

Foreword by **Dave Ramsey**

*New York Times* Best-Selling Author

**DAN MILLER**



**10<sup>th</sup>**  
Anniversary  
Edition  
*Revised &  
Expanded*

**DAYS**  
**TO THE WORK**  
**YOU LOVE**

Preparing for the New Normal



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**TO THE WORK  
YOU LOVE**

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# Author's Note

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The workplace has continued to be ravaged by changes since the first edition of *48 Days to the Work You Love*. We have seen the collapse of major financial institutions, auto manufacturers, real estate companies, and thousands of smaller companies around the world. But with those changes we've also seen a new phenomenon unfolding. Forced to look for work, many people have experienced a wake-up call, realizing they could choose or create work that is more than just a paycheck. They have discovered the thrill of work that blends their strongest talents, their personality traits, and their dreams and passions.

Yes, many of the old work models are being eliminated, never to return again. But no, there are not fewer opportunities; they just look different. These dramatic changes are creating new and exciting opportunities that would not have even been possible four or five years ago. The world has become flattened—meaning you can apply for positions with organizations that are not even in the same country where you choose to live. The chances of having a “job” with a guaranteed salary and benefits are diminishing, but it's never been easier to define new work models that allow for increased time, freedom, and income.

And no, the process for finding work that “fits” and is the application of our “calling” has not changed. As outlined in the original *48 Days to the Work You Love*, I believe that 85 percent of the process of determining the right career direction comes from looking inward—15 percent is the application to fitting work. That

process of looking inward has not changed. It's still a proven process of finding your unique talents, creating a clear focus, and then finding—or creating—the appropriate application for meaningful, fulfilling, purposeful, and profitable work.

Thus, with this revised edition we will look at the changing trends and the impact of recent changes on the workplace. The process of finding work that “fits” is not a one-time event. Whether you are eighteen or sixty-eight, fulfilling work requires an ongoing understanding of who we are and who we are becoming. Each transition point in life (even if unexpected and unwelcomed) gives us a fresh opportunity to realign our daily activities in order to embrace our continued maturity and our ability to contribute effectively.

I asked the 48 Days readers and listeners for suggestions for this revised edition. I received more than 165,000 words—more than two entire books if they were all included. The suggestions were insightful and many have been included in what you are about to read. (Many more are included in our additional resources at [www.48Days.com/worksheets](http://www.48Days.com/worksheets).) You'll see lots of real-life questions and solutions regarding the challenges and opportunities in today's world. Thank you so much to all of you who so willingly shared from your own life experience.

Prepare for the new normal.

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# Foreword

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In my work with those who are struggling financially, I hear an often repeated theme—the struggle to make fatiguing work produce adequate income. As you will see from the real testimonials in this book, *48 Days to the Work You Love* continues to be a popular resource for changing that equation. While it is not a book about finances, the natural result of having a clear understanding of Skills and Abilities, Personality Tendencies, and Passions is to match those with work that is fulfilling, meaningful—and *profitable*.

Dan’s insight and actual hands-on implementation of discovering and developing a calling has influenced thousands of lives, including mine and many of my team members. You see, implementation is the key. In the last few years I have been very inspired to be “wild at heart” and to have a “purpose-driven life” and am a huge fan of those culture-impacting books (by John Eldredge and Rick Warren, respectively). I am even more excited by *48 Days to the Work You Love* because it puts clothes on the concepts. You may be like me; I sometimes need someone to help me put the concepts into action. Knowledge without action is personified in the overeducated broke and broken who wander listlessly among us.

The following pages lead you to implement a step-by-step plan to show the world your purpose and your heart in a way that is most satisfying. It is satisfying not because you will never face adversity or make mistakes in the process nor because your career will zoom ahead and never falter. You will fall, you will err, and

your career will not take a perfect path. No, this material is satisfying and life-changing because you will have the tools to discover a key part of the plan God has for your life. This material is satisfying because when you begin discovering and *implementing* this plan, you will have a sense of God-given power that will propel you through adversity and errors. This new God-given power will give you the energy to recognize that even wrong turns can benefit the end result.

