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Rediscovering Joy

The problem is not only to win souls but to save minds.
If you win the whole world and lose the mind of the world,
you will soon discover you have not won the world.
Charles Malik[1]

By the time Sealy Yates was just twenty-five years old, he had already fulfilled his life's dreams. He had gone to law school, passed the bar exam, landed a great job. He had married a wonderful woman, and they were busy raising their first child. Life was good.

That's when Sealy slumped into a profound depression. He was too young for a midlife crisis, yet he found himself asking all the same questions: Is this all there is? Is this what I want to do for the rest of my life? What's the meaning of it all?

Sealy was not naturally depressive, so he probed for some reason behind it. And the answer he discovered was one that no psychologist would have guessed: The key to recovering joy and purpose turned out to be a new understanding of Christianity as total truth—an insight that broke open the dam and poured the restoring waters of the gospel into the parched areas of his life.

Years ago, at the age of fifteen, Sealy had responded to an altar call at a Baptist church. From that moment on, he knew deep in his bones that what he wanted most was to serve God. At first, he figured that meant doing church work of some kind—becoming a pastor, missionary, or music leader. "I wanted to live for God," Sealy told me,[2] "and the only frame of reference I had said that meant full-time Christian work."

There was only one problem: He didn't have the skills for any church-based profession. In reviewing his aptitude tests, however, a high school guidance counselor suggested that he consider becoming an attorney. The idea was electrifying. No one in Sealy's family had even gone to college, let alone law school. The very thought seemed to soar beyond the bounds of possibility. Nevertheless, he prayed, he worked hard, and now . . . he had made it.

So why wasn't he happy? Sealy's impossible dream had come true, yet he was miserable. He maintained a heavy schedule of church activities, but a spiritual hunger still gnawed at his heart. Maybe he had made a mistake? Maybe he really *had* been called to full-time church work but had ignored God's call? Maybe he should drop his job and go to the mission field?

Christians who are seriously committed to their faith often experience this inner tug-of-war. Like Sealy, most of us absorb the idea that serving God means primarily doing church work. If we end up in other fields of work, then we think serving the Lord means piling religious activities on top of our existing responsibilities—things like church services, Bible study, and evangelism. But where does that leave the job itself? Is our work only a material necessity, something that puts food on the table but has no intrinsic spiritual significance? Is it merely utilitarian, a way of making a living?

Sealy discovered that it was just such questions that were driving his depression: He had no idea how to integrate his Christian faith with his professional life. In his law classes at UCLA there had never been any mention of Christianity; none of his professors or classmates had shared his faith commitment; nor did any colleagues at the law firm where he now worked. And since his professional work took up most of his waking hours, that meant a large segment of his life was sealed off from what mattered most to him.

"Where is God in my life?" Sealy found himself asking. What he thought was depression turned out to be an agonized longing for spiritual meaning in his work. Adding church activities to a completely secularized job was like putting a religious frame on a secular picture. The tension between his spiritual hunger and the time demands of a purely "secular" job was tearing him apart inside.

Sealy's search for a solution was finally rewarded when he discovered a Christian study program that taught him how to address clients' spiritual lives. Instantly, a whole new world opened to him, as he came to realize that the law addresses issues connected to the whole person. After all, "people typically come to lawyers when they're in a crisis," he explained. "It's a phenomenal opportunity to help them do what's right." Lawyers can minister to troubled spouses seeking a divorce, counsel misguided teens in trouble with the law, advise ethically conflicted businessmen to do what's right, confront Christian ministries that are compromising biblical principles. The law is not merely a set of procedures or an argumentative technique. It is God's means of confronting wrong, establishing justice, defending the weak, and promoting the public good.

In every profession, the prevailing views stem from some underlying philosophy—basic assumptions about what is ultimately true and right. That

means Christians need not feel out of place bringing their *own* assumptions into the field. Sealy began to claim the freedom to bring biblical understandings of justice, rights, and reconciliation into the legal arena.

Sealy's Secret

The dilemma Sealy faced is not uncommon for Christians in any profession. As we saw in the previous chapter, modern society is characterized by a sharp split between the sacred and secular spheres—with work and business defined as strictly secular. As a consequence, Christians often live in two separate worlds, commuting between the private world of family and church (where we can express our faith freely) and the public world (where religious expression is firmly suppressed). Many of us don't even know what it means to have a Christian perspective on our work. Oh, we know that being a Christian means being ethical on the job—as Sealy put it, "no lying or cheating." But the work itself is typically defined in secular terms as bringing home a paycheck, climbing the career ladder, building a professional reputation.

