



Chapter 1

YOUR JOB

Several years ago I did an all-day seminar in Eastern Europe for about a hundred people. The seminar was about what the Bible teaches regarding finances, provisions, and generosity.

After the seminar an older man came up to me and told me that for the first time in his entire life he heard the truth. I asked him what he meant. He replied,

For many decades our country was a communist country. During these years we were told that the government owned everything and that the government would provide for all of our needs. But this didn't work. Then communism fell and many people came to our country and told us about capitalism.

They taught us that we were the owners of our own possessions and destiny and that we needed to take care of our own needs. But for most people, this has not worked. Today, I learned about Christianity. You have taught me that God is the true Owner of all things, that we are to serve the Lord, honor Him with our lives, share whatever He gives us, and that God will be our Provider.

For this man, communism was a lie, and he felt that capitalism was a half-truth that only worked for some. But Christianity is true and works for everyone who is willing to follow Christ and His Word.

You see, the great news is that God is bigger than nations, economies, stock markets, currencies, and job markets. When we begin to understand this we don't have to live in fear but we can live in faith in a God who can provide for us in good times, bad times, and the in-between times.

If you work for a company, it is your employer, but God is your true Provider. What would you rather have in life—what your company can pay you or what God can provide for you? And I don't mean this in a skewed way that relies on a greed-based prosperity gospel message. I mean it in a way that helps you understand God as your heavenly Father who cares about your needs (not your greeds!), who can show His love for you and provide for you.

Let me explain the idea of God's ownership in our work world in another way. My friend Shari works for a bank, and the bank was recently bought by Wells Fargo and billionaire Warren Buffett. Understandably, in these uncertain economic times, this new ownership made the employees nervous. And why not? Everyone thinks that Buffett owns Wells Fargo, and no one knows what he may do to make Shari's bank more profitable. Like many company leaders focused on the bottom line, he may decide to cut staff, reduce benefits, and close some departments or branches.

We've all become accustomed to downsizing, or "right-sizing,"

after one company buys another. This is an unavoidable fact of life in our capitalist society. It's an old story, one that many of us are familiar with. Big fish eat smaller fish. The new owners get to call the shots because they have put up the capital and thus have earned the right to put good workers like Shari onto the street if they want in pursuit of a healthier bottom line.

There's only one problem with this scenario. Warren Buffett does not own Wells Fargo. I'll acknowledge that Buffett may invest the money, place his own hand-picked team into Wells Fargo's management, bring in new bosses, lay off office workers, and have

his own special parking spot in the Wells Fargo lot. But he does not actually own the company, nor do its shareholders. This question about "Who owns Wells Fargo and who is Shari's real boss?" isn't about communism, socialism, or capitalism. It isn't a political question, a social question, or even an economic question. It's a theological question—and a basic one at that. Warren Buffett, you see, for all his business skill and prowess, is merely a temporary steward of Wells Fargo and of all the bank employees. He is a manager of what God has entrusted to him during his lifetime. A steward manages the wealth of someone else, not his or her own. A steward will also be held responsible for how well he managed the owner's assets. Warren Buffet is ultimately responsible to God for what he does with the Lord's resources and the people who are entrusted to him during his lifetime.

Warren Buffett is a temporary steward, because he does not own Wells Fargo. Who does? Why, God, of course! Ultimately, God

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is the Provider and the Owner of ALL things in life. We work and plan and produce from what God provides for us, but ultimately it all goes back to God, because He holds the deed. This truth hasn't changed, and it won't change. It has been that way, it is that way, and it will continue to be that way. As the Bible says, "The world is mine and all that is in it" (Psalm 50:12). People—you and me, and even the Warren Buffetts of this world—are only temporary stewards.

Of course, being a steward isn't bad news—at least not for the Christian. It's extremely good news. That's because Christian stewards are taken care of by the Owner of all. God is not a miser seeking to hoard everything for His own benefit, but a Giver, a Sharer, a Provider.

Getting back to Shari and Wells Fargo, we can trust the God who ultimately owns the bank to faithfully care for His stewards—not because He has to, but because He wants to. The Owner, you see, is also a Father. And fathers provide for their children. God is both the ultimate Father and the ultimate Provider for those who put their trust in Him. No wonder Jesus says, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11).

THE PROVISION OF EMPLOYMENT

So if our Father is also our Provider, how does God provide out of His limitless wealth for His children? Well, for most people at most times, Provision No. 1 is our employment—what we do to produce income for our daily bread. God's main provision for our lives, for most of us, comes through our work. Sometimes, of course, after a bad day at work or wrestling with our vocational call, we're tempted to wonder whether we really want this provision. Work is, well, work. We sometimes come home tired, sore, or discouraged from our jobs. We think that work is part of the curse

that flowed to humanity because of our sinfulness. Didn't God say to Adam, "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food" (Genesis 3:19)? But if we back up in Scripture to the beginning, we discover that "the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). In a perfect environment, with a perfect Boss, Adam and Eve were created by God to be productive—to be fruitful. Since work existed in Paradise before the curse, it cannot be intrinsically evil. In fact, as the main portion of God's provision for us, it is inherently good. Yes, the fall has made work difficult, but the Father's redeemed children have the opportunity to see their work redeemed as well.