In the last several years, while meeting and spending time with people who have become inordinately successful, I have observed several common traits among them. Two of those traits stand out. One is they have a calling, which they have discovered and are implementing. The other is they have made mountains of mistakes in the process of becoming “successful.” The gleaming mountain of success is actually a pile of trash—a pile of the mistakes we have made. The difference between the successful and the troubled is not error-free living; it is that by discovering and implementing a life calling, the successful stand on their pile of trash while the troubled sit under theirs.

Most of us spend too much of our lives in paralyzing fear, shame, guilt, and dread when it comes to our work. Work has become the daily grind instead of the great adventure it should be. The beauty of this material is that as you implement it, you will gradually diminish your negative emotions and move into a thriving work life. As someone who lives this material every day, I know you will still experience doubt, fear, and mistakes. However, by finding and functioning in your calling, you will increasingly grow in confidence that you were put here to win in spite of those things, not without them.

I am excited for you because by opening these next few pages you are lighting a fire. The wood may be old and wet, but it has the capacity to become a raging bonfire! This is a book about implementation, *so do it!*

Dave Ramsey

Nationally Syndicated Radio Host

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# Introduction

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Very early in life we begin to determine what we want to be when we grow up. You may remember the childhood nursery rhyme: “Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Thief, Doctor, Lawyer, Merchant, Chief.” We add other titles to that and begin to imagine the life as a Firefighter, Teacher, Entrepreneur, or Dentist. But as we begin school and start to grow up, there is a subtle yet significant transition from “Who do I want to be?” to “What am I going to do?” We are defined and valued in America by what we do. Unfortunately, the path to *doing* something often bypasses the basic questions about *being* something.

This book will address “who do you want to be” as the starting point for “what do you want to do.” The more you know yourself the more confidence you can have about doing work that fits you. And the more you know about yourself, the more you recognize the freedom you have in choosing work that is meaningful, purposeful, and profitable.

Having the freedom to choose our work means we can choose from the popular models—employee, independent contractor, consultant, contingency worker, freelancer, temp, entrepreneur, self-employed, electronic immigrant worker, and more. Interestingly, the theory behind most governmental systems is that “the people” do not want freedom. They want guaranteed paychecks, medical benefits, workers’ compensation, fringe benefits, and a retirement plan. And in exchange for those outcomes, people give up the freedom to find or create work that is a blend of their talents, dreams,

and spiritual calling. For many people, work has become nothing more than a paycheck and benefits. It is an accepted stance to hate our jobs and to belittle the boss and the company, while patting ourselves on the back for being “responsible providers” for ourselves and families. Give up your freedom and you’ll have two cars in the garage, a fine house, a nice vacation once a year, and you will no longer have to suffer the agony of choice.

But wait a minute. Isn’t that what growing up is all about? Doesn’t every responsible person forget about dreams and passions in exchange for getting a paycheck? Absolutely not! Let me assure you that it doesn’t need to be this way at all. Each of us, no matter what age we are or what kind of work we’re doing now, can learn to bring the same excitement to our work that we experienced as a child at play. I believe each of us can pursue work that is a reflection of our best selves—a true application of our calling in life.

Recognizing the freedom we have to choose our work also brings with it the responsibility to accept the results of our work. The sense of fulfillment our work brings, the paycheck provided, and the assurance that our work is making the world a better place are all ours to choose. No one is trapped in today’s workplace. We get to choose.