For lawyers like Sealy, success is defined primarily as winning cases. The attitude in today's legal profession is that law has nothing to do with morality. Lawyers are little more than "hired guns" who are expected to defend their clients, right or wrong, with no regard for moral principles of truth or justice. They are admonished to keep their own moral perspective tucked tightly away in the private sphere; in the public sphere, their job is to give strictly legal advice.[3]

But no Christian, in any profession, can be happy when torn in two contrary directions. We all long for our work to count for something more than paying the bills or impressing our colleagues. How can we experience the full power of our Christian faith when it is locked away from the rest of life? How can we lead whole and integrated lives when we're required to shed our deepest beliefs along the way as we commute to work, functioning there from a purely "secular" mindset?

The dichotomies we've been talking about—secular/sacred and public/private—are not merely abstractions. They have a profoundly personal impact. When the public sphere is cordoned off as a religion-free zone, our lives become splintered and fragmented. Work and public life are stripped of spiritual significance, while the spiritual truths that give our lives the deepest meaning are demoted to leisure activities, suitable only for our time off. The gospel is hedged in, robbed of its power to "leaven" the whole of life.

How do we break free from the dichotomies that limit God's power in our lives? How can love and service to God become living sparks that light up our whole lives? By discovering a worldview perspective that unifies *both* secular

and sacred, public and private, within a single framework. By understanding that all honest work and creative enterprise can be a valid calling from the Lord. And by realizing there are biblical principles that apply to every field of work. These insights will fill us with new purpose, and we will begin to experience the joy that comes from relating to God in and through every dimension of our lives.

For Sealy, that meant discovering that practicing law is much more than a way to make money and win cases. It is fundamentally a way to execute God's own purposes in the world—to advance justice and contribute to the good of society. "God showed me how to live for him *in* my professional life," Sealy told me. "It's not just about running a business or making a living. In our work, we do the work of God. That's when I rediscovered joy."

Capitol Hill Guilt

Probably most of us had not linked together the idea of Christian worldview with finding joy in life. Yet Sealy is right. It is only when we offer up everything we do in worship to God that we finally experience His power coursing through every fiber of our being. The God of the Bible is not only the God of the human spirit but also the God of nature and history. We serve Him not only in worship but also in obedience to the Cultural Mandate. If Christian churches are serious about discipleship, they must teach believers how to keep living for God after they walk out the church doors on Sunday.

Not long ago, after speaking on Capitol Hill, I was approached by a congressional chief of staff who confided, with some frustration, that many of the Christian young people who come to Washington feel "guilty" about their interest in politics.

"Guilty?" The notion was incomprehensible to me. "But why?"

"Well," he explained, "they feel that if they were *really* committed to God, they wouldn't be here. They'd be in the ministry." Though many of these young people were graduates of Christian colleges, they had not been taught a Christian worldview. They still placed their professional work on the *secular* side of the secular/sacred split, regarding it as less valuable than religious activity.

A high-ranking Washington official once lamented how difficult it was to find people for government positions who were committed Christians and at the same time outstanding professionals. The problem, he told me, is that most Christians don't have a biblical sense of calling in their jobs—and thus they fail to treat it as frontline work for the Kingdom. As an example, he related the story of a doctor who had stopped practicing medicine in order to join the staff of a Christian organization.

"I left my medical practice to work in ministry," the doctor told him.

"Hold it," the official broke in. "That's exactly the problem: Your medical practice *was* a ministry, just as much as what you're doing now." Taken aback, the doctor confessed he had never thought of it that way before.

Ordinary Christians working in business, industry, politics, factory work, and so on, are "the Church's front-line troops in her engagement with the world," wrote Lesslie Newbigin. Imagine how our churches would be transformed if we truly regarded laypeople as frontline troops in the spiritual battle. "Are we taking seriously our duty to support them in their warfare?" Newbigin asked. "Have we ever done anything seriously to strengthen their Christian witness, to help them in facing the very difficult ethical problems which they have to meet every day, to give them the assurance that the whole fellowship is behind them in their daily spiritual warfare?"[4] The church is nothing less than a training ground for sending out laypeople who are equipped to speak the gospel to the world.

BECOMING BILINGUAL

In a sense, Christians need to learn how to be bilingual, translating the perspective of the gospel into language understood by our culture. On one hand, we all learn to use the language of the world: If we've gone through the public education system, "we have been trained to use a language which claims to make sense of the world without the hypothesis of God," as Newbigin puts it. But then, "for an hour or two a week, we use the other language, the language of the Bible."[5] We are like immigrants—like my own grandparents, who came to America from Sweden. During the Lutheran church service on Sunday, they spoke their familiar mother tongue; but for the rest of their lives they had to employ the strange-sounding English of the land where they had settled.

Yet Christians are not called to be *only* like immigrants, simply preserving a few customs and phrases from the old country. Instead, we are to be like missionaries, actively translating the language of faith into the language of the culture around us.

