreme pressure to produce, low wages, poor working conditions, poor equipment, lack of respect, conflicts over procedures, lack of a sense of accomplishment, job insecurity, too many hours, conscience-violating policies, conflicts with personal or family life, physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, poor communication, labor union mismanagement, discrimination, harassment, or favoritism. Perhaps as you’ve read down this list you’ve thought of even more. The problems that so easily come to mind make it painfully obvious that the workplace can be a hotbed of dissatisfaction. But why? And what can we do about it? Must work be a burden that we have to endure? (Eccl. 2:22-23). Does God care about our jobs? Does our faith in the Lord make any difference in the way we work? These questions will be the focus of our attention in the pages that follow.

LABOR PAINS

The chief executive officer (CEO) of an international firm hired a promising young man, Zach, to fill a newly created position. The work required a loyal, hard-working person who could be trusted to follow

company policy in developing a recently released product. It was soon apparent that the young man, as capable as he was, needed someone to help carry out the company plans. The boss sent an equally competent woman named Dawn to assist him. As in any new business venture that has to be built from the ground up, the two new employees had to fulfill a wide variety of duties ranging from administrative roles to the smallest details. They enjoyed a great deal of freedom on the job—except for one restriction. They were not to open a specially marked envelope that the boss had put on top of one of the filing cabinets.

One day while Dawn was working by herself, a representative from a rival company dropped by. He noticed the special envelope and asked about it. Dawn told him what she knew. The visitor put on a skeptical expression and made it sound as if the boss was afraid Zach and Dawn might learn more than he wanted them to know. Soon Dawn was convinced that perhaps the boss was withholding vital information from her. She picked up the envelope and peeked inside. What she saw was a real eye-opener. When her co-worker Zach came along, she convinced him to look too. Later that same day, the CEO showed up for a surprise visit. Somehow he knew what they had done. With tears in his eyes, he said they would be demoted, their pay would be slashed, and they would be relocated to a place where vicious competition and “headaches” would be the norm.

What you have just read parallels closely what happened to Adam and Eve as they worked for God in the Garden. (See Genesis 1 through 3 for what really happened.) In many ways they were like employees. But they, unlike us in our everyday employment, had a perfect job, a perfect boss, and perfect co-workers. What went wrong? The first two laborers violated the only prohibition in the employee handbook (2:17). They decided to serve themselves instead of the Lord. Their action carried tragic consequences for them and every human since. Included among those results were the labor pains associated with childbirth and the pains of laboring for daily survival in a suddenly hostile world.

God told Adam and Eve, “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground” (Gen. 3:17-19). Those obviously weren’t comforting words to the parents of humanity. What had been a joy became a process filled with pain, and the “thorns and thistles” were more than simply a problem that farmers would have to face. Every occupation since then has had its own version of annoying weeds that have hindered work and caused pain. Contrary to the way we may feel sometimes, work itself is not a curse. When we learn to see it properly, we realize that in almost every job there is a way of working for and with God. We need to understand that the perfect life is not a work free existence. Work was part of the Lord’s blueprint for daily life in Paradise.

When we accept God’s perspective on work, we will find fulfillment. That perspective includes a new “job description” as found in the Bible. It tells us who it is we report to, what our duties are, and how we will be compensated. It shows us the significance of what we are doing. It also gives us a plan for working through difficulties in our relationships with bosses, co-workers, employees, and customers. It would be unrealistic for us to expect work to be problem-free. But that does not mean that work has to be joyless drudgery. Jesus Christ died and rose from the grave not only to give us a home in heaven but also to help us to experience a sense of true fulfillment here on earth as we live for Him.

HOW CAN I FIND SATISFACTION IN MY WORK?

Someone has said I like work. I could sit and watch someone do it all day.” But most of us don’t have that luxury. We can’t afford to spend our days lounging at the poolside, sipping lemonade, and watching a gardener trim the bushes. Besides, I doubt that many of us would find full time inactivity to be satisfying for very long. A Chinese proverb states, “A man grows most tired while standing still.” Our sense of personal worth is closely

connected to a feeling that we are accomplishing something purposeful with our lives. Because of that, work and a satisfying life are inseparable. But unfortunately, work doesn't always give us that sense of satisfaction. What should be personally fulfilling is more often a drain on us physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. If you are a factory worker, an executive, a professional, a single parent juggling two roles, or any other laborer, your struggles are in many ways unique. Yet in many other ways they are similar. This booklet focuses on the elements we all have in common and offers four principles for helping us to find satisfaction:

- (1) Know who you're working for.
- (2) Put your job to work for you.
- (3) Keep work in its place.
- (4) Look for a better fit.

KNOW WHO YOU'RE WORKING FOR

During my high school years, I worked for the owner of three small motels on Treasure Island, Florida. Sounds like Paradise? It wasn't. I cut grass, trimmed bushes, and pulled more weeds than I care to remember. It was a parttime job, and the pay was low. One day I figured that I had enough experience pulling stubborn weeds out of gravel parking areas in the Florida heat. So, instead of reporting in for work, I picked up the phone and called my boss. I told him that I wouldn't be coming in. I quit.

After I hung up the phone, I had a feeling that I hadn't done the right thing—then my father found out what I had done, and he confirmed my feelings. I called my boss back and apologized. I also told him that I would work a few more weeks until he could find someone to replace me. How did I get to the point of quitting that job? As I think back, a number of reasons come to mind. The work was repetitive, the conditions were hot and sweaty, the boss (though not Captain Hook) didn't seem very appreciative, and I didn't see that I was gaining much for my labor—either in money or in personal satisfaction. And besides, I wasn't working to support a family; it was just a job to give me extra spending money. My motivations for working have changed since those days. Unfortunately, though, my reasons have not always been the best—and I have felt like quitting more than once. What about you? How is your attitude when the work loses its appeal, the boss seems too critical, co-workers get on your nerves, your family doesn't appreciate how hard you work for them, you don't get the raise you want, and the work becomes boring, repetitive, and seems rather meaningless? When you don't feel that you are getting much for your work, it's hard to keep giving your all, isn't it?

But there is much more to our jobs than what meets the eye. We're not really working for our supervisor at the store, the office, the factory, the construction site, or any other workplace.

Who are we really working for?

Ultimately, we are working for the Lord. He is the boss's Boss, the supervisor's Supervisor, the foreman's Foreman, the manager's Manager. That may be hard to remember as we report to work each day. But if we keep it in mind, our attitude will be transformed.

God is an employer who has our best interests at heart. He's not out to get the most work out of us at the lowest wages. He is

concerned about you and me, and He wants to help us in every aspect of our work. The reason He cares about our work—and He cares deeply—is because our actions on the job reflect our inner character and our level of devotion to Him. We were created to

reflect God's nature (Gen. 1:26-27), and we were given abilities to use for His glory. Like Him, we are workers. He worked to create the universe, and Jesus said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (Jn. 5:17). Man and woman were created to use their hands and their heads to master the earth and make it productive (Gen. 1:28; 10 2:15-20). Like those first two employees, we are to function in a Godlike way, faithfully

working to care for what has been put under our control.

How will this change my attitude toward the people I work with each day?

If we are praying for God's kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven (Mt. 6:10), then we will be allowing Him to use us as His instruments in carrying out His purposes. Instead of considering ourselves to be victims of our circumstances, pawns of our employer, God wants us to be people of action who positively affect our environment instead of being controlled by it.

When Jesus summarized the commands of God, He said this: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Mt. 22:37-40). How does what Jesus said apply to work? Love is the giving of ourselves. It seeks the highest good of another person. To love God with all our heart, soul, and mind involves giving to Him everything we have. To love others as ourselves requires that we care as much about the well-being of other people as we do about ourselves. If we apply that to the work situation, it means that our work should be done primarily for God's glory, and that we work with the interests of other people in mind.

Who deserves service "as to the Lord"?

The Bible mentions several types of people who deserve our best efforts because we want to please the Lord. These people include our employer, our family, the poor, and society.