For many of you, *48 Days to the Work You Love* will present a process of waking up the dreams, passions, and visions you had as a child. For many people, the mergers, downsizing, firing, forced retirement, and other forms of unexpected change in the workplace in the last few years have served as a clarion wake-up call for dreams that had gone dormant. Many people were given the opportunity to take a fresh look at “Who am I and why am I here?” The moment you express a desire for something more than repetitive, meaningless work, something more than simply punching the clock, the moment you realize that meaningful, purposeful, and profitable work really is a possibility, you’ve already taken an important step toward reawakening the dreams and passions you may have had as a child. All of a sudden, complacency and “comfortable misery” become intolerable. The idea of putting your calling on the shelf becomes intolerable. Not only do we have the

opportunity, we have the responsibility to spend our working hours in work that will elevate us to our highest calling and transform the world around us.

I was raised on a dairy farm in rural Ohio. My father was a farmer and the pastor of the small Mennonite church in our one-caution-light town, which gave me a unique perspective on the world. Fulfilling God's will meant honoring my father and mother, attending church at least three times a week, not swearing like my town buddies, and keeping my word. Going to ball games, swimming pools, proms, dances, and having free time was out. Fancy cars, TVs, current fashions, and other "worldly" possessions were absolutely forbidden. Work was a constant, seven-days-a-week activity. Cows needed to be milked twice a day, 365 days a year. Corn needed to be planted, hay needed to be mowed, and chicken coops needed to be cleaned.

I had little freedom to consider what kind of work I wanted to do or was called to do. Any wishes, desires, dreams, or callings were squeezed by the realities of life—work had to be done just to survive. The luxury of "enjoying" work was not discussed. Wasn't work only something we do to pass time through this earthly life until we reach our heavenly reward? Doesn't the Bible tell us that work was the resulting curse to Adam for eating from the tree of life?

"The ground is cursed because of you. You will eat from it by means of painful labor all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust." (Gen. 3:17–19)

Now, I understood that "sweat of your brow" part—only physical work mattered. Those people who "worked" in town in banks, offices, and shopping malls had soft jobs and were separated from real life. Yet, out in the fields nothing could stop my mind from wandering, imagining a world I had never seen. I wanted to

do more, go more, have more, and be more than anything I was seeing.

And as I continued to read Scripture on my own, I began to notice a new perspective on work. If work was a punishment for evil, why does the Bible continuously tell us to enjoy our work? Even Solomon in his most pessimistic moments told us “it is also the gift of God whenever anyone eats, drinks, and enjoys all his efforts” (Eccles. 3:13). In Colossians 3:23 we are told “whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men.” And God even seems to be promising work as a reward in eternity. Surprise! The saved will “build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards” and “will fully enjoy the work of their hands” (Isa. 65:21–22). And in Genesis 8:21 we find that after the flood, God removed that curse of the ground we read about in chapter three.

Although I was expected to continue in the family farming when I completed high school, my own desire for work that seemed a better fit for me led me to college to broaden my options. The disadvantages of a poor, legalistic upbringing were helpful in forcing me to look beyond familial expectations for a more fulfilling life. I began a path of relentless personal study alongside academic requirements for multiple degrees in psychology and religion. I wanted to see if I could blend a life committed to God with a life of meaningful work.

And what an exciting journey that has been. Along the way I worked as an adjunctive therapist in a psychiatric hospital, taught psychology at the university level, sold cars, owned a four-thousand-member health and fitness center, built an auto accessories business, painted houses, mowed lawns, counseled at a church, ran a cashew vending machine business, and sold books and informational products on the Internet.

But those experiences gave me the preparation for working with people going through their own inevitable career changes. For the last twenty years I’ve had the privilege of working as an author, speaker, and career coach. The foundational principles you will read in this book come from personal experience and many years

of studying and coaching with those who, like myself, have found their calling.

## Getting Started

*48 Days to the Work You Love* outlines a new process of looking at what you are going to be when you grow up. How has God uniquely gifted you in (1) *Skills and Abilities*, (2) *Personality Tendencies*, and (3) *Values, Dreams, and Passions*? From these areas you will see clear patterns from which to make career and job decisions. These patterns create a compass, providing a sense of continuity in the midst of inevitable job changes and workplace unpredictability. Looking inward provides 85 percent of the process of finding proper direction; 15 percent is the application to career choices.

