**Class 10, Finding a Job: Putting First Things First**

Good morning, Let’s PRAY.

**I. Introduction**

One of the oddities of modern, Western civilization is that for many people, the topic of this class is a live issue. For most of human history—and for many people alive today—work’s just something you do to survive, and there aren’t really options to consider. You just do what mom or dad do, end of story.

So let’s just pause to observe the uniqueness of even answering this question—and recognize the hubris that can accompany even choosing to ask it. The idea that I somehow *deserve* a great job that does all I want it to do isn’t just unrealistic—it’s an idea that’s beyond the comprehension of most people who have lived on this planet.

And yet, for many of us, we *do* have choices to make. We not only have choices about different jobs that are available to us—but we have choices about different careers to pursue that, ideally, will open up those job options. Beyond that, with the modern, U.S. workplace evolving as it has across the last century or so, choosing a job—and even choosing a career—is likely something we’ll need to do several times in our lives.

Choosing a job is rarely easy. It’s difficult to find a good match for our skills, desires, and needs, and it is complicated by the fact that more people than ever are competing for the same jobs. We may find at some point in our lives that our skills are no longer valued, and we’ll need to learn something new to stay competitive. Beyond that, choosing a job is a key piece of how we can seize the workplace as part of our discipleship of Jesus. So how can we choose a job in a way that helps us serve him? That’ll be our topic for the rest of the day. One question you might have is how you can serve the Lord *during* a job hunt. In particular, while you’re unemployed. We won’t be tackling that question today—but will get to it later in the course.

**II. Getting Our Priorities Straight**

The first thing we need to keep in mind is that, like all of life, choosing a job is something we do under the Lordship of Christ, if we’re a Christian. As we’ve said many times in this class, no matter who your earthly boss is, you’re ultimately working for Jesus. Colossians 3:23, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.” And that’s as true about finding a job as it is about working a job.

Choose a job wisely and you’ll substantially improve your ability to be faithful to Christ in that job. Choose a job foolishly and you’ll put some very real, unnecessary obstacles in your way. And of course the real challenge is that sometimes those obstacles don’t become evident until years after you’ve made job decisions—decisions that can be quite difficult to undo.

So what does it look like to choose a job wisely? The answer is that we need to begin with God. As trite as this may sound at first, the fact is that most Christians *don’t* begin their job searches with God and God’s priorities; they begin with themselves.

Here’s what I mean. Think of your decision-making process as a pyramid, wide and strong at the bottom, pointy and crumbly at the top. A pyramid is stable as long as the strong part remains on the bottom and the weak part remains on the top—that is, when we base our lives and decisions on our highest, strongest priorities.

And what’s the right order? Well, it goes like this: Obeying and Loving God on the bottom, Serving Others in the middle, and Pleasing Ourselves on the top.



This reflects the way Jesus taught us to think as well. The greatest commandment (the base of the pyramid of our lives) is to “love the Lord your God.” After that? To “love your neighbor as yourself.” This means that “self” comes last. Self sits at the top of the pyramid — not because of its importance but because of its weakness. It simply can’t bear the weight of a life created to honor God.

So what does it mean, practically, to keep God’s priorities as the base of our decision making when searching for a job? Let’s walk through six basic questions you want to ask whenever you’re considering a new job—and I’ve ordered them quite deliberately.

The first three questions are “must-haves.” They’re the questions where you really need a “yes” to even consider the job. The questions at the base of the pyramid. The last three questions are what we call “nice-to-haves.” They’re the questions that belong higher up on the pyramid — the things that are great if you can get them but aren’t necessary.

**III. The “Must-Haves”**

***1. Can this job glorify God?*** This isn’t nearly as complicated a question as it might seem at first since *every* job that’s not inherently sinful *can* glorify God. It *can* show off how amazing he is. So no, you can’t work as a hit man, a drug runner, or staff an abortion clinic. Work that’s inherently sinful dishonors God and is forbidden for Christians. Of course, things aren’t always quite that clear! Lines can be blurry, and people’s consciences will feel differently about different lines of work. In general, though, it’s important to start here. We want to do work that glorifies and honors God.