1. Our employer.

As you know all too well, this can be tough to do. According to a story that appeared in *Executives' Digest*, "The instructor at a company-sponsored first aid course asked one of the workers, 'What's the first thing you would do if you found you had rabies?' The worker immediately answered, 'Bite my supervisor.'" That humorous response reflects a disturbing fact: People often view their boss as an enemy. Developing a good attitude isn't always easy. In Ephesians 6:5-8, Paul told slaves to respect their masters. Paul wasn't condoning slavery, but those people who found themselves in that situation were to serve their masters as if they were serving Christ Himself. Paul was addressing slaves, remember, not employees who work somewhere by choice. Yet Paul told them to serve with "fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ" (v.5). Then Paul added some motivation when he said they should do so, "knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free" (v.8). The ultimate paycheck will come from God. (See also Colossians 3:22-24.)

2. Our family. The Bible also speaks directly to those of us who have a family depending on us for food, clothing, shelter, and much more. In 1 Timothy 5:8 we read, "If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Those are strong words. We have the responsibility to supply the financial needs of our family. That includes our spouse, our children, any dependents, and elderly parents who need special care. If we carelessly or deliberately fail to provide for them, we contradict our faith in Christ.

3. The poor. The apostle Paul gave these instructions: "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Eph. 4:28 NIV). And

Proverbs 19:17 states, "He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord." Just as we are to see ourselves as serving the Lord when we serve our boss and provide for the needs of our family, so too we are to see ourselves as giving to the Lord when we give to the poor. Another proverb tells us, "The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor. He covets greedily all day long, but the righteous gives and does not spare" (21:25-26). Again the contrast is sharp—the lazy man wants more and more for himself, but the godly person is looking for ways that he can give to the poor. (See also Psalm 37:25-26, Acts 20:35,

Galatians 2:10, and 1 John 3:17-18.)

4. Society. In addition to what we saw above about supplying the material needs of the poor and our family, we need to work for the spiritual well-being of our boss and co-workers. In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, the author says, “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody” (NIV). The goal is to win the respect of unbelievers. They need to see that your faith in Christ makes a positive difference in the practical, everyday aspects of your life. When Paul wrote to Titus, he told him that part of the motive workers should have is to “make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (2:10 NIV). An honest day’s work backs up our profession of faith and points to the truth of the gospel. In the Old Testament book of Genesis we read about a hard worker and person of integrity named Joseph (Gen. 39–50). As a young man he was sold into slavery by his brothers, and he ended up in Egypt in the service of Pharaoh. It is hard to figure how he could have anything but contempt for his captors. Yet Joseph served loyally, never compromising his faith in God. Pharaoh noticed. Daniel is another Old Testament example of a person whose work reflected well on his faith in the Lord. When Israel was overrun by Babylon and taken into exile, Daniel was forced to serve King Nebuchadnezzar. By the way he devoted himself to his work, his life was a bright light for God in that pagan kingdom.

What more can we do?

Recognizing that we are really working for the Lord is the all-important first step to finding satisfaction on the job. But there’s more that God wants us to do. The sections that follow will expand on what we can do to make our work more closely fit the job description that God has written out for our lives. As we do that, our lives will become more purposeful, more meaningful, and more satisfying.

Think about it.

Why does God want you to work?

What do you give to God and others when you work?

Why is giving to others more satisfying than serving only yourself?

How do you use your money to help the poor? Are you providing for your family?

Do your co-workers know that you are a Christian—and are they drawn to Christ because of your life and example?

PUT YOUR JOB TO WORK FOR YOU

What has your job done for you lately? You pour a lot of time and effort into it, but what do you get in return? Have the frustrations, responsibilities, and pressures produced bitterness and despair in you, or have you used the difficulties to help you to become a better worker and a more Christlike person? As you look back over the time you have been a follower of Christ, you should see evidence of growth and fruitfulness. How has work helped or hindered that process? Do you see progress in your work-related attitudes and actions? Many of us have compartmentalized our lives to the extent that we do not see how faith in Christ relates to our work. But it does. God not only cares about how we serve Him at church, at home, or in our neighborhood, but He also wants to be involved in every aspect of our workdays. He cares how we make the sale, how we treat the customer, how we respond to the boss, how we work with people, how we handle company property, and how we deal with everyday irritations as well as the major crises. He cares about our choice of career and how well we represent Him on the job. God is concerned about helping us to become better workers in all kinds of situations.

In 2 Timothy 2:15, the apostle Paul wrote to a young follower of Christ, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed.” Although those words primarily dealt with the way Timothy taught the truth of God’s Word to people who were prone to wander into error, the principle applies to all types of work. We need to strive for excellence, no matter what our job.

Why don't we put our job to work for us?

One reason is that what we are doing doesn't always seem to be all that important. Work can be extremely stressful. We long for some relief. We don't look forward to the first day of the work-week. We often see work as a necessary evil that must be endured until we can punch out and do what we really want to do. For many years I cleaned an office building in the evenings. That included emptying wastepaper baskets, vacuuming floors, mopping, dusting, and making sinks and toilets spotless. I have to admit that many times I failed to see the eternal value of what I was doing. It was just a job—and not a very glamorous one. But I can remember the times I felt a real satisfaction in cleaning an office or a bathroom. In fact, there are days now that I wish I could have my old job back! What made the difference? My own attitude.

What are the symptoms of the wrong view of work?

Here are a few signs:

- laziness (doing the minimum or wasting time).
- passivity (instead of living out our convictions and standing up for what is right).
- stealing (getting our due whatever it takes).
- grumbling (discontentment).

How can we become better while on the job?

First, we need to view job stress as an opportunity to get better. The trials that James talked about in his brief New Testament letter include all kinds, even job-related ones. He said, "The testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (1:3-4). If we encounter a situation that we don't know how to handle, we need to remember what James said, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, . . . and it will be given to him" (v.5). The apostle Paul said much the same about the value of stressful situations. In his letter to the Roman believers, he mentioned that difficulties produce perseverance, character, and hope (5:3-4). A problem on the job, then, is an opportunity to do what is right and become more godly through it. Second, we need to realize that even though we don't get the respect and pay we feel we deserve, the Lord will reward faithful work that is done for His sake (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:23-24). Third, we must keep in mind that it pleases God for us to submit to both good and bad employers. In 1 Peter 2 we read, "Servants, be submissive to your masters 18 with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully" (vv.18-19). Peter then reminded us of the supreme example of Jesus Christ, who suffered wrongfully but endured it patiently (v.21). Fourth, we are to overcome evil with good. Romans 12 contains these instructions: "Repay no one evil for evil. . . . If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (vv.17-18,21).

But what if I hate my job?

I sympathize with those who feel as if they are entering a torture chamber every time they report to work. Some jobs are like that, more so because of the kind of people they have to work with than because of the actual work. If you find yourself in a bad work situation, you have two options: (1) If you are "stuck" because of the job market, you need to make the best of a bad situation, or (2) if you are able, you should look for another job. Having said that, let's look at 1 Corinthians 7. Paul addressed people in the first century world of slaves and masters when he said:

Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you— although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men (vv.21-23 NIV).

Paul didn't condone slavery. In fact, he told slaves to do what they legally could to escape it. But to him, slavery or

freedom was not the issue. The issue was a person's relationship to Jesus Christ. As we saw earlier, the Bible takes us to a higher level than our immediate supervisor or the board of directors. Ultimately, we serve the Lord, and no matter how good or bad our job situation, we need to please Him by the way we respond to inequities, stress, and personality conflicts. There is an additional option—look somewhere else for a job. Of course, quitting one place and signing on someplace else could be only a temporary solution. We could really be fleeing from problems that we could help solve; or we could be running from one kind of problem to another. After all, no company is without its faults. So before quitting, consider all the reasons you want to leave. Consider the impact on your family, your church, your community life, your personal integrity, and your relationship with the Lord. If you are at the point of looking for a job, either because you were laid off (for whatever reason) or because you find yourself in a situation that you equate with “slavery,” then the section on “looking for a better fit” (pp.27-29) may help you think through the difficult choices you face.