Work is not a curse of God but one of the benefits of living on this earth. Finding *the work you love* is not a self-serving goal; *it is a required component of fulfilling your true calling.*

You may be asking, why *48 Days*? Well, the Bible is quite clear that God considers 40 days to be a spiritually significant time period. In fact, in the Bible, many times when God wanted to prepare people for something better, He took 40 days.

- Noah's life and the world were transformed by 40 days of rain.
- Moses was a different man after spending 40 days on Mount Sinai.
- The Israelite spies scouted the Promised Land for 40 days.
- Elijah ran more than two hundred miles in 40 days on one meal to get to a place where he could hear from God again.
- Goliath spent 40 days challenging the Israelite army while God prepared David to confront him.
- The people of Nineveh were transformed in 40 days after God's challenge to change their ways.
- Jesus was empowered for ministry by spending 40 days in the desert.
- The disciples were transformed by spending 40 days with Jesus after the Resurrection.

- There are 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter (not counting Sundays).

I'm giving you eight free days in the process to create your own plan. Take a break on Sundays and a couple of Saturdays. Don't knock yourself out; just stay committed to this time frame to avoid the usual procrastination.

The next 48 Days can transform your life. And yes, I do believe that 48 Days is an adequate time frame in which to assess where you are uniquely gifted, identify your strongest characteristics, get the advice of competent advisors, consider the options, choose the best path for meaningful and fulfilling work, create a plan of action, and ACT. (*See [www.48Days.com/worksheets](http://www.48Days.com/worksheets) for the famous 48 Days Schedule to walk you through your own 48 Days plan.*)

This is a book where you get to tell the ending. You get to decide if the main character is a victim of circumstances, unable to rise above the oppressive forces of his or her upbringing, current family expectations, and the limitations allowed by the government and the company. But you also get to write the ending where the main character designs a life complete with work that matters, has money far beyond personal needs, builds relationships that nurture the soul, and leaves a legacy for the rest of history. While it may not be finding a white horse and riding off into the sunset, it's actually better. You get to choose.

*Believing that I have been created with a purpose,  
I commit the next 48 Days to a new clarity  
and a plan of action for finding—or creating—work that  
is meaningful, fulfilling, and profitable.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 1

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# What Is Work?

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*The master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and his play, his labor and his leisure, his mind and his body, his information and his recreation, his love and his religion. He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence at whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him he is always doing both.*

—JAMES MICHENER

Is work that necessary evil that consumes the time between our brief periods of enjoyment on the weekends? Is it primarily a method of paying the bills and showing responsibility? Or a way to prove to our parents that the college degree was a reasonable investment? Or the shortest path to retirement? Or is it more?

It seems some people believe that work is a trade-off for enjoyment. That work is only done to produce a paycheck. And here's another common myth: that the more income a person makes, the higher the stress level. No, when work and passion are combined, the money flows much easier. You may be making \$10 an hour and be very stressed, or you may be making \$123,000 a year and love what you're doing. The issue is not how much money is being generated but rather, how much does the work "fit" you.

The *Oxford Dictionary* defines *work* as:

1. Activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result,
2. Mental or physical activity as a means of earning income; employment,
3. Employment, as in some form of industry, especially as a means of earning one's livelihood, or
4. The place where one works.<sup>1</sup>

We seem to contrast this definition of work with play. Surely we can escape work to spend time in play.

The same dictionary defines *play* as:

1. Engage in (a game or activity) for enjoyment,
2. Amuse oneself by engaging in imaginative pretense, or
3. Be part of a team, especially in a specified position, in a game.

To work is to carry out the duties of a job; to play is to do something enjoyable. But what if you found something you truly enjoyed that also supplied your needed income? Would work and play actually become one and the same? Is it unreasonable to expect our work to be an enjoyable activity? Is that really such an impossible idea? What would happen to your plans for “retirement” if you were doing work that was meaningful and profitable now? Isn't our idea of retirement to be able to quit this stinking job and be able to do something enjoyable every day? What a novel idea.

