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Is It Wrong to Get a Job Instead of Volunteering My Time to Help Others?

August 1, 2022



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether it's a sin to get a job for extra money instead of volunteering one's time to help others and a biblical response to the phrase "I don't want to put the Holy Spirit in a box."

* Would it be a sin to get a job for extra money instead of volunteering my time to help others?

* What's a good biblical response to the phrase "I don't want to put the Holy Spirit in a box"?

Transcript

[Music]

[Music] This is Stand to Reason's #STRask podcast with Amy Hall and Greg Koukl. Welcome. We're so glad that you are listening.

Otherwise, we would be doing this for no reason. That's right. It's for the enjoyment of talking together about important things.

That's true. Greg, I always like learning from you. Okay, let's go to a question from Suzanne.

My question is regarding what the Bible says about time management. I'm in a situation where I don't need to work. I stayed at home with my kids for 18 years, so we're used to one income.

Now that my kids are grown, I'm bored staying at home. I have the opportunity to focus on volunteering, but having a paid job is appealing just to have more money for extras. Would it be a sin to work instead of spending my time to help others? Well, my simple answer is no, and I don't know why it would be a sin.

Just because we have a job, because of the benefits that it gives, doesn't mean that we are using our time illicitly or sinfully. We can still use part of our time to benefit other people. We can have an influence, a virtuous, godly influence on the people we work with.

We can use the money for our own benefit and also for the benefit of the kingdom. I mean, that's all part of that package. I don't see any difficulty with that at all.

The question broadly was time management, and I think that or fell into that category, and I immediately was thinking of Ephesians 5, which says redeem the time for the days of evil. I also think of a lot of different proverbs that talk about diligence and hard work and applying yourself to meaningful things and not in frivolous pursuits. So when I think of all of those things together, I think that what God wants is industrious people who pursue virtuous ends and who are able to provide enough for themselves to take care of their own needs, but also to have extra to take care of those who don't have, who are in genuine need and can't take care of themselves.

There were different passages in the New Testament that talk about that. So those are all part of the package. Now how those particulars are worked out in any given situation is a matter of individual preference.

When Paul says redeem the time, he doesn't want us to be idle. He wants us to realize that we have, that we have, there are important things that can be done, and that we should be about doing those things. What important things there are for each of us is a matter of individual decision based in gifts, opportunities, dispositions, things like that, but it ought to entail like obviously eternal things, not just temporal things.

Okay, I like fishing. All right, I just built a couple of fishing rods, for example, that was fun for me. I invested money in doing that.

Okay, but there is no eternal benefit to building fishing rods or going fishing. Now I do like to take my daughter out fishing. And so that has a benefit that's long term and arguably eternal as well.

So that enterprise that hobby can be repressed into service for good things. But I think there's a full legitimacy of pursuing things that we enjoy that express our creativity and the qualities that are part of human nature that reflect the image of God in man. So I was just reflecting on this the other day in thy presence is fullness of joy.

And at thy right hand are pleasures forever. It's interesting. In thy presence fullness of joy.

So there's a relational satisfaction. But at their right hand are pleasures. God has made all kinds of pleasurable things in the world.

And there are going to be pleasures in eternity uninfluenced by the flesh. But the pleasures he's provided for here. We can taste food.

So why not eat tasty food instead of lousy food if we're able to do that. That's why we give thanks for the things that God gives us, even the in a certain sense, the I'm trying to think of the right word here. What I mean to say is the so-called non spiritual things.

But I'm making the point that all of these have broader worldview ramifications. So fishing is not spiritual building fishing poles. But there is a pleasure that is not illicit that I gain from that.

There's relaxing time that I have. There's problem solving in my own mind. People who are bass fishermen and diligent at it know what I'm talking about.

A building the rods is fun. There's creativity that's involved with a craft like that. I do woodworking as well.

So all of these things are all legitimate. Now if that's all I did with my time. Well, then I don't think I would be redeeming time for eternal benefits.

And there needs to be a mixture there. Keep in mind, policy, days are evil. Buy that time back.

Our lives are but a breath. James says, you know, we're here and then we're gone and I have more awareness of that now at 72. Just had a birthday in June.