I am often asked to do guest preaching and seminars in churches around the country. During my message, I will often ask people to raise their hands if they get a paycheck from a company or organization. I then like to remind everyone that whoever gives them their paycheck is *not* their provider, but their employer. God may use an employer to help provide much of what you need in life, but God is so much bigger than your employer. I also encourage people to see that when they give financially to God as their highest financial priority that they are declaring to themselves and to the Lord that God is their Provider. Think about it. What would you rather have in life—what a company can pay for you or what God can provide for you? God is so much bigger than a paycheck, a pension, a company position, the stock market, and even our economy. Since He owns everything, He can provide the very things you need in life.

So, while God will use our employment to provide, He is not limited to what your company can do for you. But while we work for our employer, we need to be the best employee we can be while realizing that God is our ultimate Provider.

Work was part of Adam's life before the fall and after the fall. Work will be part of your life in this world and the world to come. If we go back to Adam's job resume, we discover that the oldest profession in the world is that of zoology. The Bible says that the

Lord God formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air, and all the beasts of the field (see Genesis 2:19–20). As God’s steward, Adam was to lead, rule over, and bring order to God’s creation. So his first task was to give names to all the livestock, the birds of the air, and the beasts of the field.

God provides the work. He also provides us with the ability to do the work. Psalm 90:17 is a great illustration of this principle. First the psalmist says, “May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us.” This is a sensible outlook. We need God’s favor for everything, of course—our families, our ministries, our health, our relationships. But in this discussion, we focus on the fact that we need God’s favor for the work He provides. The psalmist’s wish quickly turns into a request, a prayer: “Establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands.”

When we understand that we are working for and with God instead of working for a paycheck, our whole attitude will change. I know of one woman who worked in a dirty factory. For many at her company their jobs were sheer drudgery. But when someone at church asked her what she did for a living, she replied, “I am a Christian serving the Lord to reach people with the love of God in my factory. But God has disguised me as a third shift welder to get me around the people He wants me to reach for Him.” Wow! What a great attitude and perspective.

So, no matter where God places us, He can use us and He can provide for us.

May we all pray to God, “Establish the work of our hands.” A lot of people approach life this way: “I’m going to major in a lucrative field, get a high-paying job, and be successful. With my money I’m going to buy all I want. I’ll put my kids into the finest schools, buy a vacation home, and retire early.” They think, like the rich

man in Jesus' parable, that life consists in the abundance of their possessions. Then, like so many in our uncertain economic times, they lose it all, and someone else gets what they have worked so hard for. When *we* try to establish the work of *our* hands, we will fail—if not materially, then spiritually. Failure comes when we stewards take God's provision and act as if we own it and can dispose of it as we wish.

Don't ever go to work just for the money. Don't work for a paycheck; work for God. Paychecks come and go, but God remains, and only He can establish the work of our hands. Does this mean that only those in "full-time Christian service"—pastors and missionaries, mostly—can work for God? Not at all! God has created all of us with unique gifts, talents, skills, and opportunities. As Ephesians 2:10 notes, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." This encouragement is not just for pastors and missionaries—though they get to rejoice in it too—but for every Christian. We all have been created specifically by God to do specific good works, and many of them come in and through our work.

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To do those good works, we need to pursue things that glorify God and bring blessing to others, knowing He has prepared us to do them. Work is not about a paycheck—though a paycheck may be involved. Work is about finding and following through on God's unique vocational calling in our lives.

I realize that some people might think, if it's not about doing anything just to get a paycheck, how will we survive? We have obligations and responsibilities for ourselves and others. We need food,

shelter, and clothing, at a minimum, and our hectic twenty-first-century society tries to convince us we need a whole lot more. If our primary commitment is to focus on glorifying God and serving others—what we can give rather than what we can get—how will we meet our legitimate needs and responsibilities? Who will look out for us?

Again, remembering that God is our Provider allows us to do what others consider to be impossible. Jesus put it simply: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). The question is not whether God will bring His provision into our lives, but whether we have the faith to believe it—and act upon it.