People often ask me if I'm living the life I'm talking about. And I tell them to come spend a couple of days with me to then decide for themselves. You can see the schedule of events here ([www.48Days.com/liveevents](http://www.48Days.com/liveevents)). On the back-side of our property we have an old barn that we've redeemed and converted into my office, an event center, and guest quarters. My commute in the morning is free of traffic lights, horns, bad roads, and angry people fighting to get to their place of work. Outside my office window I see a waterfall and bird feeders that attract colorful birds and wild turkeys all year long. I also see the platform for

a zip-line we put up a few years ago that runs 350 feet from my office down over the nature trail, past my little red barn and right to the back door of our house. My grandchildren are free to come and play at any time.

Finding or creating the work environment that fits you is a very individualized process. Depending on your personality you could easily be bored with my workspace. I think, dream, imagine, and write as my work. If you are a social, gregarious person, my work environment would likely make you feel lonely and isolated. That's the beauty of knowing how we can shape our choices to fit what we know about ourselves. You get to choose what blends your talents, personality, and passions.

What if we check out a couple other words that are thrown in with work and play? *Leisure* is “time when you are not working: time when you can do whatever you want to do.”<sup>2</sup> The word comes from a term in an old French dialect—*leissor*, which means “permission,” or literally “to be allowed.”

Let's look at how our common phrases confirm that “work” is something we have to do, while “play” is something we get to do. “Thank God it's Friday” reinforces the idea that at last we can escape the evil of work and do something we truly enjoy. “Oh no, it's Monday” clearly reinforces the message from the Mamas and the Papas' 1966 song that we “can't trust that day.” Our anticipation of retirement implies that finally we can quit this thing called work and spend our time doing only what we enjoy.

But that raises the question: What would you call your daily activity if you actually enjoyed it? Would it cease to be “work”?

If the only goal of our working is to accumulate enough money to quit working, then it confirms the picture that work is just a bitter pill to be endured until the moment you can escape it. But as you move into work of your choosing and design, work that integrates your strongest talents and gifts, you will experience a joy not commonly connected with “work.” And you'll find that your desire to quit and move into the blank state of retirement will diminish significantly.

The definition of *retire* is . . .

1. to stop a job or career because you have reached the age when you do not need or want to work anymore
2. to withdraw from action or danger
3. to leave a place, position, or way of life and go to a place of less activity, or
4. to withdraw from usual use or service.<sup>3</sup>

Isn't that what is implied when people talk about retirement? *When can I stop this stupid job and start doing what I really enjoy?* Do you really want to stop engaging in daily activities? Or withdraw from service? Instead, why not expect enjoyment in your daily work?

The fruits of a fulfilling life—happiness, confidence, enthusiasm, purpose, and money—are mainly by-products of doing something we enjoy, with excellence, rather than things we can seek directly.

In his popular book *The Millionaire Mind*, Thomas J. Stanley, Ph.D., looks at the characteristics of America's wealthiest people, attempting to identify their distinguishing traits. Is it their IQ, GPA, college major, family's opportunity, or business selection? Surprisingly, none of these topics seems to predict their extraordinary success. The one characteristic the millionaires did have in common is *they were all doing something they loved*. Dr. Stanley concludes, "If you love, absolutely love what you are doing, chances are excellent that you will succeed."<sup>4</sup>

Our early ideas of work tend to view it as something less than desirable and enjoyable. Tom, a sharp twenty-seven-year-old, came to my office wanting confirmation that he was on the right track. He had recently graduated from college (having finished the seven-year plan) and had taken a sales position with an office-equipment company. Each morning he put on his suit and made his calls. The company loved him, but he was bored beyond belief. I asked him why he had taken this route, and his reply relayed a common perception. Tom said that he had a great time in college—traveling, snowboarding, attending ball games, and spending time with his friends. After graduation, he felt it was time to "grow up" and

become part of the “real world.” He assumed that meant getting a job he hated to prove his responsibility.

