



BEING BLESSED BY BUT NOT DEFINED BY WORK

Job 1: 1-22

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The narrative of Job 1 introduces us to the most successful entrepreneur of the ancient east. Job, through his hard work and faithfulness to God, is blessed with immense wealth (accumulated business assets) and production capacity. And then he loses it all along with the majority of his family and organization. Instead of faltering and turning away from God, he does not sin and stays faithful to God. From this narrative, we learn many important aspects of work and application to the modern-day entrepreneur. Overcoming the fear of failure and risk, learning to separate work from who you are, and maintaining integrity are applicable lessons learned from Job. Most importantly, through work we can be blessed, but it should never define us.

Keywords: Work, Crisis, Overcoming Disaster, Integrity, Blessings, Faith, Faithfulness

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Work is meant for all of us to do ever since God first put us in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). Job 1 is a narrative that shows a highly successful entrepreneur that accumulates vast amounts of wealth through hard work, only to lose it through a series of devastating attacks from Satan who in the end still praised God and did not allow either his wealth (life's work) or his lack of wealth define him. The following is a narrative analysis of Job 1:1-22 that seeks to extract truths and applications related to the modern-day entrepreneur and the concept of work.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

Job 1 tells the story of Job, a “man that was blameless and upright, who feared God and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). It is a “written text that speaks” repeatedly of what makes Job a servant of God full of integrity, faith and hard work (Robbins, 1996, p. 15). Job as the protagonist or leading character is not just a wealthy man, but also “the greatest of the people of the east” (Job 1:4). His family (organization) was large with seven sons and three daughters along with “very many servants” (Job 1:2-4). His family owned and managed a fortune in livestock that represented both real assets and future production capacity that could provide a means to continue to prosper and thrive (Job 1:3). Despite all of this worldly success, Job, the entrepreneur, would “rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings” to God, whom he feared, so as to cover for any sins he or his family may have caused (Job 1:5). Job was a man of detail and perseverance as he “did this continually” (Job 1:5). Job possessed both great character and wealth and God took notice of his work.

Satan enters as the antagonist who delights in being able to ruin good men like Job. God engages in a conversation with Satan and asks him if he has “considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” (Job 1:8). God is extremely pleased with Job and how he conducts his life, work, and business affairs. He highlights that Job “turns away from evil.” Evil is a direct reference to Satan who then takes this as a challenge to turn Job towards evil by turning him from God. Satan is

allowed by God to attack his family, wealth and business (Job 1:10-12). However, Satan will not be allowed to harm Job himself (Job 1:12).

The scene is set for Job to experience evil through a direct attack by Satan. The crisis comes in four devastating blows. The first three attacked his business assets and production capacity and the fourth his most prized part of his organization – his family. Each time a messenger came bearing bad news within seconds of the other with each attack conducted by Satan himself. First, the oxen, donkeys and servants tending them were attacked by the “Sabeans” (Job 1:15). Second, the “fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants” (Job 1:16). Third, the “Chaldeans” stole the camels and killed the servants tending them (Job 1:17). These were all bad, but the fourth and most devastating blow came when it was reported “that a great wind” brought down the house where his children were staying and killed them all (Job 1:18-19).

This crisis brought great pain to Job and he expressed it in the most passionate way possible as “he tore his robe and shaved his head” (Job 1:20). All within minutes he had lost his wealth, business and family. His life’s work was gone. Yet, he was not defeated, nor did he turn to evil. Instead, he “fell to the ground and worshiped” God (Job 1:20). A lesser man would have fallen, but not Job who was quick to recognize, in spite of his grief and loss, that God gives and takes as He sees fit and, in all things, “blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). The crisis did not conquer Job and as the leader he did not blame God nor sin (Job 1:22). Amazing! This terrible crisis does its damage, but God still wins through the actions and faith of his servant Job who is greatly harmed, but not defeated.

This story begs to understand why God allowed this to happen to Job (Long, 1988, p. 5). However, there is no explanation other than God through evidence of Job’s devotion, faith, fear of, and consistency towards Him believed that he could handle all that Satan and his evil could muster. Job’s life in Uz could be depicted as being the “perfect moral businessman who knows how to succeed at the reward game, with life and with God” (Long, p. 8). While Job’s life in Uz is seen as perfect prior to Satan’s attacks, it is really a fragile existence where any moral transgression could bring disaster upon himself and family (Long, p. 8). The sad truth is that Job

did nothing wrong nor anything right to bring calamity on all of his life's work. Hard work does not necessarily correlate to blessings and prosperity forever as evidenced by Job. "Job suffers not because he has violated some holy ordinance, but because God issued a seemingly capricious challenge to an Adversary, made a wager in the heavenly court, and enigmatically turned Job over to the power of a malicious opponent" (Long, p. 11). Job worked hard, prospered, became a target, suffered greatly, but did not sin in the end. Job was seen by the world for his work and accumulated wealth, but by God for his faith. God looked way past Job's work products and organization to define who he was. This separation of Job, the faithful servant, from his work is what distinguished and defined Job in God's eyes.

