

“STRESS2REST: JOB”
by Rom A. Pegram (5/31/20)

Several years ago, I had a wakeup call with my health. In my early 40s, I found out I had high blood pressure. After talking to my doctor, we soon discovered I had what was known as ‘stress-induced high blood pressure.’ In other words, the stress of my work was causing this, so he put me on medication. Of course, at that time, my doctor had to tell me about the side-effects of high blood pressure over time; I needed to learn to deal with the pressures of work, in order to lessen my stress levels. He knew I was a pastor, so this was a bit embarrassing. I knew Paul’s writings in Philippians (4:6a) where he says, “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.” It was as if my doctor was telling me I needed to quit worrying, learn to relax, and trust in God. After that, he went through the list of things I’d have to stop eating or cut back on (i.e. salt, etc.). Finally, he said something I’ll never forget: “Rom, if you don’t learn to deal with the stress you face at work, it’s literally going to kill you!” Fast forward several years to 54 years old ... and it just about did...

‘Bottom line? I knew some things had to change, if I was going to deal successfully with high blood pressure—the *stress induced by work!* And I’m sure I’m not the only one who deals with stress in the workplace. You know what I’m talking about. So, let’s take a look at our scripture for today to see what God’s word says to us about *work and stress* (Matthew 11:28-29 & Ecclesiastes 2:24, NLT)...

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God.

You can see in today’s scripture, Jesus wants to replace your stress ... with his rest, when it comes to your souls! Work is hard, isn’t it? It’s draining, and it’s always going to be that way. After all, it’s called ... WORK...

But God also wants your work to be meaningful—to make a difference. And that’s what the Ecclesiastes verse is all about. I want you to notice that satisfaction in work isn’t something you do apart from God; in fact, it comes from the very hand of God. So, if you want to replace the stress of your work with the rest that only God can give, then God’s hand must be on your work. You can’t do it without him!

The good news (for me) today is that, after several years of being treated—adjusting to my stress-induced scenario, *my blood pressure is now good*. It’s not because I moved stress out of the workplace; it’s because changes were made—*mostly in me*—and I’ve learned better how to deal with the stressors of work. And with God’s help, we all can. Folks, here are **5 GODLY ACTIONS TO DEFEAT THESE 5 JOB STRESSORS:**

JOB STRESSOR #1: “I don’t know what to do with my life.” Now, there could be a lot of reasons for finding yourself in this situation: Job loss – you don’t know what’s next;

job dissolution – in a job, but not happy with how it’s going/what it is; various reasons – a lot of people simply searching for what to do with their lives...

So, here’s a God-solution for those wondering what to do with their lives: **ASK GOD WHAT HE WANTS YOU TO DO.** ‘Sounds pretty simple, right? Just ask God. The problem is, most people have never actually stopped, amid life, and asked the simple question: *God, what do you want me to do?*

We’ll ask our friends. We’ll ask our parents. We’ll ask our siblings. We’ll even ask counselors—sometimes strangers—what to do with our lives. But ask God? Probably not...

Look what it says in the New Testament book of James (1:5): “If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking.” Ask God. And you might be surprised at how God answers...

How does God answer this question? It’s not that God has your life all mapped out, ready to hand you a written copy of the ‘the plan.’ We need to ask ... and the question is: *God, what do you want me to do?* How God answers is he—often—reveals a need to us ... then asks us to join him where he’s already working. What’s God going to do when we ask? He’s going to invite you *to join him in an important work*, by revealing something he knows will touch your heart. If we’re being stressed out by ‘not knowing what to do with our lives,’ we need to pray and ask God what to do...

Then we need to pay attention—so we don’t miss what God’s trying to tell us. God may speak to us through a quiet time, through prayer, through reading of the Bible, through a conversation with others ... but God, for sure, will answer you in a way that touches your heart—inviting you to join him. “I don’t know what to do with my life.” Ask God... Here’s #2...

JOB STRESSOR #2: “I feel like a failure when I don’t succeed at my job.” The problem here is ... *we can’t separate who we are ... from what we do!* Success in work = success in life; we see our jobs as the ultimate way to fulfill ourselves. The problem is ... *the ultimate purpose of your job/career isn’t to fulfill you!* It’s not to bring meaning to your life, because *you are more than just your job!*

So, here’s a God-solution for those who feel like a failure on the job: **SEPARATE MY IDENTITY FROM MY JOB.**

One of the biggest sources of my high blood pressure was that my identity was tied too closely to my job as a pastor. I’ll be honest with you, sometimes in ministry it’s hard for me to separate who I am ... from what I do. If I’m Pastor Rom 80% of the time, who am I outside of that? And when you can’t separate yourself from the problems you deal with on the job, or the people you talk to on the job, it can cause a lot of stress. In other words, *however the day goes as a pastor, so too goes my esteem!* If I had a really lousy day, then I must be a really lousy pastor ... or person. Every time there’s a failure in ministry, I felt like a failure personally. You see how it goes. And this happens when we look to our job as the ultimate source of self-worth or satisfaction in life. But is that right? Look at our next verse (Ecclesiastes 2:20, TLB): “So I turned in despair from hard work as the answer to my search for satisfaction.”

Now look, your job matters! Your job is important. But your job isn’t your life. It’s not your identity. Your job is a temporal context through which you can live out who God’s

called you to be. Your job is but a temporary way for you to live out your true, God-given identity...