I laughed and asked who had sold him that bill of goods. We looked carefully at his skills, personality traits, values, dreams, and passions. Today, Tom is co-owner of a snowboard shop in Breckenridge, Colorado. On a moonlit night you might catch him coming down a hill, testing one of his new designs.



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### **Abused Wife Syndrome**

No, this excerpt is not really about abused wives, but I had a client use that term recently in describing his repeated return to the unfulfilling work of his professional training. In his mind, there was a strikingly similar pattern. He would break away from the work he despised for something more rewarding, experience a challenge or setback, and return to the dreaded work, knowing it was where he could make the most predictable income.

Do you do your work only because of its paycheck? Do you long to leave for something more enjoyable? Have you tried another path only to return to what is more familiar? Many people often get trapped in these patterns of returning to negative, abusive situations. The emotions and self-esteem issues there may be complicated and confusing. However, the stakes are dramatically lessened with a job.

A job should not define who or what you are. You should be able to leave today and it not change the overall purpose or direction of your life. Your calling is a much larger concept than what you do daily to create income. Work opportunities can come and go—the direction of your life should remain constant.

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## Why Do We Work?

In asking this question, I typically get the following responses:

- to pay the bills
- for food, clothing, and shelter
- because of others' expectations
- to combat boredom
- for self-worth
- for social stimulation
- because it's a place to go

I encounter a lot of people who leave their traditional jobs because they want to do something more significant. One woman, who has just resigned from her \$74,000-per-year job, said she wanted to do something “noble.” Many are saying they want to make a difference, to make the world a better place, and to do something with *spiritual* significance.

Now there's another word worth checking out—*spiritual*, meaning . . .

1. of or relating to a person's spirit
2. concerned with religious values<sup>5</sup>

You mean normal work does not connect our mind, spirit, and temperament? Perhaps we can create a definition of *work* that includes more than just completing duties for a paycheck. What if we were able to create a model for work that included work, play, leisure, and spiritual components?

Would it be unreasonable to expect to find fulfilling, enjoyable, spiritually significant, income-producing work?

In his book *Prayer*, Richard Foster says, “The work of our hands and of our minds is acted out prayer, a love offering to the living God.”<sup>6</sup> Kahlil Gibran adds, “Work is love made visible.”<sup>7</sup> Is that how you feel about your work—that it's a prayer offering to God? That it is a direct expression of how you love others? Or are you thinking that perhaps God looks the other way when you go to work?

How is it possible for our work to be a form of prayer? This may seem challenging as long as we think of prayer as something

we do only on our knees with folded hands and closed eyes. But if we recognize prayer as a time of being present with God, then it follows that our work can be a form of engaging our hearts and spirits in a way that places us in His presence. Anything less would be a questionable use of our time, talent, and resources.

We live in a time that gives us the luxury of seeing the benefits of work that go beyond just providing a paycheck. Money is ultimately never enough compensation for investing one's time and energy. There must be a sense of purpose, meaning, and accomplishment. Remember psychologist Abraham Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs:

1. First, I need *food, water, air, rest*, etc. (Basic physiological needs)
2. Second, I need *safety* and *security*. (Do I have stability and structure?)
3. I need to *belong* and feel *loved*. (Does anybody like me?)
4. Next comes *self-esteem*. (Do I feel competent and appreciated?)
5. Lastly, I need *self-actualization*. (Am I doing what I'm suited for/talented at?)<sup>8</sup>

Most of us aren't worried about finding food tonight, but we are concerned about if we are spending our time doing something meaningful. Having a job that provides nothing more than safety and security is not very fulfilling.




