

The definition of work

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For about three and a half years, from 11th grade until the summer after my freshman year in college, I was convinced that I was going to be an engineer. My mother worked for a civil engineering firm at the time, and so I knew what it took to be successful. I enjoyed high school physics. I was pretty good at math. Most importantly, I had been fascinated by that one parking space set perpendicular to all the rest in the SKH lot. I was golden.

Except.

I hated college physics. I wasn't very good at calculus without my fancy calculator. Most importantly, I realized I could enjoy the mind that thought up the SKH parking space while not having to have that same mind within me. An engineer, I am not.

My first year of college is, perhaps, a helpful anecdote to teach two seemingly different lessons about work. First, in the physical understanding work is effort exerted over a distance. You can push a brick wall all you want, and while you might be exhausted when you are finished, no work has been accomplished. Kind of like my year as an engineering student at Pitt. Lots of effort, very little distance.

More to the point of my ultimate vocation, however, is the admonition of Jesus, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you." For Jesus, work done for short term gain, though strictly speaking, work, is still a waste of effort. As Christians, our work shouldn't be "all about the benjamins" but instead all about the kingdom. What sort of work are you involved in? Are you accomplishing anything other than paying bills? Is the Kingdom of God being grown in your work? Our work, as Frederick Buechner has been credited with saying, "is where our greatest passion meets the world's greatest need."

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