The challenge with Job is that he worked hard and remained faithful to God and yet he suffered greatly. He was blessed by his work as shown through his accumulated wealth, but it was not lasting. The story of Job begs to ask the timeless question "why do bad things happen to good people?" (Edwards, 2002. p. 531). The concept of work is that it may define us from the world's perspective, but not with God. Work is what we may do, but not who we are. Job feared God and had faith and because of that he worked hard, but did not allow that work to define him.

RELATION TO MODERN-DAY ENTREPRENEURS AND THEIR WORK

This narrative lacks justice for Job, but it does not lack meaning nor lessons for modern day entrepreneurs. The first is an ability to overcome the fear of failure and risk, the second is to learn to separate the work (business) from who you are, and the third is to maintain integrity despite unbearable outcomes. The following reviews each of these lessons.

Overcoming the Fear of Failure and Risk

Job is every bit an entrepreneur and if he lived today, he would have been on the interview circuit discussing his tragic story as a man who had it all and then lost it all. His servants would today be called employees and his family would have served in leadership positions in his once

thriving organization. His story would have been one where unforeseen risk brought down his once thriving venture. Entrepreneurs stick out and take risk. The risks involved in entrepreneurial activity does not often equate to a marketplace “premium” for the entrepreneur (Vereshchagina & Hopenhayn, 2009, p. 1808). So why do people look to work as entrepreneurs? Many are able to simply compartmentalize risk and overcome their fear of launching and investing all they have in their business (Vereshchagina & Hopenhayn, p. 1825). Job’s story on the surface could paint him as a failed entrepreneur, but the fact that he did not let it define him could be seen as an encouragement to others to still become an entrepreneur themselves. Nanda and Sørensen (2010) discuss how surrounding oneself with other entrepreneurs, even failed ones, increases the chance that one will become an entrepreneur themselves (p. 1124). They would look to Job’s story as something to learn from and at most a cautionary tale as opposed to a stop sign from launching their own work and business endeavors.

Learning to Separate the Work from Who You Are

Howard Schultz, the CEO of Starbucks, was so enamored by his original stand up Italian style coffee bars name of “Il Gironale,” which meant daily, that he almost failed to capitalize on the brand name power of “Starbucks” (Schultz & Yang, 1997, p. 107). He was simply too close to his business and his personal thumbprint on every detail to realize the gem he had in the simplicity of the name of Starbucks. Job also had every reason to be enamored by his immense assets and everything his wealth represented, but he refused to be owned by his business and defined by it. He knew that his identity was not in work or business, but it was completely defined by his relationship with God. Entrepreneurs would do well to never seek their identity in their work or business, but rather through their faith in God – the one who created them!

Maintaining Integrity as an Entrepreneur

Job as shown through the narrative never lost his integrity. Entrepreneurs may not realize this, but at first integrity is all they have. Integrity at the individual level “refers to the consistency of an individual’s words and actions” regardless of the circumstances (Palanski & Yammarino, 2009, p. 409). Job during times of prosperity blessed God and at times of calamity blessed God. Regardless, of how he felt or his situation, he was consistent with his integrity. Integrity also has to do with alignment with one’s values in how they practice (Palanski & Yammarino, p. 410). Job’s values were on display when he offered burnt offerings in Job 1:5 in times of prosperity and in Job 1:20 in disaster when he “fell on the ground and worshiped.” How he saw his alignment with God, as a servant, never changed and was full of complete integrity to both himself and God.

IMPLICATIONS AND IMPACTS ON THE CONCEPT OF WORK

Richards (2009) lists working hard in his top ten ways to create wealth (p. 210). We catch a glimpse of Job’s strong work ethic and commitment to hard work in Job 1:4 when it states, “he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings.” Job also understood the importance of this task by doing it himself and not delegating to one of his servants. He worked and led by example. Leading by example increases greatly the strength of leadership-membership exchange relationships that he most certainly had with his many servants (Yukl, O’Donnell & Taber, 2009, p. 296). Upon learning of his calamity, Job continued with the work that he knew and could still do which was to fall on his face and worship God (Job 1:20). He understood that his immediate work was to draw closer to God. Sometimes after calamity that is the only work a follower of God is capable of doing. Regardless, work does not stop for the faithful servant and that is a good thing.

CONCLUSION

Job never faltered and allowed God, not work, to continue to define who he was in the world through either times of wealth or poverty. Work is something we should do to serve God and not ourselves. However, it should never define us. It can bring about great wealth that may last for a while. However, in the end, all that matters is our relationship with God not our accumulated assets achieved through work. Job work hard, achieved much, lost everything important to him through no fault of his own, and at the end of the day he remained true to God.

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