

## **Heigh-ho, Heigh-ho, It's off to Work We Go**

by Pam Pugh

A butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker. A preacher, lawn raker, Los Angeles Laker. Who of these is the most important? Whose work is the most significant? Do we believe that some work is more valuable than others, that there is a hierarchy of vocations?

Unfortunately, sometimes we do. And we might even unconsciously take this approach in the Christian world. One church I know places such a high premium on a Bible college education church that framed photographs of high school seniors headed to there dot the church's back wall. Some of those pictured left their college days thirty years ago. Still, there they hang, forever young, celebrated because they attended at least a semester of Bible college. Such an education certainly has import for many reasons. But in this case, the church teaches that professional ministry is God's highest calling, and steers as many of its students as possible to go that way—in some cases, frankly, with disastrous results.

Ministry *is* a high calling, and I appreciate those who have answered it. But what about teaching, waiting tables, creating beauty in a home, managing a dental office, running trains, or coaching soccer? What is the purpose of some of these callings? —to earn a living, to be sure; to be salt and light in the world, certainly; to earn money to fund charities and ministries, of course. But is there another purpose for work? For your work?

When God established His creation, he set man and woman in it and told them to be fruitful and multiply and to subdue the earth. Being fruitful and multiplying is a pleasant occupation in itself, but God didn't intend only for them to create offspring. Consider that He meant them to fill the earth with families, laws, governments, schools, churches, and so on. And when He instructed them to subdue the earth, he meant to master the natural world—to grow food and flowers, use wheels, build bridges, create art. Some call this approach the cultural mandate. Writers such as Nancy Pearcey, Dennis Bakke, Patrick Morley and others have expanded on the idea.

It seems reasonable that all work that brings about the basics of food, shelter, clothing; or recreation or beauty—exists as a necessary function to the smooth running of God's created world. To explain insurance in the doctor's office, to keep a home or car running smoothly— each is worthy in itself, in addition to and beyond the importance of earning money to live and to give, and being salt and light. When Lydia became a believer as related in Acts 16, no one told her to stop selling purple cloth—because in her profession

as a dealer in fabric she provided an important service to her society.

God is at work in the world enlarging His kingdom, yes; but also providing workers to keep His creation running smoothly. What if a pastor had time to visit members of his congregation at their jobs? The message would be: your work is important—how you spend much of your day matters, because what you're doing is part of God's working in the world. Next time we're tempted to think one line of work is on a higher rung of the ladder than another, let's remember the skill it took to design that ladder and nail it together. For Prime Time America, this is Pam Pugh.