Think about it.

What areas of your attitude and behavior need improvement?

What problems can you do something about by confronting a co-worker or a manager—in love?

What problems are beyond your control?

Why is prayer so important in dealing with these issues?

KEEP WORK IN ITS PLACE

How much of your life is spent working? If you figure an average of 8 hours a day, that's one-third of your day. If you sleep 8 hours, then work takes up half the hours you're awake. And if you consider commuting time, you need to tack on another hour or so each day. Then how about your preparation time and the “unwinding” afterward? It adds up to a big chunk of your life, doesn't it? It's even more when you include the time away from work that you spend thinking about it. If you're a homemaker or a single parent, it may seem as if your entire day is spent on the job. When it's all added up, for many of us our work is our life—at least in the time and attention we devote to it. Is that bad? The answer to that depends on our needs and our attitude. Even though the amount of time we work can reflect a good or bad attitude toward work, the real issue is not the hours we put in but the reasons for our actions and the kind of people we are on the job.

When does work get out of control?

When we look at work as our primary source of fulfillment and we squeeze out all other interests in life—pushing our personal life, family, friends, church, and community interests into the background—then work has become our god. The author of

Ecclesiastes knew how futile that kind of life can be. He said, “I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun” (2:11). Trying to find personal fulfillment in one's work is like pursuing a mirage. Once you've reached your goals you find that the expected sense of satisfaction was just an illusion. There's more to life than grasping for a bigger paycheck, a higher-level job, or a good retirement plan. Solomon wrote:

What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God (Eccl. 3:9-13).

What are the key ideas in those verses? For one thing, although God has put a sense of eternity in our hearts (v.11), we get bogged down in the moment-by-moment activities of life. That can lead to frustration. On the other hand, satisfaction comes to the person who puts his trust in God's sovereign control and then lives responsibly. The author of Ecclesiastes was not advocating a “what will be will be” attitude, a pessimistic and passive

resignation to life. We are not merely killing time. Rather, we need to recognize that satisfaction with our work is a “gift of God.” A person who lives for the Lord knows that even though life is far from perfect, God is active in our work. And as we trust Him, He will give us satisfaction in the little things of life.

Are we fooling anyone but ourselves?

If you are like me, you may not realize that you are looking to your work to bring happiness. In a recent survey of Americans in which people were asked what was most important in their lives, 40 percent said they valued their relationship with God above all else. In sharp contrast, only 5 percent said the most important thing in their life was to have a job they enjoyed. Some analysts have hailed the results as an indication that Americans are much more religious and less materialistic than they are perceived to be.

But I wonder if an opinion poll really gives us an accurate picture. Who in his right mind would ever say that his job was more important than God? I know I wouldn't. But what do my actions and your actions say about what is more important to us? Don't we all tend to give lip service to God while living for some lesser god—expecting more from work than it can deliver? Think about your own attitude. When are you happy? What occupies your thoughts? What goals are most important to you?

Am I a workaholic?

A workaholic, like an alcoholic, doesn't easily recognize the real issue. He will usually deny that there is a problem. A workaholic thinks he has his work under control. *I could quit this job any time*, he thinks. But in fact he is driven by his job, motivated by the high he receives from making more money, gaining more power, getting the praise of his boss and co-workers, and outdoing the other guy. The book of Proverbs, however, tells us, “Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint” (Prov. 23:4 NIV). If we fail to show restraint, we burn ourselves out—and for what purpose? The author of Ecclesiastes reminded us that life is short, wealth is fleeting, and one's relationship with God and people is more important than any lesser concept of success.

What is the sane alternative?

We need to see the value that God places on our work, and we also need to keep life in balance. We must see work as only one of many important parts of our lives. Don't overdo it nor ignore it. Work is necessary to survival and essential to living out the way God designed us. Work gives us an avenue to fulfill our life's purpose of loving God and loving others as ourselves (Mt. 22:37-40).

Do we work to provide for our needs?

If we are getting too wrapped up in our work, we may be forgetting that ultimately it is the Lord who supplies our needs, not our own efforts. Hard work does not always equal success. In fact, though there is a place for hard work, the Lord is the One who blesses our efforts (Dt. 6:10-12; Prov. 10:4-5,26). In Matthew 6, Jesus told His followers not to fret about what they would eat or drink, but to seek first God's kingdom; *then* God would supply their needs. Too often we get things backwards. We pursue the things of life first, thinking that we are the masters of our destinies, the sole providers of what we need to survive. And even though we may give thanks at mealtimes for God's provision, it is all too easy to take the credit ourselves. This is not to say that we should just sit back and wait for God to drop what we need into our laps. God expects us to work. The apostle Paul reminded the believers in Thessalonica that a person who isn't willing to work shouldn't be given food. Paul described his attitude toward work this way: *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, . . . but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat* (2 Th. 3:7-10).

What areas of life need our attention?

If we are to avoid giving too much or too little attention to our work, we need to recognize the other elements of our life that deserve our time. In the book *Your Work Matters To God* (NavPress), Doug Sherman and William Hendricks mention five parts of life that need our attention. They use the analogy of the sporting event called the pentathlon. In order for an athlete to do well, he must excel in running, swimming, horseback riding, pistol shooting, and fencing. The competitor cannot do well if he focuses on one event at the expense of the others, or if he ignores any event. In a similar way, we must devote effort to five basic areas of life if we are to succeed in living as God desires. The five areas are:

1. our personal life
2. our family
3. our church life
4. our work
5. our community life

How can we keep these areas of life in proper balance?

Sherman and Hendricks also offer a strategy for keeping work in perspective:

1. "Organize your prayer life around the pentathlon" (p.207). This helps us to remain conscious of all areas, and it solicits God's help to keep it all in proper balance.
2. "Determine how much time you need to spend at work" (p.207). We must set limits on work to keep it from gobbling up all our energy.
3. "Set a come-home time" (p.208). Work tends to expand to fill the time we allot to it.
4. "Schedule nonwork areas just as you would work areas. . . . In our datebooks we need to . . . add family times, church and ministry commitments, community involvements, and personal plans" (p.209).
5. "Guard your use of emotional energy. . . . God never intended for work to become psychological slavery" (pp.209-210).
6. "Maintain a sabbath" (pp.210-211). We need to set aside special times during the week (a day or a special hour of each day) when we can rest, reflect, and put life in perspective.
7. "Cultivate interests and commitments outside of work" (p.211).
8. "Beware of watching instead of doing. . . . There is a real danger to avoid in our leisure, that we not become mere spectators" (p.212).

Think about it.

Why do you work? Have you given attention to all five areas of life? Would you consider yourself a workaholic, a balanced person, or someone who needs to put more effort into life?

LOOK FOR A BETTER FIT

"Max" realized that a major change was in the wind. The firm that he worked for was facing a production slowdown. Profits were shrinking, and top management was looking for ways to trim its expenses. Max learned that in the corporate restructuring, his job would be phased out. But because of his years with the company, they would transfer him to another position—a job he wasn't too excited about. Max took this opportunity to evaluate his options and his future. He learned about a job opening at another firm. The work fit his interests and his training. It didn't require as much time away from his family. He went for an interview, and when the job was offered to him, he took it. If you, like Max, have the option to choose your career or your place of work, consider yourself fortunate. Most people don't have that kind of opportunity. As you consider your job choice, beware of the misconception that the highest form of work is what has been called "full time Christian work." Being a pastor,

a missionary, or working for a Christian ministry is not more sacred to God than “secular” work like selling clothes, programming computers, or driving a truck. All types of work that serve legitimate needs are honorable to God. We please Him most highly when we do our best with the skills He has given us. If you are at a point of indecision about whether to stay at your current job, or perhaps wondering what career to pursue or job to take, how do you choose? It usually isn’t easy, but you can minimize the anxiety. The RBC booklet *How Can I Know What God Wants Me To Do?* offers five steps for discovering what God’s will is for you. These steps make up the acrostic G-U-I-D-E:

Being in a right relationship with God is necessary if you expect Him to help you. You must trust Him, obey Him, and pray.