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### **Crushed Spirit**

I recently saw a sixty-one-year-old gentleman who lost his job nine months ago. When a long period of unemployment has passed, I always suspect more life issues to be lurking in the sidelines. Sure enough, his wife left him four months ago, his daughter ("the joy of my life") got married and moved away five months ago, his investments are now worth less than half of what they were three years ago, his place of

employment for thirty-six years let him go with a small severance package, he's unconnected at his church, and feels "rejected on all sides." He made the last mortgage payment three weeks ago on his dream house that now must be sold to settle the divorce before he moves into an apartment in town.

Where do we go from there? Proverbs 18:14 tells us "a man's spirit can endure sickness, but who can survive a broken spirit?" Or in the Living Bible "what hope is left?"

Each area of our lives requires us to make deposits of success. Tiny withdrawals with no deposits will lead to physical, spiritual, and emotional bankruptcy in relationships, jobs, and finances. In times of crisis the area of most pain gets the most attention, but by making extra deposits in other areas, we can bounce back to success in our most depleted accounts.

My advice: Set aside time for vigorous physical exercise. Walk three miles four or five times a week—the feeling will help release tension and stimulate creativity. Seek out an inspiring mentor. Much of the success of Alcoholics Anonymous has been from attendees having another person to call in the lowest times. Read inspirational material at least two hours daily. Volunteer for a worthy cause—helping someone else in need is a great way to ease the inward pain. Get a job even if it's not your dream job or a great career move. Deliver pizzas or work in the garden department at Home Depot to get moving in a positive direction while you continue to build for long-term success.

Unfortunately, some losses are irretrievable and some pain is debilitating. If you recognize too many withdrawals in your life, take drastic measures to stop the hemorrhaging today!

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## How Do We Choose Work?

The opportunities in today's work environment are endless. While in previous generations children adopted the careers handed down by their parents, today's youth have little or no guidance to direct them onto a work path. They enter the workplace with little work experience and little knowledge of varied careers, leading to poorly made life-directing decisions. Often, a career decision is made with less thought and planning than is put into deciding where to go for spring break. When I asked a young college graduate how he chose criminal justice as his major, he said, "On the first day of college they sent all of us freshmen into a big room. Then they announced, 'If you are going into accounting, follow this lady down the hall. Advertising majors, go this way.' I looked down the list [of majors], closed my eyes, and hit the page with my finger. Criminal justice became my chosen field."

Don't laugh. It's a frequently used process. Who knows how to choose the right major? Many business administration majors discovered during their junior year that the quickest way to graduation was by declaring that major. I'm now starting to see graduates with degrees in university studies. Was it just too challenging to decide on any focus? Next we'll have a degree in "showing up." That's why ten years after graduation, 80 percent of college graduates are working in something totally unrelated to their college major. And that's okay. College is a broadening experience that rarely forces anyone into a narrow tunnel of no escape. You can change course several times in a lifetime without feeling like you're derailed or starting over, if you have a sense of calling to act as a constant compass. More on that in chapter 3.




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### **"The Shallow Waters of Avarice"**

One question on my coaching request form is "Briefly describe your current work situation." Here is a response from a thirty-three-year-old guy:

"Antithetical to my personal and professional expectations. Unfulfilling on multiple levels: Lack

of meaning and purpose; a myopic pursuit of the almighty dollar; a parasitic and never-ending voyage into the shallow waters of avarice.”

Wow. What a powerful and eloquent statement of being off track and realizing that money is never enough compensation for investing one’s time and energy.

He continued: “Because of the necessity and immediacy of my situation . . . I took the path of least resistance, which has led me down a perilous pike of disappointment and despair. As a direct result of our financial obligations, I absolved myself of the freedom to pursue my dreams for the oppressive restraints of debt.” Feeling trapped by the realities of life, he felt blocked from any attempts at following his true passions.

Fortunately, new possibilities are possible. We mapped out a process for getting an additional degree and an immediate plan for expression of his unique writing skills. He can hike, run a marathon, study fossils with his kids, and get involved in a book club. Life does not have to be put on hold. There are always ways to make deposits of success in areas deemed important. Few obstacles exist beyond those in our minds if we are creative in looking for solutions. And remember to enjoy the journey, starting with today. Success is not a future event—it is the *progressive realization of worthwhile goals*. Thus, either you are successful today or you are not.

