

Finding Treasure

Nothing is worse than hating your job; and nothing could be further from the Lord's will for our lives either! We are not supposed to put down our heads, wince our eyes, grinding out each day in frustration just to earn a pay check, then hoping to go wild at night and on the weekends to make up for lost time. Something will eventually give, and it might not be pretty. Work is a big part of our lives, certainly nothing to ignore, resent, or shove to the side. It is central to who we are. It is the platform from which we can joyfully serve others, our world and God. It is a big gift to find a job we love.

For the past 30 years, I have traveled to many different countries helping new Christian communities grow into churches - through the work of the Holy Spirit and the prayers of many people. There is nothing I enjoy more than working in cross-cultural and inter-religious settings. I love seeing the Gospel break into new places in the world where no indigenous church has ever been expressed or enjoyed before. But, during these years, I have also learned how important it is for my family and me to be well grounded in our local neighborhood, church, and surrounding community. What good am I - if I travel the whole world - but don't attend first to the needs of my family and neighbors?



For the past three-and-a-half years, I have been leading a Bible study comprised mostly of recently retired men in my neighborhood. Many of them are partners of mine in ministry. These particular men are full of life, determined to make the most of their remaining years on earth. Most of them had never read the Bible on their own. Many were leaders in business. They are energetic learners who keep me on my toes every time we get together to read the Bible, talk and pray. Currently, we are reading through the book of Matthew. Every time I read the book of Matthew, I am reminded of my own life. In the beginning verses of the 9th chapter, it reads, "As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. 'Follow me and be my disciple,' Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him."

In my late twenties, I was reaching a crisis point of who I was as a person and what was the meaning of life. To my undeserved good fortune, God more than accommodated my searching heart at that time. In a short span of time, I ran into many different people who loved God; and they all pointed me toward reading more

of the Bible and Christian history. Before I knew what had happened in the early 1980s, I became a member of a local Bible study group; I was also meeting once a week with a gentle and wise man willing to answer all my questions related to the gospels, New Testament, and Christian faith. I could not believe how quickly all my objections or reservations about God began to melt in light of what I was learning about Jesus. I was rigorous in comparing the values of peace and love in my generation with what Jesus had taught and said. I made sure that what my parents had taught me about right and wrong could be found in the teachings of Jesus. I did not want to go down easily.

I love Matthew's story because I can identify with the sudden clarity Matthew found in the presence of Jesus. Matthew was not having an easy time being a tax collector for the occupying Roman government. He was despised by his fellow Jews for being willing to do this job. Matthew was endlessly being tempted to pocket money for himself. But, he needed to earn a paycheck and feed his family. Everything was going along as well as could be expected for Matthew until he heard this man, Jesus, teaching the crowds; then everything began to change. In the midst of Jesus' loving presence and compelling teachings, Matthew dropped everything and followed him. I know of no culture or religion in the world that objects to the teachings of Jesus. Many people may object with the Church or Christianity, as they know it, but no one I know objects with the teachings of Jesus. For the last 2,000 years, scores of people from many different cultures in the world have dropped everything and decided to follow Jesus, the Messiah.

When Matthew decided to become one of Jesus' followers, he left everything behind and became a new man with a new job. There is another passage later in the book of Matthew that describes beautifully this complete joy and willingness to change directions. In the 13th chapter, it reads, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field. Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!"



**Artistic depiction of the
Parable of the hidden**

I could not believe the sense of utter relief, rest, and joy I experienced when I decided myself that I was ready to bank my whole life on the truth of the gospel and the claims of Jesus Christ. I had finally gotten to the point where I could no longer find any logical or reasonable objection to what Jesus had said, taught or exemplified in his life. The only thing left for me to do was make the decision to believe, and follow him. With incredible joy, I did just that; I got up from my

agricultural commodity trading desk in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1983, and decided to enroll in a Spanish language institute for missionaries in San Jose, Costa Rica, where I spent two years, living with a Costa Rican family and helping a mission organization start a new church. I was ready to invest everything in the greatest treasure I had ever found.

My whole life, I was raised to be a businessman. My father taught hospital administration and health policy in three different business schools over the years. He also became a leading executive for Blue Cross/Blue Shield. All four of my siblings have their Masters in Business Administration degrees. I am the only McNerney with a masters in something else - Divinity! Yes, I could have remained in business and probably enjoyed it for the most part; but it is in ministry where I find my greatest joy and best use of my natural gifts and talents. I believe that when we trust Jesus with our whole lives, he helps us discover are own personal gifts, and how we best can serve his world and kingdom. Not everyone is called into full-time ministry; but all of us are called into one form of ministry or another through the vocations and jobs God provides for us according to the gifts he has given us.

Changing directions in life, examining what we believe and why, discovering who we really are versus what we or someone else wants us to be, takes time. Joining a Bible study or small group, attending church, or learning more about the life of Jesus, is the most important thing we can do with our time and hearts. The retired men with whom I meet on Mondays are an inspiration to me as I watch them wrestle with God and search for their own treasures. Is today a good day to get up from your chair, drop everything, and follow Jesus? It will be the best adventure your heart has ever known.