***2. Does this job permit me to live a godly life?*** In other words, will this job allow me to obey God in every area of my life, or will it mean I have to sacrifice obedience in other areas? Will this job allow me to love my spouse well and parent my children well? Will this job force me to default on another biblical obligation? Will it allow me to obey God by having a rich relationship with a local church? If a job necessarily means I’ll have to disobey God in other areas of life, then in all likelihood it’s a job I shouldn’t be considering.

A few practical things to think about:

1. Will this job allow me to be faithful in my other assignments?

Some of this comes down to the “work-life balance” question that we looked a few weeks ago. But it’s not just about time. Does job leave me the mental energy to engage with my family, my neighbors, my friends, and so forth. If it doesn’t, is that OK for a period of time? And how long is too long for a job to cause the assignments Jesus has given me in other areas of life to feel unsustainable?

1. Will this job allow me to be involved in my local church?

This doesn't mean that all things church-related are necessarily more important than all things employment-related.  For example, I know someone who stopped being an elder so he could make partner at his law firm.  And the elders all thought this was a very wise decision.

Why?  Because his goal in making partner wasn’t the prestige of the role but the ability that position gave him to serve God better in the long-run. It gave him a job where he could provide for his family, where he could be generous with others, and it created stability so he could serve the church well in the future.

But while things at church are not "necessarily" more important than things in the workplace, a wise life is nearly always a life centered on the local church. A typical Christian will serve Jesus better over the course of his life if he prioritizes his ability to invest in the local church when making career decisions, not the other way around. Why is that?

* A good church is harder to find than a good job.  A good church being defined not only as a church that is solid doctrinally, but a church where you can grow well, where your family can grow well, and where you are on-board enough with their approach to ministry that you can happily serve there for many, many years.  So moving to a city primarily because there's a good job there and then finding the best church around is probably the opposite way to think about this decision since the good church is the scarcer commodity.
* Investing in a church mainly means investing in relationships.  And those relationships take time to develop. Which means that the longer you’re at your church, the more fruit you can bear through those relationships. Most people in this room will make better use of their lives if they’re members of just one or two churches through their adult years rather than moving every 3-5 years. Not everyone, but most people. That stability can be a huge blessing to you, your family and your church. Now, this is a generality and not a rule. So it might not be true for you. But simply because it doesn’t fit the decisions you’ve made to date doesn’t necessarily mean it’s *not* true for you; it may be that it *is* true for you and you’re not spending your life very wisely. So strongly consider the cost to your service in the local church when you decide to move for a job.
1. Do the temptations of the job reinforce my besetting sins?

Every job is going to bring it’s own unique set of temptations. The question is, are you the right person to bear those temptations? I’ll give you a few examples:

* In some jobs, you get paid for fame. It’s all about making a name for yourself. That could be in careers that are obvious—like being a movie star or a recording artist. It could be in careers that are less obvious, like being a research professor or a writer or some areas of law. And yet as Christians, our goal is to make a name for Christ. Are you the kind of person who’s built to handle the tension between those two goals?
* In some jobs, you get paid for dishonesty. Take a lot of sales jobs or journalism, for example. Theoretically an honest salesperson or journalist can develop a reputation for honesty and turn it to an advantage. But often, the market doesn’t have that long of an attention span. How tempted are you to allow someone to be misled, even if you haven’t said an outright lie?
* In some jobs, you get paid to be a savior. Lots of jobs in politics work this way, or in healthcare, or emergency response. You go in, you save the day, and you feel awesome. Great! But again—there’s some tension between that and a Christian’s desire to do everything for the glory of God.

You get the point. No matter what field you’re in, it’s probably a good idea to spend time this afternoon writing down what temptations are inherent to your profession. Then sit down with a friend and compare that with where you tend to struggle.

