

**DON'T LET PEOPLE OR CIRCUMSTANCES STEAL YOUR JOY****By Jim Mathis**

We sometimes hear people talking about the importance of finding work you love. This may be a little overrated, but it is important to do things that do not destroy your joy, your sense of satisfaction and meaning. You may be doing physical labor all day that is not very much fun, but coming home tired, knowing that you accomplished useful work, can be its own reward.

Over the years I have had a variety of jobs and been involved in different kinds of business. The things that turned out to be joy-killers, I determined to get out of as quickly as possible. The work I have found most enjoyable has been anything that enables me to contribute to the lives of other people.

Currently I spend most of my time restoring old photographs. This is very rewarding, especially since I not only enjoy the work but also like to hear people's stories behind their pictures. I also do a lot of portrait photography. I love people and find delight in helping them look their best.

I also have a seasonal job as a tax professional, preparing people's income tax returns. Sitting down with them, getting to know and helping them in the annual task of filing their taxes is very worthwhile; guiding people through a process that can be very confusing. For years I managed a local coffee house, not only enabling people to enjoy their favorite caffeinated and decaffeinated beverages, but also creating an environment in which they could relax and interact with others in meaningful, even life-changing ways.

Every now and then, however, I have gotten involved with something that initially might have sounded good, but soon I realized it was a wrong decision. I could have stayed and felt miserable or decided to leave at the earliest opportunity. Most of the time I chose the second option.

The choice of whether to fulfill some sort of commitment or to get out of that situation as soon as possible can be a hard one to make. Sometimes we can "grin and bear it," toughing it out for a short time. Other times, however, it is best to recognize a no-win situation and bow out as amicably as possible if we find circumstances robbing us of our joy, peace, love, or sense of humor. I have often found principles from the Bible to be helpful in evaluating such difficult decisions:

**God created work for our good.** Some people regard work as a "necessary evil," but from the start the Lord ordained work to provide for our daily needs and give us a sense of meaning and fulfillment. "God blessed [Adam and Eve] and said to them, 'Be fruitful.... Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air.... I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the

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whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food” (Genesis 1:28-29).

**Man’s rebellion made work difficult.** Adam and Eve’s disobedience by eating from the forbidden tree carried consequences, including making work harder to perform and more challenging. “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food” (Genesis 3:17-18).

**Work is rewarding when done for the right reasons.** Work can be joyful and rewarding if we realize who we ultimately work for, and that God has equipped us with certain abilities and gifts. “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (Colossians 3:23).

© 2023. Jim Mathis is a writer, photographer and small business owner in Overland Park, Kansas. His latest book is *The Camel and the Needle, A Christian Looks at Wealth and Money*. He formerly was a coffee shop manager and executive director of CBMC in Kansas City.

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### Reflection/Discussion Questions Challenge

1.No matter what kind of work we do, there will always be some elements of it that we do not enjoy. But as some have said, “If you do something you love,” you will never have to ‘work’ another day in your life. Are you finding joy and fulfillment in the work you are doing today? Explain your answer.

2.If you find that your current job or vocation is not giving you the sense of joy or fulfillment that you would like, what options are available to you? If leaving your current job is not one of those options, what are some things you could do to make your work more meaningful?

3.Mr. Mathis writes that the work he has found most joyful, and fulfilling has involved interactions with other people and serving them, working in ways that benefit them? How can we approach our work in a similar way, focusing on the services we can provide for other people?

4.What do you think it means to be “working as for the Lord, not for men (people),” as stated in Colossians 3:23?

### Challenge

If you find that your work is “stealing your joy,” who can you go to and discuss this, seeking wisdom for how you can use your God-given abilities and gifts to serve Him and others in a meaningful way? If you do find much joy in your work, pray about how you could offer encouragement to a specific individual who is not presently having that experience.

### NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:  
Proverbs 18:9; Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, 3:22 5:18-19; Ephesians 6:5-7; Colossians 3:17,24

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