What biblical issues apply to your decision? What are your options, the pros and cons, and the consequences of those choices? How do your interests, talents, and weaknesses fit with your job choices? How could you be most effective for the Lord? Talk with people in various professions and also with trusted friends. If you’re depending on the Lord, and you’ve done extensive analysis, move ahead by faith. The Lord will honor you when you honor Him by including Him in the process. To help you analyze your current situation and the options available to you, use the following outline as a starting point:

Personal background:

- Age
- Education
- Previous work experiences (good and bad)
- Positions held
- Skills
- Interests
- Financial needs

Evaluate job choices:

- Biblical principles (as in this booklet)
- Options
- Counsel of others (family, friends, co-workers)
- What jobs make the best use of the abilities God has given to you?
- In what jobs can you serve the legitimate and worthwhile needs of people?
- Wages/salary and benefits
- Working conditions

QUIT WORKING!

What if you were hired for a job that you weren’t qualified to do? Imagine the stress! Each time you were assigned a task, you would try your best, but your best wouldn’t be good enough. Time after time you would fail. You would realize that it was only a matter of time before you were fired. Imagine something even worse. You’ve been given the job of trying to live in a way that pleases God. But you’re not qualified. You realize that the product of your life is fundamentally flawed. You’ve made errors of judgment. You often have to admit that you don’t know what you’re doing. You fear that at the end of your life, when you stand before the Lord, the One who demands perfection, you won’t pass final inspection. Our lives are that way. We are flawed by what God calls sin. We’ve violated His laws, His standards of conduct. No matter how hard we work to try to please Him, we can’t do it.

Romans 3:23 tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” And then the Bible tells us that “the wages of sin is death” (6:23). The only paycheck we deserve at the end of life is God’s verdict that we are unsuitable to enter heaven. We don’t deserve to go there because we have failed to do what He asked us to do. But that’s not the end of the story. God has done something incredible for us. He offers us everything that we don’t deserve. Because Jesus Christ died on the cross to receive the wages we deserved, God offers to reward us on the basis of what Jesus did instead of what we have done. Romans 4:4-5 says,
“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (NIV). Hard to believe? Too wonderful to be true? Believe it—because if you don’t you won’t have a chance. God guarantees that to be true. The way to please God is to admit that you deserve the paycheck of spiritual death and to accept the gift that Christ earned for you. By His life, death, and resurrection, He made it possible for you to be forgiven of all your failures, to be credited with Christ’s success, to receive eternal life, and to be able to work for God in ways that please Him. It’s time to quit trying in your own strength to live a life that’s good enough to please God. It’s time to accept the free gift of salvation that the Lord Jesus provided for us. It’s time to trust Christ and begin living for Him.

THE TERMS OF WORK

The Fall: When Adam and Eve rebelled against God, the entire creation was infected by the negative effects of sin. One consequence was that work became difficult and full of frustrations.

Full Time Christian Work: Generally understood to be full time employment for a church, missionary society, or church organization. All followers of Christ, however, are to work at all times for the Lord, no matter what their occupation.

Integrity: Consistency of personal character. To be people of integrity on the job means that we fulfill our commitments, that we are honest, and that we are unhypocritical.

Sabbath: Under Old Testament law, this was one day of rest each week. The principle is still appropriate today. We need times of rest not merely to “recharge our batteries” but to draw closer to God and get our lives in proper focus.

Salvation: God’s work of rescuing individuals who trust Christ as the One who took their punishment and who offers peace with God. A person is saved not by working hard to earn it but by accepting God’s forgiveness as a free gift.

Satisfaction: A sense of fulfillment that comes when we realize that our work pleases the Lord.

Work: The effort to accomplish something; a task or undertaking; a job.

Workaholic: A person who devotes an excessive amount of time and attention to a job, and whose life becomes focused on work to the detriment of family, friends, church, and community.

When Power Is Misused

Finding The True Strength Of A Man

The 1992 motion picture *A Few Good Men* tells the story of two US Marines put on trial for the murder of a fellow platoon mate. Under orders from their commanding officer, they had carried out a “code red” against a fellow soldier thought to be a dishonorable slacker. Also known as “hazing,” a “code red” is an illegal and extreme form of physical discipline sometimes used to teach a lesson. In this case, the “code red” triggered an undetected medical condition that not only contributed to the fellow Marine’s underperformance but also led to his untimely death.

The two Marines accused of the murder were defended by a trio of military lawyers who were split on how they viewed their clients. Two of the lawyers believed the men were innocent because they were following orders. Although the third lawyer accepted their contention that they were under orders, he believed there was no excuse for what they did and that they should be severely punished.

At a very tense moment in the trial, the lawyer who had little sympathy for the accused Marines was asked by one of his colleagues to explain why he disliked his clients so much. He explained, “They beat up on a weakling! . . . They tortured and tormented a weaker kid. They didn’t like him. And they killed him.” Moments later he shot back the question, “Why do you like them so much?” The sympathetic lawyer replied, “Because they stand on a wall, and they say, ‘Nothing’s gonna hurt you tonight. Not on my watch.’”

In that brief exchange, the film powerfully taps into both the good and the bad side of masculine strength. There is the good side that steps up and comes through for others. From daily providing for their families to courageous acts of heroism. From forging homesteads out of the rugged wilderness to protecting their country against hostile forces. We don’t have to look hard to find stories of men stepping up and exerting themselves, often at great personal risk, for the benefit of others.

This film, however, reminds us that there is a dark side to male strength. The pages of history also chronicle the tragic story of masculine energy gone bad. Over the centuries, husbands, fathers, sons, friends, church leaders, employers, and civic authorities have used forms of masculine strength to bully and hurt others.

Violent crimes, which are for the most part committed by men, are obvious examples of the abuse of male strength. The misuse of masculine strength, however, is not necessarily played out in physical violence. The problem is much broader. With a sharp look of disapproval, a raised voice, or an intimidating threat, men are able to throw their weight around and walk all over people without breaking a law or laying a hand on someone.

Before we get too far, let’s make it clear that the purpose of this booklet is not to engage in malebashing. Masculinity has taken enough of a bad rap. Maleness is not villainous. It’s a reflection of God Himself (Gen. 1:27) and declared by Him to be “very good” (v.31).

Men don’t have to apologize for their gender or their strength. Still, all of us men need to be open to see where, how, and why we’ve misused our strength—and hurt others in the process.

If you are a man who has a pattern of dominating others, something has likely happened that caused you to pick up this booklet. A friend may have stood up to you and said, “You’re too hard on people.” Your wife may have filed for separation or divorce. You may even have been arrested or lost your job. It may not seem like it now, but it’s a good thing if it has gotten your attention. You are now at a place to start taking more seriously the way you treat people.

Whether you are troubled by the way you bully people and mishandle your power, or even if you don’t think you cross that line, please read on.

The following pages are one small effort to help men begin putting a finger on what's gone wrong in the hearts of males whose strength has turned bad. Further, it's our hope to help men discover and deepen a God-given desire to use their strength to "stand on a wall" for others.

What's Gone Wrong?

Pick up a newspaper or go to your favorite online news site. It doesn't take long to see that masculine strength has taken a turn for the worse. It's gone in directions that God never intended. To understand what's gone wrong, let's step back and consider misused strength by men from a larger context.

A Divine Starting Point. The Bible describes God's character and purposes as a mysterious and wonderful mixture of strength and tenderness, justice and mercy. David, a man who was closely acquainted with the nature of God's heart, summed Him up this way: "One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving" (Ps. 62:11-12). Jesus had some fairly harsh words for the religious hypocrites of His day who neglected both the "justice and the love of God" (Lk. 11:42).

Both men and women are created as equally valuable image bearers of God (Gen. 1:27). And both genders possess and reflect the strength and tenderness of their Creator. Without getting into a discussion about the similarities and differences between men and women, it's reasonable to say what common sense has told us all along—that strength is an important starting point for masculinity.