And so I want to continue to make good use, productive use of my time for personal satisfaction, for building closeness with my family, for leaving a legacy behind and for making a difference for eternity. All of those things I think are noble enterprises. If a person does not have to be employed to care for their own needs, well, it doesn't mean they shouldn't be employed.

They may not be. They might use their like retired time as retired people do to relax whatever and pursue personal interests. But still the time can be spent pursuing things with eternal consequence or get a job and do the same.

Do something enjoyable, make use, appropriate use of the finances that you earn. Try to have an impact for eternal things as well. I'm going to throw one other thing out there to think about as you're trying to figure this out, Suzanne.

And that is, I think there's something in this question that needs to be tweaked a little bit because your last thing you said was, would it be a sin to work instead of spending my time to help others? And what I want to point out is that our jobs are helping others. Every job is serving the people around you in certain ways. God created this world and we all play a part in it doing various jobs.

And every job that we do, work is valuable in itself. It's not just a throwaway thing that takes our time away from God. In fact, Paul talks about how everything we do when you're working, you are working for the Lord.

So you just need to keep in mind that every job you do is a chance to serve others. I think about that. Have you ever seen that show Undercover Boss? I've seen it a time or two, but... One thing that always impresses me on that show is you'll see a person working there who's maybe a janitor or whoever.

And that person is doing that job with pride and service to others and kindness. And it always overwhelms me. And I think it is so beautiful.

Every job can be beautiful because you are serving others. So I don't think it's a matter of deciding to help others or to work. It's a matter of where are your gifts, where is the need? Do you want more flexibility? Because you may get money, but there are downsides to that.

Maybe your job is boring to you. Or maybe wherever you go, you will be serving. But are you using your gifts? Well, are there people around you that you would have more meaning in serving? Because that's something definitely to keep in mind and you brought up meaning.

So all those things you need to consider for this. But I just don't want you to think that work is not helping others. Right.

Well, there's a false dichotomy there. Either this or that. Well, either this or that can be appropriate, it can be noble, or it could be ignoble, depending on how you pursue it.

It's not whether you get a job or not, but there's all kinds of noble ways to pursue either end productively and for God's glory. And the meaning that you get from things that are unpaid could be way more valuable to you than the money. So that's another thing to consider.

And I would say, I have a friend who is, she's a stay-at-home mom and she teaches her kids. But the fact that she is available to people because she's at home and she's not at an office has added so much value to our community. It's unbelievable.

And that I've always thought that it amazes me how valuable she is to all of us just because she's available. So all these things, I mean, I just keep saying all these things are things to keep in mind, but I don't know what else to say. Well, here's another thought.

And I'm going to take exception here with a kind of a standard observation people make regarding the end of life. And they say, well, you know, when you're on your deathbed, you're probably not going to be thinking, I wish I would have spent more time in the

office, all right. To which I respond, that depends entirely on what you did for a living.

If what you did at the office was noble and virtuous and had an impact for eternity, and you didn't spend much time doing it well, then maybe at the end of your life, you would think, I wish I would have done that job more effectively. I wish I'd put more hours in, more effort than I did. I think the point people are making is that there's a value in relationships that somehow sometimes gets eclipsed by mere employment activity.

And of course, there's a truth to that. But the key here is what exactly are you doing with the time you're spending, whether at work or not at work. If the work you're doing is noble, and you're doing it in a noble way, and especially if the work has eternal consequences, well, that to me that elevates that option above just mere recreational activity.

Sometimes I get trouble when I know of people who work hard or retire, and then all they do is play. Okay, you earned it. I'm not judging it, but it doesn't sit well with me.

I guess I could never do that, partly because I want to keep making a contribution that matters, and I think that's part of our responsibility as Christians. I want to keep redeeming the time for something noble. If I were to retire, and that's not the calendar, just so you know, I certainly would do more recreation activities that I'd like to do to enjoy and whatever, build more fishing rods, work my shop more off or whatever.

But I would not want my time simply to be spent serving myself, because I don't think that would be satisfying, and I don't think it would be right, just my view. Let's go on to a question from Kevin. What's a good biblical response to the phrase, "I don't want to put the Holy Spirit in a box." I hear this from believers that have been a part of charismatic churches after witnessing a strange occurrence, such as historical laughing or crowing like a chicken, etc.

This statement seems unbiblical. Well, I remember when these kinds of statements came up with profusion when this movement was a big deal. I'm trying to remember back when that was.

