

August 17, 2015

By Robert J. Tamasy

## **WORK, WHERE REWARDS ARE NOT ENOUGH**

A wise observer of the workplace and the life of business and professional people is Max DePree, a highly successful corporate executive who has written numerous books, including *The Art of Leadership* and *Leadership Jazz*. One quotation from Mr. DePree that I recently saw particularly impressed me.

He stated, “Goals and rewards are only parts, different parts, of human activity. When rewards become our goals, we are only pursuing part of our work.” Read that aloud and chew on it for a few moments. What do you think Mr. DePree is saying – and do you agree?

This is not to say setting goals and pursuing rewards are inherently wrong to do. For a business to survive, it must make a profit and hopefully will grow, and rewards such as financial compensation and career advancement are part of our motivation for putting forth our best efforts each day. The simple activity of work in itself has intrinsic value.

In a recent “eco-encyclical,” called *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis offered this observation: “Jesus worked with his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship. ...most of his life was dedicated to this task in a simple life which awakened no admiration at all: ‘Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?’ (Mark 6:3). In this way he sanctified human labor and endowed it with a special significance for our development. As (Pope) John Paul II taught, ‘by enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity.’”

Indeed, the Bible teaches work has been God’s idea from the start, and was not intended as a penalty or punishment. It was part of His purpose for mankind:

**God appointed us to serve as His managers or stewards.** The Bible says God assigned to mankind responsibility to overseeing His Creation, giving us stewardship authority. *“So God created man in his own image...male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth*

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*and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature...” (Genesis 1:27-28).*

**Work performed for rewards alone is never enough.** We set goals and aim for stated objectives, but even when they are achieved, other goals and objectives remain unfulfilled. *“My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done, and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was...a chasing after the wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11). “For riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations” (Proverbs 27:24).*

**Work is one way of honoring and serving God.** As we recognize work as part of our divine calling, we also are assured that by doing it faithfully and with excellence, we will earn an eternal reward from God, the Worker who made work part of being “in His image.” *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24).*

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### Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Do you find that rewards and goals are your primary motivation as you go about doing your work from day to day? Explain your answer.
2. Mr. DePree states, “When rewards become our goals, we are only pursuing part of our work.” What do you think he means in saying that?
3. What do you think it means to be a “steward” of God’s creation through work that we do? From that perspective, how good a job do you think mankind has been doing, in general?
4. The Bible talks about receiving an “eternal reward” for our work? What does that mean to you? Do you think that is sufficient motivation for pursuing excellence in the things we do? Why or why not?

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*NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:*

Proverbs 12:24,27, 22:29; Ecclesiastes 9:7-12; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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