Most adult men develop significant upper body strength. Research also shows that males build muscle easily and are built for physical clashes and the use of force.

The biblical narrative puts its own emphasis on the strength of a man. Heman, a very wise contemporary of Solomon (1 Ki. 4:31), implied that something vital is missing when a man lacks strength. He said that "a man without strength" was like one who was dead and remembered no more (Ps. 88:4-5).

"So be strong, show yourself a man" (1 Ki. 2:2) are the words the great King David began with as he challenged his son Solomon in the last moments of his own life. On his deathbed, a time when people cut to the chase about the things that matter most, David stressed to his son the connection between being a man and acting capable and strong.

The apostle Paul also stressed that strength is the place for a man to begin. Notice the following charge he gave to the men at Corinth: "Act like men, be strong" (1 Cor. 16:13 NASB). Paul wasn't telling them to be arrogant or to feel the need to prove themselves to others. He was encouraging them to act legitimately confident as they contended with the challenges of life. Paul's words were not a mere suggestion—"By the way, it might be a good idea if you guys acted capable and strong." Far from it. His words were directive as well as instructive about what is at the heart of being a man.

Being strong and coming through for others is an essential component of masculinity. While parts of culture and society promote twisted and violent versions of male strength, it's a basic trait that men are endowed with and are meant to offer to their world. And there is more to it than just being physically powerful. Masculine strength isn't just about muscle mass or how much weight a man can bench-press. God packages masculine strength in all physical shapes and sizes. A physically smaller male doesn't have to join a gym and bulk up to be strong. A physically handicapped man is not doomed to a life of weakness. Even men of small physical stature or those with a physical limitation can live strong and courageous lives.

Every man, regardless of his size or weight, is born with an essential strength in his heart that is central to his being and yet unique in its expression. Sometimes strength is expressed in physically heroic measures to protect or rescue someone in harm's way. Other times it is shown by speaking up or by simply making a difficult

choice. There are even moments when quiet strength is expressed through a look or a presence that lets others know he means business.

However it's expressed, strength is that quality of stepping up and taking action when danger calls. It's about assertiveness and movement versus passivity and paralysis. Rather than shrinking back in fear, it is having a spine, forging ahead and making tough and unpopular decisions. Instead of being a pushover, it's standing one's ground in the face of sharp opposition. It is that part of a man that will rise up and go to bat for others or even be big enough to admit when he's wrong.

While we should respect and appreciate the right kind of masculine strength, it never implies superiority or greater value. Nor does it mean that men have to cut out their gracious and gentle side. Sometimes a man needs to be gentle like the apostle Paul was to the church in Thessalonica when he wrote: "We were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children" (1 Th. 2:7). But Paul was not gentle at the expense of his strength. When he needed to be strong, like the time the Jews "opposed" him and "became abusive," he stood his ground and confronted their abuse (Acts 18:6).

Earlier, when some men in Jerusalem tried to take away the Galatians' freedom found in Christ to make them slaves again to religious rules, Paul and his men held their ground and "did not give in to them for a moment" (Gal. 2:4-5).

Strength Turned Bad. God created men to be initiators and to come through when the going gets tough. But early in the story of humanity when that strength was put to the test, it failed and eventually turned bad.

The book of Genesis may indicate that Adam was present the day Satan tempted Eve. Genesis 3:6 tells us, "She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." The Hebrew word translated "with her" means "right there, shoulder to shoulder." Adam may not have been somewhere off in a different part of the Garden of Eden when Satan lied to and deceived Eve. The phrase "with her" implies that Adam could have been standing next to her as Satan misled her. Even if he wasn't actually present, as some suggest, there still was a moment of truth when Adam needed to step up and do something, to say something, to intervene. But he did nothing.

When history hung in the balance and humanity counted on Adam's strength, he lost his nerve and froze. There's no record that he spoke up—only silence. At crunch time, he choked on his words and passively allowed his wife to lead. When Adam took a bite out of the forbidden fruit, God cursed the ground because Adam "listened" to Eve (Gen. 3:17). This was an indictment of his failure to be strong and to speak up.

Another important twist to the Genesis story is that God had not yet created Eve when He instructed Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:15-17). That means that when Satan was tempting Eve, Adam should not have remained silent. God specifically entrusted Adam with firsthand knowledge of this vital information—to pass it along and to protect its integrity. Consequently, Adam should have spoken up and clarified what God actually said. He could have said, "Eve, the snake has it all wrong. I was there when God said not to eat from this tree, and the snake's trying to trick you. I'm not sure what's going on here, but he's misquoting God. Please don't listen to him." Instead, he sat on vital information and followed his wife into disobedience.

One of the results of Adam's silence has been more male passivity. All of us men have followed in Adam's footsteps more often than we care to admit. But it was only a matter of time before Adam's passivity led to the violence and misuse of strength that has plagued the world.

Within one generation of Adam's failure to be strong, masculine strength turned into murder when Cain killed Abel (Gen. 4). Only a few generations later, Lamech followed suit and killed a man for "wounding" him and threatened to kill anyone who dared to cross him again (Gen. 4:23-24). From there, violence spread like a cancer. Apparently, things got so out of hand that one reason God flooded the earth was because of the violence of men (Gen. 6).

Even before Cain turned on his brother and murdered him, God had predicted (not condoned) that men would mishandle their power. Before banishing Adam and Eve from Eden, God said that one of the tragic results of humanity's fall into sin would be that men would use their strength to dominate women. "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). The Hebrew word translated "rule" means "to dominate."

There is something to the notion that it is a man's world. Throughout history, men have used their strength to maintain the upper hand against women. For instance, many male dominated cultures have wrongly viewed women as nothing more than property or sexual objects. They were not allowed to voice their opinions and were not given opportunities for education. Although parts of the world have recently granted women privileges that for centuries belonged only to men, women have historically been relegated to little more than cooking, cleaning, and bearing children. Sadly, many in the church today have twisted New Testament statements about male headship to justify male domination in the home.

From the start of the human story, something went terribly wrong. Eve's temptation by Satan put Adam's strength to the test—and he failed. Masculine strength eventually turned bad. Like Diotrephes (the villain in the New Testament book of 3 John) who maliciously imposed his will on others (1:9-10), men have had a tendency to misuse their strength ever since. For some men, it happens occasionally. For others, it develops into a destructive way of life.

Part of the reason many men turn out to be so harsh and pushy is that their family and society have trained them and given them permission to be self-centered and heavy handed. Taking away that permission by showing men they don't have the right to dominate anyone would go a long way in turning things around for the good. To more fully understand the misuse of masculine strength, however, we must also look into the heart of men who walk over others. We'll find a wounded strength that is a part of every man's story.

What's Behind The Misuse Of Strength?

Near the end of the classic film *The Wizard Of Oz*, Dorothy and her three companions meet up again with the mysterious wizard. No one had ever seen the "great and powerful" Oz, but his booming voice portrayed him as a mighty force to be reckoned with—that is, until Dorothy's little dog Toto pulls away the curtain to Oz's control room, showing him to be a small, insecure man with a weak and unassuming voice.

It's not always immediately seen, but there's a common reason men misuse their strength. Like Oz, there's more going on behind a man's show of force that further explains (yet never excuses) his pattern of using power to control people. It's the contention of this booklet that there's a wounded strength deep down inside most men who routinely misuse their strength. They may hide it well behind an abrasive front or false bravado, but it's there. Let's pull back the curtain of a man's show of force and consider strength that has been shamed or badly ignored.

Shamed Strength. To be affirmed as strong and capable is essential to males. God the Father's relationship with Jesus could serve as an example of the importance of a father affirming a son when He said to Jesus: "You are My Son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased" (Lk. 3:22).

The unfortunate reality is that we live in a less than-perfect world where every man questions himself. To some degree, we all wonder if we have the strength to come through when we're called on. It's a doubt that cuts to the core of our character. Though most do not easily admit it, such doubts and feelings of inadequacy run deep in the hearts of men who have a habit of pushing others around. Their doubts often come as a result of being shamed and belittled in their formative years.