That was in the 22,000s or maybe even before that, the Holy Laughter, and there's still a remnant of that going on. Here's the question, I guess, that can be asked, because this is one of those, I remember Frank Beckwith said that when somebody, as Christian disagrees with you, they trump you with spirituality. A lot of times when a Christian disagrees with, "Well, they trump you with spirituality." You're wrong, I'm right, because I'm more spiritual.

What do you mean you're a spiritual? I don't put the Holy Spirit in a box and you do. I mean, that's basically what's going on here. Okay? This is not a theologically sound statement to make, because basically what a person is saying is, "I am not going to put

any boundaries on what might be appropriate for the God we worship, or for Christian conduct," because that would be putting God in a box.

The question that comes to mind is, "Well, maybe you can't put God in a box, but can God put God in a box?" In other words, does God himself give us any guidelines that helps us to discern whether there are things that are in fact from the Holy Spirit? And by the way, it occurs to you when somebody says that about some of these strange phenomena that are being questioned, that that's actually circular, "I'm not going to put God in the box." The issue here is whether it's God at work to begin with, and to say you're not going to put God in the box presumes that this is God and God can do whatever he wants. Look, we all agree that God can do whatever he wants. This is not in question here.

The question is whether any given manifestation that claims to be from God is from God. That's it. Do we have any reason to question the legitimacy spiritually of this thing, saying, "I'm not going to put a God in a box as foolishness, because it doesn't give us any standard by which to assess whether or not God is moving in this circumstance." That's the question.

When the Holy Laughter thing was really big and it was people rolling around and laughing and uproariously, and this just happened recently, somebody contacted me about this when I was in Wisconsin, in fact. I said, "They were concerned about this." I said, "Oh, yeah, well, these things come and go, and this one is pretty much went, but it's still remnants of it around." So why would we think that people out of control laughing, rolling around in the aisles, and in some cases making animal sounds, are under the influence of the Holy Spirit? Well, we don't want to put God in the box. That's not an answer.

Why would we think that this is God? And if there's no good reason to think that it is God, then we're not obliged to think that it is God. There are all kinds of screwy things that are going on, and that kind of response, not only would justify nonsense, which I think is what happened in that whole movement, but it also keeps us from being careful about what is sound and what is in sound. This is not a legitimate way of assessing a problem.

I don't want to put God in the box. What makes you think it's God to begin with so that that's a question that would address the circularity of the comment, or what about God putting himself in a box? What do you mean? Well, maybe in Scripture we have some guidelines about what God does and what He doesn't do. What we can expect from Him.

Can God tell us? God does all kinds of strange things. I mean, I'm reading through a second Kings now, and here's Elijah's making ax heads float, and there's goofy things. All right, God can do it every once, but that doesn't mean we're justified in dismissing something crazy.

I'm sorry, not dissenting, but accepting something crazy, as from God, when we have no good reason to believe it, just because people say it's the Holy Spirit. I think we could do better than that. And so the comment, we can't put God in a box, is not helpful at all.

What we need to do is evaluate these things by Scripture, and Scripture is not a box. Scripture is a description of the truth about God. In other words, it's not confining God, it's confining our views about God to the truth.

So this idea that Scripture, that examining things by Scripture, and what Scripture says about things, is a box confining it, is absolutely the wrong image. Right. If we're putting that.

Well, Greg, we have come to the end of the time. I'm not going to try and squeeze in one more in the last minute. No, I thought it was more free.

That was such a profound insight. I thought you would develop it more. But let me just reinforce that Scripture is not a box, it's a description of God in the way God works, and that is therefore our benefit to understand the appropriate working of God.

And so you're right, this is God in the box is just the wrong image. Scripture confines our views, not who God is. And it rightly confines our views, because otherwise we would have all sorts of wrong views.

All right, Greg, now we are ending. We would love to hear from you. If you have a question, you can go on Twitter and use the hashtag #STRask.

Or you can go to our website, just look up our podcast, go to our podcast page, go to #STRask. And then you'll find a link there. You can send us a question, but just make sure you keep it short.

It needs to be just a couple of sentences. It needs to be tweet-sized. So make sure you follow that so we don't have too long questions.

All right, that's it. Well, thank you for listening. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

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