

Your Highest Calling by Sharon Swing

Maybe I'm getting a bit too sensitive. Maybe not. I'd like to know what you think.

While listening to a radio program, a caller identified himself as a pastor. Before answering the man's question, the host encouraged this man by saying that the role of a pastor is the highest calling, and he was sure that God was pleased with his choice to serve Him.

While at a conference, a pastor interviewed a university president. At the conclusion of the interview, the pastor said something like, "When you are done with that job, why don't you join the staff of a church where you can really make a difference."

Unknowingly, Christian organizations often use this idea of a "higher calling" as a recruiting strategy. The idea is "come make a difference with your life," as if other professions are somehow less able to make a difference in the world. It may be that the people doing the recruiting are projecting their own life story onto others, and expect that God will work similarly in the lives of others.

When recruiting volunteers, it doesn't work too well to talk about how desperately a ministry needs help. Few people will run to board a sinking ship. Many great ministries tell how you can make a difference in people's lives and how much fun you can have while serving as a part of their team. That is good, honest recruiting strategy. Some recruiting efforts take one step too far and contrast the joy of volunteering with the meaninglessness of 'your regular job.'

Over time, when the unintentional subtext of these messages converge, we can believe a lie about how God cares less about our work-lives than he does about those who serve full-time in the church. If we absorb this distortion of truth, we'll miss out on the adventure that God has for us right where we are.

Could it be that our picture of the church is sometimes limited to what we do and where we are when Christians are gathered? The picture changes substantially when we recognize that the 'church gathered' is intended to equip God's people for works of service when we are scattered into our homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods. That means when God's people are scattered, we are doing 'church work' 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. That is a high calling, indeed.

I don't think these people intend to minimize the work-lives of 99% of Christians who are not on staff in a local church or Christian non-profits. However, let's talk about what these kinds of statements communicate to Christians in other lines of work, or in different seasons of life. If God calls a person to work in a church or Christian non-profit, it is a good place of service, but not a calling superior to other professions. Our highest calling is wherever God wants us to be, doing whatever Jesus would do in our place. Following Jesus does not always mean trading our 'regular jobs' for employment by a church or Christian non-profit organization to gain significance in God's eyes. More specifically, we are called to be followers of Jesus, servants, and people of The Way in our everyday lives. We are called to love God and love people. We can do these things in nearly any profession. The challenge is to do them well.

God can make 'regular jobs' and 'ordinary lives' extraordinary when we ask him to live **in us** and **through us** in every circumstance. Any work can be made secular, even church work, when we edge God out. Any work can be ministry when we do it with and for God, serving others in practical ways.

Some people are left feeling as if they just must not be spiritual enough to be called in to 'Christian ministry,' as if they are on God's J.V. squad. Let's take this to an extreme for a moment and think about what the world would be like if all 'mature' Christians, went into 'full time ministry' in the context of a local church or Christian non-profit. What if there were no Christians teaching in public schools, in business, ditch digging, nursing, sales, or leadership positions? Some places of employment shape society in profound ways. Would we really want them to be void of Christian influence? This is where the 'priesthood of all believers' lives closest to the people who need to know Jesus.

As we practice servanthood in mundane or exhilarating ways, our places of work offer us the challenge of getting very practical about living out our faith. These are the places where God can let his light shine through us so that non-believers will see our good work and praise our Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Could it be that wherever situation you are in today might be your “highest calling” for today? It is our job to look for the divine appointments with people and divine encounters with God in the context of our everyday lives, regardless of our profession. If you are a Christian, you are in full time ministry every day, every hour of your life, regardless of your profession. Go into full-time ministry, right where you are!

THINK ABOUT IT

- What are the implications of these thoughts for your life and work?
- Ask God to show you where he is at work today, and joyfully join him in the redeeming, restoring and creating work he’s doing today right where you are.
- Ask God to show you how you can best serve him by **how** you do **what** you do at work today.
- Thank God that he is with you wherever you may work, wherever you may go. Acknowledge his presence and his leadership in your life today.

I’d like to hear what you think. Write Sharon Swing at sharon@oneLifemaps.com