One man remembers that when he was growing up, his father often called him a sissy or a little girl. He chided his son about his failures and rarely noticed his accomplishments. Some, like the man just mentioned, had their sense of adequacy ridiculed by a hostile parent. Others had peers, teachers, coaches, and a number of

authority figures reinforce the idea that they were weak and lacking. Even life's circumstances, such as childhood abuse, losing a job, growing up in poverty, or a long-term illness, can leave some big questions that undermine self confidence.

Ignored Strength. Not only can strength be shamed and undermined, it can also be ignored altogether. In some cases, the adults who were meant to build up and encourage a young boy's sense of adequacy simply weren't present. For a number of reasons—a divorce, a job that required long hours or a lot of traveling, or some other extenuating circumstances—their fathers were absent or just plain uninvolved. When it came to speaking to their sons about their competency, they were silent. Sadly, many fathers couldn't pass along and validate in their sons a sense of adequacy because it was never affirmed in them.

The Message Of Wounded Strength. Whether a sense of strength is shamed or ignored, it sends an unsettling message that will eat away at a male's sense of competency. It whispers and sometimes shouts to their hearts, "You are weak! You don't have what it takes! What little strength you may have is not enough."

The message of such wounds is so powerful that it can slowly begin to rule a male. Taking their cue from earlier messages, some men will gravitate toward a life of fearful passivity and avoidance. Others will handle it by going to the other extreme and will angrily mishandle their power. These males learn to compensate for their feelings of inadequacy by bullying others or lashing out at those who make them feel small. Some constantly live with a big chip on their shoulder, out to prove themselves. They come to believe the lie that making others feel weak or overly dependent on them makes them bigger and better than everyone else.

Saul, Israel's first king, is a prime example of a man who exhibited both extremes. Even though he was a physically "impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others" (1 Sam. 9:2), he had come to believe a completely different message about himself.

When the prophet Samuel told Saul about God's plans to make him king and deliver Israel from their archenemies, the Philistines, he balked. He said to Samuel, "Why do you say such a thing to me?" (1 Sam. 9:21). His response betrayed his true view of himself—a man who was "small in [his] own eyes" (1 Sam. 15:17). In fact, he felt so inadequate and unsure of himself that when it came time for Samuel to present Saul to the people as their king, he tried to hide among some baggage so that no one could find him (1 Sam. 10:22).

The biblical narrative doesn't tell us the details of what chipped away at Saul's view of himself. We don't know if his father or someone else demoralized him or ignored his strength. What we do know is that after Saul was anointed king, some "troublemakers" mocked his strength. "How can this fellow save us?" they jeered. "They despised him and brought him no gifts." Not surprisingly, he "kept silent" as they carried on (1 Sam. 10:27). Saul just took it like someone who was accustomed to hearing such things about himself.

Despite what Saul had come to believe, God had put His stamp of validation on him. He was the man for the job. And for a time, Saul apparently believed it. Under the power of God's Spirit, he stepped up and powerfully answered God's call on his life. (First Samuel 11 records the courageous military campaign he led to rescue the city of Jabesh.) But it didn't last long. The old message of inadequacy returned as he grew to be more controlled by what others thought about him than by God's approval. Instead of being a strong leader and following God's commands, he started to compromise and make concessions out of fear. When Samuel confronted him, he finally admitted, "I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them" (1 Sam. 15:24). And it cost him his throne.

As God began to tear the kingdom away from Saul, he became increasingly hardened and violent. It only got worse for Saul when his future replacement's military successes caused his popularity to swell among the people (1 Sam. 18:5-9). It galled him as the crowd cheered, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." The last half of the book of 1 Samuel records the tragic story of an increasingly insecure and jealous man who resisted God and repeatedly tried (but failed) to kill David. In the end, he took his own life as he was being overrun by the very enemy from whom he was called to rescue his people (1 Sam. 31:1-6).

False Strength. Out of the message of wounded strength men manufacture a contrived strength. When a man lashes out physically or tramples others with his words, he may appear to be strong. It may feel strong to him, at least for the moment, but bullying others is not a genuine strength. It's often a distorted counterfeit that tries to compensate for feelings of weakness and inferiority.

Wounded strength may not account for every time men dominate and push others around, but it is behind the problem far more than we realize. More often than not, males misuse their power because somewhere deep down they believe they are small and powerless. Few see the wounded strength underneath, least of all the bully himself. Still, beneath much of it is a deep uncertainty that he doesn't have what it takes.

Men who are mean and domineering are often uncertain about their real God-given strength. And we don't help them, or the ones they continue to hurt, by just scolding them and punishing their behavior. The failure of prison systems to "reform" criminal offenders is an expensive reminder that treating the symptom doesn't work. The issue is always the heart.

Nothing justifies a man walking over people and treating others in an authoritarian way. While we need to boldly confront the misuse of strength by men and lovingly hold them accountable for the sake of those they hurt, there's a greater goal than just modified behavior. We want to help these men see that there is a wounded strength inside of them that doesn't have to rule them anymore. We want to help them realize there's a way for their wounded hearts to mend and that they can find and use an indispensable strength that brings life and protection. We want them to know the freedom, life, and strength that can be found only in Christ (Jn. 10:10; Gal. 5:1).

Strength Restored

There is a strength, a good strength, somewhere inside men who misuse it. But it can't be found and restored for good if we try to strip men of their masculinity. In his book *Raising A ModernDay Knight*, Robert Lewis notes that men in our culture are "being stripped of their maleness. . . . Over the last few decades, this culture has steadily and relentlessly undermined healthy notions of what it means to be a man. Oncenoble images of masculinity have now been replaced by images of men behaving badly. . . . Manhood is no longer a unique calling: it's now seen more as a problem to overcome" (pp.2-3).

Certainly, one important way to turn things around is by teaching men who behave like tyrants to be less self-centered and more sensitive to the needs of others. But the solution is not to do away with a man's strength—to throw it out like a faulty or useless part. That's a tragic mistake that emasculates men. Our world equally suffers from a lack of men with backbone.

It's important to keep in mind that the legitimate strength of a man accounts for much of the good and heroism in the world. Remember, it was a band of men on Flight 93 who rushed the cockpit and prevented the hijackers from flying another airplane into a crowded building on September 11, 2001.

In East Greenbush, New York, it was two male teachers who tackled and disarmed a 16-year-old who had opened fire on his classmates on February 9, 2005. May we never forget that nearly 2,000 years earlier it was a Man who spent every ounce of strength in His being as He willingly suffered excruciating torture and gave "His life as a ransom" for the world (Mk. 10:45).

If you are a man who has a habit of throwing your weight around, literally or figuratively, you don't have to sacrifice being strong. Yes, you have some rough edges that need smoothing, but there still remains an essential strength within you. God is the One who put it inside you, and He wants it restored. He wants you to learn how to use it for noble and great purposes that you've yet to discover.

Finding what that means for you is a deeply personal process that requires time. Along the way, there will be some difficult things to acknowledge and work through. There are no easy formulas to follow, but as with most major breakthroughs in a person's life, it starts with admitting that you have a serious problem.

Admit That You Have A Problem. Whether you do it with words or brute strength, at home or out in the community, it's essential to admit that you bully others. There is no way of getting around this. Those who admit they have a problem can change. Those who don't, will not.

You might try to minimize your problem by claiming that others are at fault. You may justify what you do because you feel pushed around. You might be tempted to believe the lies that if people would just stop being so sensitive or just be more attentive to your needs, things would get better. The truth is that your misuse of strength will only get worse if you continue to point the finger at others and operate from the selfish idea that the world revolves around you.

Admitting your problem may be especially difficult if you are the type who acts nice and charming to some people. Many may be fooled by your charm. You may have even fooled yourself and don't really know what you're doing. None of it, however, changes the fact that there are those in your life—a spouse, your children, a friend, a coworker, an employee—who consider you abrasive and controlling.

If you get stuck on this point and can't admit this about yourself, remain open. Be willing to be wrong. People can't make you admit to something that is painfully obvious only to them. But be open to the fact that others may see a side of you that you don't currently see.