Let me explain how this works—or, at least, how it’s worked in my life. When I first came to know Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord as a college student, I was bartending in a nightclub to make money. After I became a Christian, I realized that what I was doing was not pleasing to the Lord and it certainly wasn’t beneficial to our customers. I needed the money, but I wasn’t comfortable doing what I was doing. So, I prayed about what to do and sought the counsel and prayer of godly people I knew. Ultimately, I turned in my resignation even though I didn’t know what would happen next or how I would make the money I needed to live on.

After I resigned the Lord led me to return to my hometown and provided a better job with a company that allowed me to honor God and serve others in a positive way in my life. When I made the decision to resign, I was declaring to myself and the Lord that He was going to be my Provider and that I would look to Him to lead me and guide me. Proverbs 3:5–6 exhorts, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” I was on a crooked path and God helped make my paths straight.

While making a decision to honor God is not always easy, I can testify to the truth of Philippians 4:19, which says, “And my

God will meet all your needs, according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.” Therefore we can pray with confidence, “God, establish the work of our hands.”

ADDITIONAL INCOME

God our Provider has a plan to allow us to glorify Him and bless others. He promises to meet our needs as we labor in those things to which He has called us. Many times He provides through a regular paycheck. Sometimes He provides us with extra work or income. We might get a raise, a commission, a bonus, overtime pay, freelance work, a home business, refunds, or rebates. These blessings, just as much from the hand of God as our regular employment, seem to be serendipitous extras, to spend as we please. We forget that God has brought even these extras into our lives, and they belong to Him. As Deuteronomy 8:17–18 says, “You may say to yourself, ‘My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.’ But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”

Every financial blessing in life comes from God. It’s God’s blessing, God’s resource, God’s kindness, and God’s mercy. Yes, it can be used to benefit you, but perhaps God wants to do something else with it. Not long ago I was having breakfast with someone who was visiting from England. At the end of the breakfast we stood to leave and he said, “God is prompting me to give you \$100,” and he gave me a \$100 bill. Imagine that! Someone handing you an unexpected \$100 bill because God told him to do so. What would you do with an unexpected and extra \$100? Before I could even think about how I was going to use this money, the Lord spoke to my heart and said, “This isn’t for you, this is for someone else.” So I immediately told the man from England, “Thank you for this gift, but I want you to know that this isn’t for me. Someone else needs this more than I do, so I’m just going to keep it in my wallet until God shows me that person.

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Somewhere along the way I'm going to give this to someone and I will tell them that God had a man in England give this to me so that I could give this to them to meet a special need in their life."

After carrying the \$100 bill in my wallet for a number of weeks, I met a new couple at church one Sunday who had just moved from another state. They had two little children and a car, but they had no money, no job, no home, and no food. God immediately prompted me, "This is the couple, give them the \$100." I did and they were helped and blessed. Others in our church also showed them the love of Christ in tangible ways, and today they are active members in our church family.

Sometimes God brings us extra financial blessings not to heap them into our life, but so that they might flow through us. In other words, we need to learn to be *open-handed* in this tight-fisted world. In his book *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn says, "God does not always raise our income so that we can increase our standard of living, but rather increase our standard of giving."

Once, after I finished preaching a message on what the Bible teaches on finances and giving, a man came up to me with tears in his eyes. I asked him, "What's wrong?" He said, "Brian, all the days of my life I've been so proud of myself and my money-making abilities. I could squeeze money out of a rock. I've been great with money. But for the first time, I realize that my strength to make money comes from God. I'm seventy years old, and I never realized that God was the source of that strength. My life and my giving will be different starting today." That day this man learned what it meant to become open-handed in a tight-fisted world.

Shortly after my self-published *40 Day Spiritual Journey to a More Generous Life* Bible devotional became an unexpected best-

seller with 100,000 copies in print in just nine months, the NBC affiliate in my town called me, to do a news story about the book. When they came to my house to interview me the reporter asked, “So, do you think God wants everyone rich?” I said, “No, I don’t believe that.” She said, “Well, then, what do you believe?” I said, “I believe that God wants everyone to learn to become more generous with whatever God entrusts to them—whether they have little or much.” She then asked, “But didn’t this bestselling book make you rich?” I said, “No, it helped make us more generous!”

Just because we made a lot more money from the book sales didn’t mean God wanted us to spend this extra money on ourselves. My wife, Sandi, and I realized that God had given us more because there was more He wanted us to give to advance His kingdom.

No situation is too difficult for our Provider. A friend of mine in Georgia recently lost his job. He was well-known and respected in his industry. But a new CEO was named and almost overnight the new CEO eliminated my friend’s position and his entire department and outsourced all their duties to an outside vendor. After twenty-six years of faithfully serving this organization, my friend and many of his colleagues were out on the street. Just like that, his job was gone. I knew this was rough for him, and I kept in touch by email and phone. A year after he lost his job, I was in his town on a business trip and we got together for breakfast. He told me with wonder in his voice, “My job is gone, but God is not. God has provided. He’s provided side jobs, consulting income, and my wife’s employment to help meet our needs during this time. I’ve actually made more money this year than I’ve ever made in my life. I’m enjoying doing some things that I never had time to do.”

