

## **When God Milks Cows**

### **By David Feddes**

Have you ever seen God milk cows? I have. I've also seen God fix car engines and cook delicious meals. I've even seen God throw trash into a garbage truck.

What did God look like? Well, when I watched God do these things, I didn't see him wearing a heavenly uniform with the letters G-O-D stitched on the pocket. When God milked the cows, I saw the jeans and boots of a dairy farmer. When God fixed the car, I saw the skilled hands and blackened fingernails of an auto mechanic. When God was cooking, I saw my wife's face and clothing. When God hauled away the trash, I saw the coat and gloves of local garbage haulers. In each case, God was working in the disguise of a man or woman doing a job that benefited others.

You might not always recognize God behind these various disguises. When you see other people working at something, or when you look at your own work, you might not see the Lord of the universe in action. But the reality is that whenever a person works at something worthwhile, God himself is working.

Take milk, for example. When a farmer milks cows, God himself is milking the cows. When cattle breeders develop better lines of cattle, and when manufacturers make better equipment for feeding and milking, God himself is increasing the world's milk supply. When workers at a milk plant process the milk, God himself is making the milk safer to drink. When a trucker hauls containers of milk to the stores, God himself is transporting the milk. When a store manager and checkout clerk make the milk available to individual customers, God himself is bringing the milk to those who need it. When a parent pours some of the milk into a glass, smiles, and hands it to a child, God himself is pouring and smiling. And so, even though the milk has come to the child through the efforts of many different people, it's absolutely right for the child to bow at mealtime and thank God for it.

How do we know God is involved in all the different tasks of bringing milk to a child? Well, the Bible says, "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time" (Psalm 145:15). This means that all food and drink, including every glass of milk, is provided by God. And if God provides it, then God is at work in each task in the entire sequence which brings milk.

This is true not just of milk but of every good thing we enjoy. The Bible says that every good gift is from above, from the heavenly Father (James 1:17), so every good thing which comes to you through other people's work and every good thing that flows to other people through your work is a gift from God. Whenever a person works at something worthwhile, God himself is working.

### **Divine Design**

Milking cows, fixing cars, cooking meals, and collecting garbage are down-to-earth activities, but heaven's King is at work in them. Worthwhile work isn't just human; it's divine. If you're in the workforce, you're going to spend a lot of time this year doing your job. Even when you're at home, you'll spend a lot of time on household tasks. How would it affect your energy level and your job satisfaction if you sensed that your work was really God's work? God doesn't just care about praying and going to church on

Sunday morning. God is active all week wherever people are working. Wouldn't you like to go through every hour of work and every day on this year's calendar knowing that when you're working, God himself is working?

Work isn't always glamorous, but it's glorious, because God is in it and uses it to bless others. If you're involved in farming and the food industry, God is using you to nourish people. If you work for a car company or a repair shop, God is using you to help people travel where they need to go. If you're a parent cooking, changing diapers, or wiping runny noses, God is using you to care for precious children. If you haul garbage away from people's homes or mop floors or clean toilets, God is using you to make a cleaner, fresher, healthier environment for people to live in. Whenever a person works at something worthwhile, God himself is working.

I see God doing all kinds of work, and if you pay attention, you too will see God working. You'll see God prescribe medicine, pour cement, drive a police car, work with computers, install carpets, run business meetings, fly aircraft, wash windows, teach school, assemble parts, make clothing, conduct research, and do a thousand other things. Whenever a person works at something worthwhile, God himself is working.

Let that sink in: *Whenever a person works at something worthwhile, God himself is working.* Believe this, and let it transform your outlook. Don't take the good things in your life for granted; instead, praise God and appreciate other people for all the work that gives you these things. Don't see your own work as dull or degrading; instead, rejoice that God himself is working through you and using your work to benefit others. Value other people's work, and value your own work, as the Creator's way of caring for his creatures.

Does that sound unrealistic? Can you honestly have such a positive attitude toward work? It's easy for someone in a radio studio to say God milks cows—but does it feel so divine if you're the guy who drags yourself out of bed in the wee hours of the morning to milk a bunch of hard-headed Holsteins day after day, month after month, year after year? It's easy for a preacher to speak of the glories of work, but does it seem so glorious for working stiffs who are stuck in jobs they hate? It's easy to say that whenever a person works at something worthwhile, God himself is working, but what if you find yourself working with a bunch of negative, nasty people who are anything but godlike? It sounds sweet to say that God uses people's work to help others, but what about those who throw all their energy into occupations that are useless or even harmful to others? And what about people who exploit workers and get rich from their work while overworking and underpaying them? Those are important questions, and we'll address some of them a bit later, but let's put them on hold for now.

Before we address the difficulties, we first need to accept the basic fact that work itself is a good thing. Work isn't just a necessary evil; it's good, even God-like. Rebellion against God can twist work into something bad, but work itself is good. It's a big part of God's design for us, and it's even a way God works through us. Work is divine. If we have the vision to see this, every task we do glows with fresh meaning.