Even Paul had trouble seeing that he had a problem. Until he was confronted on the Damascus road, he was convinced in his own mind that hunting Christians down and persecuting them was God's will (Acts 9:1-18). God opened Paul's eyes to see the truth about himself. God can open your eyes too. So ask Him to help you search your heart for as long as it takes till you start to see your problem for what it is. Pray with the psalmist: "Search me, O God, and know my heart . . . See if there is any offensive way in me" (Ps. 139:23-24).

You are well on your way to restoration when you admit your problem. And once you surrender to God, you will be able to make more progress than you ever thought possible.

Surrender To God. Jesus taught, "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it" (Lk. 9:24). He didn't mean that we must physically die. Nor was He calling for an end to all personal confidence. What must "die," according to Jesus, is our commitment to self-sufficiency. We must give up the self-absorbed illusion that we can manage life without Him. In other words, we will not find the life God wants us to have until we humbly get out of the way and allow Him to be the Lord of our life.

If surrendering to God feels like putting your life into the hands of a complete stranger, a major turning point will occur when you see your need for God's forgiveness and accept His offer of a restored relationship through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Mt. 20:28; Jn. 3:16). Putting your faith in Jesus doesn't make the struggles of life disappear, but it is your spiritual starting point to a newfound life. Paul wrote, "Just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . , we too may live a new life" (Rom. 6:4).

Whether you entered into a relationship with God recently or years ago, you can surrender and start to get deeply connected with the One who cares about you and believes in you like no one you've ever known. God is a person, not a set of rules. And relationship with Him is not primarily about going to church and behaving yourself. The Scriptures teach that rules will enslave us and drain us of life if we make them the focus (2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 4:9).

At its core, relationship with God is an intimate friendship. From Moses to Paul, the Bible tells the story of a God who wants to be our constant companion and converse regularly with us. As Jesus put it, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends" (Jn. 15:15).

Surrendering to God is not a one-time event. Surrender is a place you return to in your heart again and again. It's where you center yourself in God's authority and friendship on a daily basis. Some days you may surrender willingly. Other days you might have to wrestle with God before you go there. Still, from a surrendered heart, you can begin to truly confess the difficult things you've begun to see about yourself.

Confess Your Misuse Of Strength. Regardless of where you misuse your strength, it's essential to admit to yourself that you have a pattern of controlling others. As you have the opportunity, it's equally important to personally acknowledge what you've done to hurt others.

Be sincere and specific. It's not enough to simply say the words, "Okay, I admit it. I sometimes push you around." Confess the details. As best as you can, genuinely acknowledge how you dominate others and when you tend to do it.

For example, one harsh and uncompromising boss finally admitted that he rarely lets anyone tell him anything. He acknowledged that he does whatever he pleases, regardless of the effect on others.

Along with confessing to others, it's vital that you humbly confess your misuse of strength to God. God doesn't want to condemn you. Like the father of the prodigal son, He wants to embrace and forgive you (Lk. 15:11-24). God welcomes your humility. "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6). More than anything, however, He wants to celebrate your change of heart.

God's gracious response may not be what you've come to expect, especially if you were mocked or made to pay dearly for your mistakes as you were growing up. Let today, however, be the day you are surprised by His kindness. Let His grace and mercy leave you stunned and speechless. Let Him love you, especially at your worst. Soak in His forgiveness like the warm sun on a winter's day. Let it fill your heart with grateful celebration (Ps. 65:3).

Do you feel that God won't use you now because of what you've done to others? Well, there may be some consequences for misusing your strength, but God hasn't written you off. In fact, He's just getting started. Forgiveness, as huge and surprising as that is, is just the beginning. You can continue to become a different man who offers his strength for the good of God and others. An important sign that this is beginning to take shape in your life is a willingness to take responsibility for the pain you've caused others.

Take Responsibility For The Harm You've Caused Others. A man who has bullied people and misused his strength has victims. And he shouldn't take lightly the effect he's had on others. There is much more to it than simply saying, "I'm sorry." Although you may have moments when you feel and express deep regret and sorrow over the harm you've caused, it takes months and sometimes years for a man to truly understand and take responsibility for the way he has hurt others with his strength.

Those who truly own the hurt they've caused others are willing to accept the consequences of their actions. They are willing to bear the burden that they haven't been a safe person to be around. They take responsibility for the fear and mistrust they've caused others. They give the people they've hurt as much time as they need to work through the pain they've created. They are willing to do whatever it takes to rebuild the trust they have broken.

It's important to be aware that the people you have hurt will likely hurt you in some of their own responses. Make it your goal to be gracious to them, and confess it to God when you're not. Why? Because you want to take responsibility for putting others in such a difficult situation in the first place.

Stepping up and taking responsibility for the harm you've caused is one of the early stages of discovering and showing true strength. It shows the people you've hurt that you are not just going through the motions because you've been told to. It shows that you seriously want to be a different man.

In some cases, you need to accept that things may never be reconciled between you and someone you've hurt. Depending on the seriousness of your offense and the degree of the harm that's been done, complete restoration of some relationships may not be possible.

Although it may not be possible for some relationships to be restored, you can be restored! You can set out to know and believe the real truth about yourself and go on to live as the man God created you to be. This process of restoration, however, can keep going forward only as you turn away from your false strength.

Turn Away From False Strength. When you stop pushing others around, you'll be putting off "your old self" so you can "put on the new self, created to be like God" (Eph. 4:22-24). This is more than just straightening

out wrong behavior. It comes from a surrendered heart and mind that willingly seeks to give up what you've trusted in to deal with your wounded strength.

Giving up your false strength is not about shaping up because you are afraid of losing a marriage, a friendship, or your reputation. Fear of what you might lose can help get your attention, but alone it is not a strong enough reason to make you walk away for good. You need to stop hurting others with your strength for one reason: It is wrong and unworthy of who God created you to be. You need to stop talking down to others and running over people just because you can and you want to. You need to walk away from your false strength so that you can be healed and restored.

God wants to bring real healing and restoration into the lives of men who misuse their strength, but that can't happen as long as they continue living out of a false strength. Healing comes only when we humble ourselves and turn from our self-destructive and harmful ways (2 Chr. 7:14; Acts 28:27). It's only then that any of us can find God's grace and healing.

Letting go of your false strength doesn't mean you have to turn into a pushover. It means you stop misusing your strength to deal with your feelings of inadequacy. No matter how belittled or weak you feel, it means that you give up the right to deal with your pain by using your fists or throwing your weight around. It means that you stop putting others down so you can feel better about yourself.

You can turn away from it willingly, out of a broken and surrendered heart. If you don't, God may have to graciously force the matter. To save you from what will eventually destroy you, He may let it blow up in your face. For example, one man was brought to this point after he was arrested and put on probation for slugging his teenage stepson during a late-night altercation. For him, the choice was clear: Either stop hitting his son or go to prison.

However it comes about, leaving your false strength behind opens you up to a process of restoration that requires faith. It is not only giving up what you've trusted in to deal with the wounds in your heart, it is also trusting that God has something better for you and for others, even though you can't always see what that is. "We live by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). No matter how hurt and angry you may feel, you have good reason to refrain from your old ways: God has something better.

Be aware, however, that the journey to restoration tends to get worse before it gets better. Why? Not only is there a lot to own up to (in terms of the damage you've caused), but there is also a lot of unresolved pain to face in your own heart. Once you've quit covering your insecurities through the abuse of your strength, the painful wounds in your heart will start to intensify. And it won't be a stroll through the park as the hurt and feelings of selfdoubt push back to the surface. This is one reason you shouldn't try to walk this journey alone. You will have a difficult time sorting through this part of your life by yourself. As you start to turn your attention to the places in your heart where your strength has suffered its greatest blows, reach out to a man who has dealt with this issue in his own life or a group of men you trust and admire.