Another friend of mine unexpectedly lost his job and told me over lunch one day, “I made less money the year I was let go than I have made in years. I have a stay-at-home wife and five young daughters. But God provided for us again and again, even when we didn’t have any regular income. During the time I was out of work,

we learned that God was our true Provider.”

Of course, God can also establish our work by putting us in a position to succeed and then enabling us to do so. As Psalm 75:6–7 (TLB) says, “Promotion and power come from nowhere on earth, but only from God. He promotes one and deposes another.” The truth of this verse litters the pages of the Bible, which are filled with accounts of unlikely heroes and leaders who receive promotions to positions of great power and responsibility. Moses, a murderer and fugitive, rises to lead God’s people out of bondage. Joseph, left in a pit by his jealous brothers, is named Egypt’s second-in-command and saves the nation from famine. Daniel, a mere Jewish exile, earns the respect of a pagan emperor and becomes a government official.

God can do the same for us. Note that the verse does not say that our *supervisors* promote and empower us. Sometimes we feel we are at the mercy of our boss, who can be good or bad as a people manager. I’m not minimizing the fact that human relationships are important at work, but our Provider works in, through, and sometimes around them to accomplish His will. Our work relationships can be sticky and sometimes go in the wrong direction, but ultimately a sovereign God rules over these matters and places us where He wants us to be. Our Provider is our Promoter. When we realize that God has called us to do a job, we can experience peace, no matter what the office politics are.

Once I was in northeast India teaching a seminar and I mentioned the Bible was against bribery. Some Christians in the audience told me, “You don’t understand. Here in India that’s how we do it. Bribery is how you get a job.” When I explained God’s Word, they replied, “You’re an American; you don’t understand. This is how we do it in India.” I asked, “What do you mean?” They said, “Well, if a government job comes open, usually thousands of people apply for it. The only way to move your name up the list is to bribe somebody.”

What could I say that would convince them? This was how it worked in that part of India. Then an older gentleman, about sev-

enty years old, raised his hand and asked, “May I come forward?” Everybody became quiet as he took the microphone. The gentleman was a well-known, high-ranking government official. “How many of you know that I’ve been in government service all my life?” he asked. All the hands went up. Then he said, “All my life I’ve been asked, ‘Who did you pay? How much did you have to pay them to get your positions and promotions?’ I stand before you today to say that I have never paid anyone one rupee for my position. God has placed me where He wanted to place me. God must be your Source. He must be your Provider.”

No one said a word. They could push back against the American, but not against this senior saint, who quoted this verse: “He promotes one and deposes another.” God is the Promoter and Provider.

Yes, the workplace can sometimes be a difficult place of testing, of struggle, of failure. Even our best, most faithful efforts sometimes miss the mark, and no job is completely secure. Some of us feel hopeless, particularly those who have lost their jobs or fear that they might. It is to them that God says, “I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jeremiah 29:11).

One day a woman at my church in Milwaukee, a mother on welfare, asked for some money so she could rent an apartment. I said, “If we give you the money, what’s going to happen next month?” She said, “I can’t worry about next month.” I asked, “But do you have any work?” She answered, “No, I haven’t worked in years. I don’t have any skills. I’ve always been told I’m worthless and that I’m no good.” I replied, “Yes, you need money, but you need more than that. You need to see that you have dignity. You have worth. God created you.”

We gave this woman who thought so little of herself a computerized career test from Crown Financial Ministries that explores people’s values, skills, passions, and experiences. After getting the results, this woman had an epiphany. She looked up and exclaimed,

“I’m valuable! I’m worth something! I have skills, I have abilities, and I can do something with my life.” Within two weeks this woman had a job in a field that fit who she was. In two months she was off welfare and food stamps. Why? Because suddenly she understood that God had created her and that she could glorify God and bless others. She understood for the first time that she is “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14), and she praised her Provider and Promoter.

Understanding that God is the Source of every good thing, including our work and the ability to do it, so will we.

For groups, classes, or family discussions, choose the most interesting three to five questions to discuss together.

1. When you were a child or in your teen years, what was a job or career you wanted to have when you grew up?
2. What type of work and responsibilities were you doing ten, twenty, or thirty years ago?
3. What has been some of the most satisfying work or volunteering you’ve ever done?
4. If you ever lost a full-time job, share any special ways God provided for you during this time.
5. In this chapter, we said that a company is not your provider, but your employer. God is your true provider. When people grasp this truth, what difference do you think it will make in their life?
6. Do you feel God has “placed” you in your current position? If so, what are some reasons you feel God has placed you in this role?