***3. Does this job provide for my needs and allow me to be a blessing to others?*** Scripture commands us to be hard at work in order to provide for ourselves and our families and be generous toward those in need. We place this in the must-haves because it really is not an optional characteristic. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 5:8, “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Wow! That’s pretty clarifying, isn’t it? If you choose a job that uses your gifts but doesn’t pay enough to provide the basics for yourself and your family, the Bible says you’re living in sin. Believe it or not, money is a must-have.

Far from feeling bad about caring about money, this should be one of the primary reasons we work. If you’re the primary provider for your family, you should consider your ability to make money at your job in light of the current and future responsibilities that you'll have. Some of you here need to be pushed from a job that prioritizes comfort or enjoyment over the money you could make with your skills. And, some of you here need to prioritize "getting ahead" in your career. Not in a worldly way, but in a godly way that will position you to serve your family in an expensive area.

If you’re in a job that doesn't provide adequately for your needs: you should ask; 1) Am I striving for a lifestyle that is unrealistic given my income-earning potential? If you’re not, you need to ask a second question: 2) Why am I so obviously underemployed and what can I do about it?

***Questions?***

**IV. The “Nice-to-Haves”**

***4. Does this job have potential to improve me as a person?*** In many ways, this is a continuation of the last question. My job *may* be able to provide for my needs and allow me to be generous in *this* station of life—when I’m single with no car, no mortgage, and no kids. But how will I be able to obey 1 Timothy 5:8 once I’ve got a family? Quite simply, by being worth more then than you are now. And the main way that’s going to happen is if your job teaches you and shapes you and develops you.

The main thing to keep in mind here is that, over time, you want to build a skill that’s in demand. Seek to become an expert at something, where your value isn’t in how much time you put into your job—but in your ability to make decisions that others can’t make. On the other hand, if you’re just selling your time, the only way to increase your income is to work more hours. And eventually that comes to a breaking point.

If you have a skill that’s in-demand, you’ll likely get paid more—and as a Christian you can use that money for great good. You’ll be able to bargain for more flexibility in your job. You’ll likely be able to resist moving as frequently. You’ll be able to be more effective in your job—which should in some way be serving others, whether it’s making soap or educating kids or serving food.

Is your employer simply squeezing all the value they can get out of you? Or do they have a vested interest in improving your skill so you’re more valuable. There’s nothing morally wrong with a company simply juicing you for value. It’s just that a job like that isn’t going to position you to serve Christ better in the future.

***5. Does this job use my gifts and talents?*** There’s nothing wrong with working in a job that doesn’t use all God made you to be. In fact, it’s inevitable that some of what you’re good at is going to be left behind. But if you *can* work in a job that uses your gifts and talents, that’s a wonderful thing. After all, the Bible is full of stories where God equips people to do specific work for him. Bezalel was specially gifted to build the tabernacle, Joseph to administrate Pharaoh’s kingdom, Daniel to govern, and David to be a warrior-poet.

Of course, sometimes God does exactly the opposite: he shows off his power by putting is in places precisely *because* we have no idea what we’re doing. Think of Moses protesting to God because of how poorly he spoke, for example. Or Gideon watching his army be whittled down to a sliver before God let him attack. So don’t assume that God can *only* use you where you’re skilled. He can do whatever he wants.

One question to consider that we often overlook is whether this job values the qualities in you that Christ also values. Christ values things like servant-leadership, generosity, humility, peace-making, honesty, family-focus, and so forth. How wonderful it is when you find a job that also values these things! Because, after all, the longer you serve Jesus, the more these things will describe you. There’s nothing necessarily wrong with working in a culture that despises honesty, humility, and your family. But why put yourself through that if you can afford not to? In our class on gender in the workplace, our main message was “be who you are.” Well, the same is true here. If possible, look for a job where you can be who you are in Christ—and where who you are in Christ is good for business.