Look for opportunities to rise above the “shallow waters of avarice” today.

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Generational expectations still do play a large role in many career decisions. Historically each generation has been expected to be more educated and wealthier than the preceding one. Many in preceding generations had the finest degrees, invested in rapidly growing companies, and banked millions. Now what are their offspring supposed to do to top that? Or here’s a situation: What

if the son of a cardiologist is really gifted as a carpenter? Can we encourage that young man to be excellent as a carpenter, or will he be railroaded into a “professional” career?

Several years ago I saw a young surgeon who had gone to Harvard Medical School, as had his father and grandfather. He had the finest cars and opportunities along the way. And yet something was amiss. By the time he came to see me, he was shooting heroin into the heels of his feet (the heels being the only parts of his body where he had not abused the veins). He had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital in an attempt to save his life. While working with me, he expressed his childhood dream of driving a truck.

Today he works as an emergency room physician on the weekends and is still able to make a significant income. During the week he drives a snack delivery truck. He has moved out to the country and is getting his life in order.

Proverbs 22:6 says, “Teach a youth about the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” That verse has been distorted to justify cramming spiritual principles onto impressionable children to make certain their theology matches that of their parents. And to force a child to move up academically and socioeconomically from the parents. A truer reading of the original text might be: “Train up a child in the way that he is bent . . .” The challenge of parenting is to discover how God has uniquely gifted this child and how the parent can help the child excel in that area. Thus there will be times when the son of a surgeon will be most gifted as a truck driver or carpenter or musician or missionary. Well-intentioned parents, teachers, pastors, and others in positions of influence can easily misdirect an impressionable child if external opportunities are the only criteria for career selection. The power of confidence in career choice comes from looking inward for the alignment of personal characteristics, not from looking outward to where “opportunities” lie.

Here are some more misdirected influences in choosing a career:

- What will be in the most demand? With entire industries becoming obsolete in four to five years, how can we accurately predict the jobs of the future?
- What are the most “godly,” “humanitarian,” or “socially or environmentally responsible” careers? While honorable, using these as external criteria can misdirect a person from doing what is a proper “fit.”
- What is the most secure? *Security* is a slippery concept in today’s work environment. Little security is found in any company or job. The only security is in understanding yourself—that will provide a compass for navigating the inevitable changes.
- How can I achieve position, status, and power? This is likely to be an elusive path, leading to rapid burnout.
- Where can I get the greatest income? (Similar to the previous bullet point.) If you look first at the money, it will likely stay just outside your grasp.
- What is advertised in online job bulletins? Probably the worst of all influences, it has nothing to do with your uniqueness or a proper alignment of your calling.

None of these will help you build a *life plan*. Even as we focus on the work aspect of our lives, be very aware that getting a job is only one tool for creating a meaningful life.

Better questions to ask regarding a career or job choice would be:

- What was I born to do?
- What would be my greatest contribution to others?
- What do I really love to do (and when I’m doing it, time just flies by)?
- What are the recurring themes that I find myself drawn to?
- How do I want to be remembered?

When we are not true to ourselves, to our unique God-given characteristics, we lose the power of authenticity, creativity, imagination, and innovation. Our life becomes performance-based, setting the stage for compromise in all other areas of our lives.

## Countdown to Work I Love

1. Who gave you your first job? What kind of job was it? How much money did you make?
2. From looking at your work life so far, what has been of the greatest value or worth?
3. If your job changes, does your *calling* change?
4. Do you think your current job will exist five years from now?
5. What would be the key characteristics of an ideal job or career?
6. When you daydream, what do you see yourself doing?
7. What have been the happiest, most fulfilling moments in your life?
8. If nothing changed in your life in the next five years, would that be okay?