I want you to hear me clearly today: *you have a greater purpose than just your job.* And that, dear friends, is to love God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, and with all your strength ... as well as to love your neighbor as yourself! That's your greatest purpose in life!

If you've ever received an email from me, you'll note one of my favorite scriptures toward the bottom. Ephesians 2:10 (NLT): "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." If you didn't have your job tomorrow ... if you no longer worked in the same career, you need to understand that work isn't what you were created to do! You were 'created anew in Christ Jesus, so you can do the good works he planned for you.' Find a way to separate yourself from your job; God's picture for your life is much bigger than yours! Let that stressor go... Then, we find:

JOB STRESSOR #3: "I hate my job!" (*No one's ever been there before!*) Folks, *is there anything at work that could cause more stress than being in a job that you don't like ... and/or working with people you don't like?* There are really only two possible solutions to a job we hate: 1) We can find a new job ... or 2) we can learn to love the job we already have!

Do you know what God's solution might be to this situation? Here it is: **DO WHAT I LOVE AND LOVE WHAT I DO.** They may sound a bit trite ... but that's not how I mean it today...

First, if you choose a job that you love ... you'll never have to work a day in your life! I was told that a long time ago—proven true in my life (and many others)! That's the #1 solution ... but *what if you're in a job you don't like very much?* In a sense, you know God has you right there, right now for good reason. But *how do I learn to love what I do, when I'm not doing what I love?*

Look at this verse from Ecclesiastes 9:10a (NJB): "Whatever work you find to do, do it with all your might..." And some of you are thinking ... 'But Rom, you don't know my situation!' I understand. But understand this: In God's eyes, *what you are doing right now is the most important job in the world!* If God indeed opened the door for you to be where you're at, God doesn't make mistakes. You may not understand the reason for being there, but God does. God may just be asking you to be faithful to the door he's opened for you! So, if God planted you there, how should you be looking at that job? Jesus tells us, as recorded in Matthew 25:23 (NLT): "The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'" You have been faithful at the job I have you at now, so now I'm going to move you to one with more responsibility ... and more rewards!

Folks, the bottom line is this: *If you want God to bless you with more, be faithful with where you are right now.* Do your best (with God's help); make things better where you are. Represent Christ in all you do... **Do what you love and love what you do.** Those are God's solutions. Here's #4...

JOB STRESSOR #4: “I work too much and I’m burnt out.” This means there are too many long hours, too much work to get done, not getting enough time off, not getting enough sleep—crashing & burning because you’re working too hard... ‘Sound familiar?

Here’s God’s solution—been around since the beginning of time: **KEEP SABBATH BY TAKING ONE DAY A WEEK OFF.** Does this sound familiar to anyone? It should... Folks, the Sabbath is such a big deal to God, he took one in the creation story (*and on the seventh day, God rested*), then asked us to do the same in the 10 Commandments (*not suggestions!*). The ‘command’ was for our own good! It was because God created us and knew ahead of time what we needed! God knew how we’d abuse ourselves if left to our own devices...

It’s really something ... how we take many of the other ‘commandments’ seriously—don’t murder, don’t steal, don’t commit adultery ... *but ol’ #4 ... we treat as a ‘suggestion!’* Don’t we? Exodus 20:9-10a (NLT) says: “You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work.” And we pastors have to find another day during the week to take Sabbath...

But this rhythm is the way God created us; even football games have a half time, don’t they? The body needs a break... So, the answer to “I work too much and I’m burnt out” is simply this: *Mind God’s command for Sabbath rest!* Finally...

JOB STRESSOR #5: “I don’t feel like my job matters.” Did you know studies show ... more heart attacks happen on Mondays than any other day of the week? 20% more heart attacks happen on Mondays than any other day of the week; also, more suicides ... and it’s not just coincidence! Why? Because many people spend the whole weekend dreading going to work on Monday (*and what a way to ruin a weekend!*)

The God-solution for this stressor is: **LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE GOD AT WORK.**

One of the biggest stress-causers is ... *we take God out of work!* When we separate the secular part of our lives from the spiritual part of our lives, it’s like we’re saying, “I’ll put Jesus over there ... and I’ll put my job over there.” When we force ourselves to find meaning in our work—outside of God, that’s a hopeless thing, a stressful thing. *You’ll always be stressed out at work ... if you separate God out of your work!*

Instead, what we should be doing is deciding that, *beginning today, we’re going to go to work for God!* Our #1 goal at work should be ... to please God—to honor God! Colossians 3:23 (NLT) says it this way: “Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.” Two things are going to happen, if we will begin to take this scripture seriously ... and live it in our lives!

- 1) The stress you experience at work is going to *decrease* ... because God’s a pretty good boss! No one loves you like God does ... and...
- 2) Your work will become more meaningful because if you’re working for God, your work’s connected to eternity; so, your job is eternally important or significant!

God might have you where he has you right now because ... maybe you’re the only follower of Jesus there. Have you thought about that? God may want to use you to impact their lives, so he couldn’t afford for you to lose your job. Folks know that God has

a plan for you ... and he wants you in a position where you can serve him through your work! *Your job really does matter...*

Let's close now with 2 Corinthians 3:5 (NCV), which says, "We are not saying that we can do this work ourselves. It is God who makes us able to do all that we do."
Remember the truth of this verse always...