***6. Is this job something I* want *to do?*** This can be a very dangerous question to ask, given how our culture idolizes it. So let me clear away the dangerous bit first. You need to have realistic, biblical expectations about the level of satisfaction and fulfillment a job will bring. Remember: in love, God cursed your work to futility, and no job in this life is going to break out of that curse. The world tells us that finding a job you enjoy is *the* key aim in life. But the Bible says nothing of the sort. Instead, listen to Paul’s very prosaic goals for your job in 1 Thessalonians 4: “We urge you, brothers…to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.” (v. 11-12) No “make a dent in the universe” or “do what you love” there.

And yet, it’s awfully nice to have a job you enjoy. It’s easier to work with all your heart, as unto the Lord, when you enjoy what you’re doing. The sweet spot, in fact, is probably somewhere between dislike and passion. A job you dislike can be a hard place to stay motivated, to work as unto the Lord. You can be tempted to be idle in your work. A job you’re passionate about is dangerous in its own way—it can quickly become an idol. A job you enjoy can be good—to a point.

***Questions?***

**V. The Danger of Inverted Priorities**

Take another look at the pyramid of priorities. As you work through these six questions, you’re making your way *up* the pyramid. These questions should lead you to start with God, then consider others, and finally think about yourself. That’s the kind of mind-set that will lead to a stable, godly decision- making process.

Most people — even Christians — don’t think like this at all. In fact, they completely invert the pyramid.



They start their job search by asking the question, “What do *I* want to do?” Only then do they ask whether a job will benefit others, and finally they do a quick check to make sure they’re not about to sin when they sign on the dotted line.

Inverted thinking leads to all kinds of problems. It amplifies our tendency to think first of ourselves, which distorts the way we think about what kind of job might be best for us. If we start with selfish considerations, we may find ourselves wrongly ruling out jobs that would honor God perfectly well; allow us to live quiet, godly lives; provide for our needs; and allow us to benefit others. In the same way, inverted thinking can lead us to jump at a job that might be fulfilling to us in its own way but doesn’t pay enough. It can lead to employment that makes demands on us that force us to shirk other responsibilities or to a job that doesn’t really benefit anyone but ourselves. When we invert the pyramid and expect concerns of self to bear the weight of our decision making, the whole process becomes hopelessly unstable. Don’t pass up a job that *isn’t* personally fulfilling yet glorifies God and provides for your family. And don’t pick a job that *is* personally fulfilling if it doesn’t do those basic things. Keep the pyramid right side up!

Of course, there’s one other obvious point to keep in mind. If God doesn’t give you an opportunity to do a certain thing, then he’s not calling you to do that thing, at least not now. God directs our steps through *present* opportunities. There’s nothing wrong with thinking about options and considering “what ifs.” But we still have to do what God puts in front of us *today*. Solomon wrote two nearly identical proverbs about this truth. Proverbs 12:11 reads, “Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.” Proverbs 28:19 reads, “Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.” This is such a practical and important point that Solomon says it twice! Don’t chase worthless pursuits. Don’t chase fantasies. Take advantage of the opportunities you have right now instead of obsessing over opportunities you may never have.

VI. CONCLUSION

Though the decision to pursue a certain career path or accept a particular job offer can feel at the time like the most important decision we’ll ever make, the truth is that they are subject to change as well. This means we should exercise wisdom, pray, seek counsel, plan, and strategize, and then we should make a decision quickly and move on. Why? Because in the final analysis God is in control. He is sovereign over everything— and that certainly extends to our jobs! We can place our lives and our careers in his hands, knowing he is a good and kind King who works all things for his glory and our good. He will not waste our deployment.

So above all else, trust in God as you choose a job. Jobs are temporary; God is eternal. If it looks like you may have to choose a job that isn’t perfect for you, praise God and do it with all your heart. One day that job will end. And if it looks like you’ve landed the job of your dreams, work at it with all your heart. Remember, one day it, too, will end! Either way, you work for Jesus. You can trust he has good reasons for the work he is giving you to do.