Identify And Face Your Wounds. A man will not understand the force that drives his misuse of strength until he is honest about his own woundedness. Most men find this difficult. Not only are the wounds extremely painful, some see facing their wounds as a sign of further weakness. Many men have been taught to "gut it out" and play through the pain. One lie many men have bought into is, "Big boys don't cry." As a result, too many men downplay how much they've been hurt.

In his helpful book for men titled *Wild At Heart*, John Eldredge writes, "Most men deny their wound— deny that it happened, deny that it hurt, certainly deny that it's shaping the way they live today." He goes on to add, "But a wound that goes unacknowledged and unwept is a wound that cannot heal" (p.106).

Facing your wounds is not a sign of weakness. Big boys do indeed cry. Just look at the example of King David. He was a battle tested warrior who was candid about the heartaches of his life: “I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me” (Ps. 109:22).

“Playing through the pain” may be appropriate in an athletic event, but it has no place when it comes to the deep hurts of your life. It’s time to stop playing the independent tough guy who doesn’t need anything from anyone (including God) and start admitting that you’ve been significantly hurt.

To get started, take some time to think about your own story. Before you became a bully, some painful things may have happened or were said to you that made you feel small and caused you to doubt your own sense of strength. If so, what were they? Who said them? And how did it make you feel about yourself? What did you long to hear about yourself from the people who meant the most to you—your parents, siblings, teachers, friends? Whether it was intended or just your own perception, what was the message you heard from them about your strength?

Reflecting on these types of questions can help you break through your denial and open your heart. It won’t always be evident, but begin to watch for moments when you feel the pain of an earlier wound. Look for that old message to surface when someone says something that makes you feel angry and small. Watch for your wound to surface as you’re watching a movie, reading a book, or listening to a song. God can use nearly anything to bring your wound to your awareness.

Whatever surfaces, write it down and talk about it with a friend or a group. Put words to what happened and how it affected you. Writing it down and talking to others helps you reconnect with the events in your life that have shaped you.

Don’t make the mistake of rushing through your unresolved wounds. Give yourself time to let the truth of what happened and how it affected you sink in. It’s not just another task to check off your to-do list. View it as part of the ongoing rescue mission of your heart.

Admitting your wounds is not a mere intellectual exercise you finish in one session. Nor is it something you can do just in your head. Not only is it important to understand how you’ve been hurt, but also to feel the emotional weight and hurt of the negative words you’ve heard about yourself all your life. You didn’t ask to be put down or ignored when you were growing up. Don’t run from the pain by blaming yourself. It wasn’t your fault, but it was a big deal. It was a significant hurt, and it still is. Let yourself be angry and cry. It’s essential to grieve.

Jesus said that God comforts those who mourn (Mt. 5:4). In fact, unless you can be real and feel the pain of your wounds, your heart won’t be in any condition to hear the deeper Voice that can counter the negative messages you’ve heard about yourself all your life. As you are open to grieve and grow in your ability to recognize those times when you are feeling shamed or small, you can begin to do the most important thing you could ever do with your wounds—take them to God.

Take Your Wounds To God. Men who misuse their strength are often so caught up in protecting their image or proving themselves to be “strong” that they fail to see the connection between their misuse of strength and their woundedness. But once a man starts to turn away from his false strength and is honest about the deep pain in his own story, he can turn to the One whose opinion counts the most.

You don’t just get past your wounds and what others said to you about yourself. You have to intentionally go through them by taking them to God. Cry out to Him and ask Him to speak truth into your heart and bring restoration.

As Jesus launched His earthly ministry, He let people know that one of the primary reasons He showed up on the stage of humanity was to bring healing and freedom to the brokenhearted (Isa. 61:1-3; Lk. 4:17-22). Later on, He said, “Come to Me. Get away with Me and you’ll recover your life” (Mt. 11:28 The Message). For a man who has had a habit of abusing his strength because of his own insecurities, it’s time to take Jesus at His word and to

bring Him the pieces of your heart that are broken. It's time to ask the Lord to help you reinterpret the painful messages you've heard about yourself. It's time to invite Him into the wounded places of your heart where you feel inadequate.

More than you know, God wants to show love by speaking words of healing and validation that counter the negative messages of your life.

You may have already heard Him speaking some difficult things to you about the way you've mistreated others. And He likely has some more difficult things to say to you. But He doesn't say any of it in a spirit of condemnation. His words of conviction are laced with the truth and hope that we are much more than the sum of our sins and failures. We are a new creation because of the redeeming work of Christ in our heart (2 Cor. 5:17).

Hearing from God is more than just a mental exercise in which you recite a Bible verse or remind yourself about God's love for you. It's asking God what He really thinks of you— and then listening for His response.

One of the saddest statements in the Bible is, "The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention" (2 Chr. 33:10). God wants to speak to us, but we're often not paying attention for a number of reasons—we're too busy talking, too distracted with life, or we simply don't believe He will say anything to us.

Jesus said, "He who belongs to God hears what God says" (Jn. 8:47). Sometimes hearing from God requires getting away from all the distractions of life and spending time alone with Him. If we would actually quiet our hearts and take the time to listen we would be amazed at what He has to say. This is when we can hear His "gentle whisper" say what is true about us.

Getting to a place of solitude is often what gives your heart the necessary breathing room it needs to hear and absorb what God wants to say. Obviously, He speaks through the Bible— our foundation of truth. But you must also be open to God speaking to you in other ways. He can also deliver words of affirmation through nature, books, friends, music, films, or any other way He chooses (for more, see *When Disappointment Deceives* CB041). But remember, whatever we think God is saying to us must agree with what He has already said in the Scriptures.

Imitating Jesus

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Man is God in ruins." It's true. Much has gone wrong in the hearts of men. At the same time, there are significant remnants of dignity. There still remains a good strength that is part of man's original glory that God intends to restore.

We see this original glory most clearly in the life of Jesus. He was the perfect model of kindness and strength. Those who were down and out, oppressed, and treated like outcasts had no better friend than our Lord (Mt. 9:36; Jn. 8:1- 11). Those who were in the service of the kingdom of darkness and oppressing the disadvantaged, however, encountered a very different side of Jesus. Just ask the money lenders whose tables He knocked over and chased out of the temple just days before His execution (Mk. 11:15-17; Lk. 19:45-46).

Jesus was the most gracious man ever to set foot on this planet, but He also possessed an intense, loving strength. As a human being, His strength was based on knowing who He was. He listened and believed what His heavenly Father said about Him: "You are My son, whom I love; with You I am well pleased" (Lk. 3:22).

His strength also came from knowing His purpose. He knew why He was here. He knew His role in God's story and what He had come to do (Mt. 20:28).

Finally, He knew who His real enemy was and what he would attack. He knew the real enemy wasn't people. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12). He knew it was Satan, the same adversary who deceived and lured Adam and Eve into rebelling against God. And Jesus also knew that the enemy would attack His identity. Twice in the wilderness temptations, Satan called into question the very identity God the Father had given to Jesus when he sneered, "If You are the Son of God" (Lk. 4:1-13).

As a follower of Jesus, you too can hear God speak to you. You can know with more and more certainty that you are His son and that you are capable and strong. You also can start to find your purpose and mission in life (2 Th. 1:11). This is the place in God's ongoing story of rescue and redemption where your strength is needed the most. Finally, you should expect the same kind of attacks from the enemy. He poses the greatest threat to the life God has for us. Like it or not, all of us were born into a world at war. It's the war behind every war—the spiritual clash between good and evil that has been taking place ever since Satan tried to overthrow God (Isa. 14:12-14). In fact, your wounded strength is a casualty of the life-and-death battle between good and evil.

Jesus said that Satan is a “thief” who is out “to steal and kill and destroy” (Jn. 10:10). He will continually try to steal away anything you hear from God about your true identity and strength. He will do whatever he can to make you doubt God, yourself, and your ability to carry out God's calling in your life. He will stop at nothing to lure you back into a false strength.

This battle can become quite fierce. But you don't have to sit there and take it. Like Jesus, you can stand your ground and resist the enemy's lies and attacks as you continue to live a life of surrender (Jas. 4:7).