### **Fruitful Development**

Long ago God created the world and filled it with living things. Then he created humanity, both male and female, in his own image. From the beginning, God meant for

us to work. The Bible says that God put Adam and Eve "in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it'" (Genesis 1:28). God wanted humanity to be fruitful by having children and also to be fruitful in another sense: to discover and invent and work, to be productive as well as reproductive, to fill the earth and develop its resources.

There are now billions of God's image-bearers on earth, and we're constantly making new discoveries and coming up with fruitful inventions that make fuller use of the world around us. We've discovered which plants are good to eat, and we're always finding ways to grow them in greater amounts than ever. We've developed domestic livestock which provide us with milk, meat, leather, wool, and other things. We've turned common herbs into medicines, molds into antibiotics. We've taken oil—which was once nothing but sticky black gunk in the ground—and turned it into something that powers our cars and heats our homes. From plain old sand, we've made silicon microchips for computers.

We've harnessed fire and electricity. We've invented lights that make our houses as bright as day long after the sun goes down. We've gone from walking to riding, from swimming to sailing to steamboats to ocean liners, from horse-drawn carriages to locomotives to cars, and now we can even fly. We've discovered electromagnetic waves; we've sent satellites into space; we use telephones to talk with far away people and televisions to watch far away events. We've invented clocks to measure time, so we're able to coordinate meetings, assembly lines, airline schedules, and who knows what else. We've devised something called money, which helps us to trade goods and services; we've created banks and stock exchanges and other ways to raise capital. Our inventors and researchers and business leaders keep looking for new things to provide for people and for better ways to provide them.

All of this flows from God's powerful word to our first parents to be fruitful and subdue the earth. He made a rich creation and gave us much power over that creation. We haven't always used our power properly, but the fact remains that we have it, and we have it because God has given it to us.

God is the one who has given us the ability to think and plan and work, and he's the one who has given us a world to explore and develop in the first place. We didn't create matter and energy; we didn't invent gravity or electromagnetic energy; we didn't design atoms or molecules or chromosomes. We don't make the sun shine; we don't make the wind blow; we don't make the world go round. God does all this. But God has chosen to carry out some of his creative work through us as we try to harness the potential that's in the creation around us and the creative ability that he's placed inside us. God means us to be fruitful.

### **Resembling God, Connecting With Others**

Why didn't God create us in such a way that we would never have to work? If he had wished, God could have given us an automatic food supply that required no work. God could have built homes for us that required no human effort. God could have dropped new inventions into our laps every few years without any research or work on our part. God could have designed us to be like sloths, sitting around, munching our

food without doing much else or accomplishing anything new, and he could have designed the world to reveal its secret potential without any study and to produce one invention after another without any human effort. God could have done it that way, but he didn't. He wanted to make us in his image, and as part of being like God, we are designed to create and work and find satisfaction in doing so. We're not designed to be a bunch of do-nothings. God made us to be creative workers.

We're also not designed to be completely independent of each other. God could have created us so that each person would have his or her own private world. In that case, each person would be born full grown with no need for parents to do the hard work of rearing children. Each person would have every talent without needing the skills of other people. Each person would have unlimited energy to do all jobs necessary without burning out. Imagine it: just you, all by yourself, on your own personal planet, doing everything for yourself, needing nobody else's work—while other people, each in another private world, would not need your work. God could have made us that way, but he didn't. He made a world with lots of different people with various abilities, where each needs others' work and where one's own work benefits others. In God's design, people are not self-sufficient. God has bound us together by giving each of us needs that only other people can meet and by giving each of us opportunities to meet others' needs.

Here, then, are two great facts about work: first, that our work is designed by God to be an expression of God's own work of creating and caring for his world; second, that our work is designed by God to connect people with each other and benefit each other. Put these two facts together, and it's clear that whenever a person works at something worthwhile, God himself is working. We are God's coworkers in creation, his partners in providence, his hands holding humans together.

### **Just a Janitor?**

This means that every form of honest, useful work is honorable. It has dignity and value. If your work is God's work, how could it not have dignity? If your work helps others, how could it not have value?

Perhaps you've been measuring your job only in terms of status and money. If your work doesn't involve a fancy title or high income, you may feel pretty low. You may say, "I'm just a janitor," or "I'm just a secretary," or "I'm just a factory worker," or "I'm just a waitress," or "I'm just a housewife." You may feel ashamed because you don't have a high-paying, high-prestige position. But open your eyes! Look at your work the way God looks at it. Work with the enthusiasm and energy of a person through whom God himself is accomplishing something important, something which truly benefits humanity.

In our society, doctors usually get more money and recognition than janitors or secretaries. I'm glad there are doctors, but doctors aren't enough. Unless there were people to clean doctors' offices and make hospitals spotless, many people would get sick from the unsanitary conditions. Unless there were secretaries to set up appointments, process paperwork, and handle insurance claims, doctors would be so swamped with these details that they wouldn't be able to help nearly as many patients and might not even be able to run their practice at all. God's work of restoring health involves not only doctors but also all the people who make a doctor's work effective.

People need each other and each other's work. If you work at a high-paying, high-prestige job, don't be too proud to acknowledge how much you depend on others' work. If you work at a low-paying, low-prestige job, don't feel so low that you don't see the value of your own work. All worthwhile work is honorable.

### **When Work is a Drag**

So far this may sound too idealistic. Work doesn't always feel honorable; sometimes it feels humiliating. Work doesn't always feel divine; often it's a drag. We've been looking at work in light of God's original design for it. Let's also face things that have gone wrong because of sin. When the first people, Adam and Eve, rebelled against God, the Lord told Adam that a curse would affect his work and make it harder and less enjoyable than it would otherwise have been. The effects of sin's curse are still with us today.

Discomfort, frustration, and boredom can taint even work that is obviously valuable. A plumber's work is important, but connecting pipes and smelling sewage aren't always thrilling. A factory worker may help build a useful product, but doing the same old thing day after day can get old. A corporate office may provide significant services, but the office worker whose job is to enter names and information into a computer hour after hour after hour may get sick of it. Flipping burgers or washing dishes may be honorable work which benefits others, but that doesn't mean it's always exciting or fun. Working as a consultant or in sales can be useful by helping people find out about a good thing they might otherwise have missed out on, but all that travel can get tiresome.

The curse of sin makes work more difficult and dull, and sin affects not only the work itself but also the way people relate to each other. Employers may mistreat workers and pay them less than they're worth. Employees may not care about those they work for, and they become lazy and sloppy and accomplish less than they should. There may also be a lot of bickering in the workplace, making it a miserable place to be.

Sin also causes some work and effort to be aimed in the wrong direction. Individuals and even whole enterprises can devote their efforts to dealing drugs, peddling pornography, ripping people off through gambling, killing unborn babies, trying to clone humans, and so forth. It's true that whenever a person works at something worthwhile, God himself is working—but it's also true that whenever someone works at something wicked, Satan is working. Satan has many co-workers in casinos, abortion clinics, and embryo research labs. Sin twists our God-given talents into the service of demons. Skills which should help other people are instead used to harm others.

Now, if sin has done so much damage to the world of work, how should you respond? It might be tempting to say that whatever God's original design for work may have been, you might as well forget about it now that things are messed up. You might as well just settle down in a grim routine of slogging your way through work you don't like, surrounded by people you don't like, and do only as much as you have to. You may even decide that if everybody is rotten anyway, you might as well do rotten things too and try to get rich without being concerned about whether you're doing other people more harm than good.

## **A Better Way**

But there's a better way. Rather than taking a negative attitude toward work, believe that your skills, your energy, and your opportunities are gifts from your Creator to be used for his glory and the good of others. Admit that you've misused God's gifts and fall far short of God's will for you, and ask the Lord to forgive you and help you to change. Jesus Christ came into the world not only to save souls for eternity but to make a difference in everyday life right now, including the world of work. Jesus' blood is more than precious enough to pay for your sinful past, and his Holy Spirit is more than strong enough to lead you into a better future in all you do. When Jesus accepts you and his Spirit lives in you, you can experience more and more what it's like to work for him.

This is true even if you're working for someone you'd rather not be working for or doing something that isn't your favorite thing to do. The Bible spoke to people who were trapped in the worst work situation of all, slaves, and told these Christian slaves, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23-24). Did that mean slavery was good? No, elsewhere the Bible told slaves, "If you can gain your freedom, do so" (1 Corinthians 7:21). Still, even though the system of slavery was bad, working to do something useful was still a good thing. Those who were stuck in the slave system could still work with a real sense of serving Christ and of accomplishing important tasks. You can't always choose your line of work—slaves surely couldn't—but you can choose your attitude and choose whom you're really working for: "It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

When you trust in Jesus, you start to see everything, including work, from God's point of view. You start to do things the way you would do them if you were working for God himself or if God himself were working in you—because that's exactly what is happening. No matter what you're slaving away at, as long as it produces something useful, it is God's work, and your attitude must be shaped by God's purpose, not by the sinful world's attitude toward work.

Humble work may sometimes go unrecognized, but it may still be more important than certain upper crust jobs. The guys who take the garbage from the curb in front of my house are doing more important work than a hot shot executive in a company that makes lipstick and eye shadow, and they are certainly doing better work than millionaires who run tobacco and liquor companies. A gorgeous supermodel may get more wealth and fame than most women, but what does she really accomplish? She struts and poses to arouse envy in women and lust in men. That may help the company which hired her to sell stuff, but it doesn't accomplish God's work. An ordinary schoolteacher or a stay-at-home mom who gets far less money and fame is doing something far more valuable than the model. When you trust Christ and work for him, you see your work for what it's really worth, not just for what a distorted, sinful standard says it's worth.

Whenever a person works at something worthwhile, God himself is working. Trust Jesus as Lord and Savior. Believe in the Lord God as the Creator and Provider who milks cows, fixes cars, cooks meals, hauls garbage, and does a million other things

through human workers. Then do your own work as a divine calling, and see it as your daily opportunity to practice the presence of God.

*Originally prepared by David Feddes for Back to God Ministries International. Used with permission.*