The uncomfortable truth is that we don't seem to be doing very well as linguists. Columnist Andy Crouch tells the story of a Christian professor at Cornell University who was concerned about the Christian students in his classes. They "hardly say a thing," the professor complained. The only way I even know that they're fellow believers is when "they come up after class and furtively thank me." Here was a professor actively seeking to create a friendly environment where Christian students would feel free to participate—"but they won't say anything!"[6]

Why not? The answer is that most Christian students simply don't know how to express their faith perspective in language suitable for the public square. Like immigrants who have not yet mastered the grammar of their new country, they are self-conscious. In private, they speak to one another in the mother tongue of their religion, but in class they are uncertain how to express their religious perspective in the accents of the academic world.

The Faith Gap

Polls consistently show that a large percentage of Americans claim to believe in God or to be born again—yet the effect of Christian principles is decreasing in public life. Why? Because most evangelicals have little training in how to frame Christian worldview principles in a language applicable in the public square. Though Christianity is thriving in modern culture, it is *at the expense* of being ever more firmly relegated to the private sphere.

Another way to phrase it is that the private sphere has become increasingly religious, while at the same time the public sphere has become increasingly secular. In a 1994 poll, 65 percent of Americans said religion is losing its influence in public life—yet almost the same number, 62 percent, said the influence of religion was actually *increasing* in their personal lives.[7] This means the divide between public and private realms has widened to a yawning chasm, making it harder than ever for Christians to cross over in order to bring biblically based principles into the public arena.

Privatization has also changed the *nature* of religion. In the private realm religion may enjoy considerable freedom—but only because the private sphere has been safely cordoned off from the "real" world where the "important" activities of society take place. Religion is no longer considered the source of serious truth claims that could potentially conflict with public agendas. The private realm has been reduced to an "innocuous 'play area'," says Peter Berger, where religion is acceptable for people who need that kind of crutch—but where it won't upset any important applecarts in the larger world of politics and economics.[8]

By allowing religion to be restricted to a segregated area of life, however, we have undercut one of its primary purposes, which is precisely to provide a sense of life's overarching meaning. As Berger writes, privatization "represents a severe rupture of the traditional task of religion, which was precisely the establishment of an integrated set of definitions of reality that could serve as a common universe of meaning for the members of a society."[9] In fact, many evangelicals no longer even think it *is* the task of religion to provide a "common universe of meaning." Today religion appeals almost solely to the needs

of the private sphere—needs for personal meaning, social bonding, family support, emotional nurturing, practical living, and so on. In this climate, almost inevitably, churches come to speak the language of psychological needs, focusing primarily on the therapeutic functions of religion. Whereas religion used to be connected to group identity and a sense of belonging, it is now almost solely a search for an authentic inner life.

People often become very attached to a religion that addresses their emotional and practical needs in this manner. In an increasingly impersonal public world, people are hungry for resources to sustain their personal and private world. Nonetheless, it represents a truncated view of Christianity's claims to be the truth about all of reality. "Secularization did not cause the death of religion," says theologian Walter Kasper, but it did cause it to "become but one sector of modern life along with many others. Religion lost its claim to universality and its power of interpretation."[10] That is, Christianity no longer functions as a lens to interpret the whole of reality; it is no longer held as total truth.

In essence, Christians have accepted a trade-off: By acquiescing in the privatization process, Newbigin says, Christianity "has secured for itself a continuing place, at the cost of surrendering the crucial field."[11] In other words, Christianity has survived in the private sphere, but at the cost of losing the ability to make a credible claim in the public sphere or to challenge the reigning ideologies.

The reason Newbigin was so sensitive to the problem is that he lived for forty years as a missionary in India, which is not plagued by the same secular/sacred, public/private split. The mentality of Indian Christians is that *of course* religion permeates all of life. The same is true of African Christians. "In most human cultures, religion is not a separate activity set apart from the rest of life," Newbigin explains. In these cultures, "what we call religion is a whole worldview, a way of understanding the whole of human experience."

On a global scale, then, the secular/sacred dichotomy is an anomaly—a distinctive of Western culture alone. "The sharp line which modern Western culture has drawn between religious affairs and secular affairs is itself one of the most significant peculiarities of our culture, and would be incomprehensible to the vast majority of people."[12] In order to communicate the gospel in the West, we face a unique challenge: We need to learn how to liberate it from the private sphere and present it in its glorious fullness as the truth about all reality.

CHAPTER 2: REDISCOVERING JOY

1. Charles Malik, *The Two Tasks* (Westchester, Ill.: Cornerstone, 1980), 32.
2. Sealy Yates, in discussion with the author.
3. See Joseph G. Allegretti, *The Lawyer's Calling: Christian Faith and Legal Practice* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1996). For an analysis of Christian approaches to law, see *Christian Perspectives on Legal Thought,* ed. Michael McConnell (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001).
4. Lesslie Newbigin, *Our Task Today.* An unpublished paper given to the fourth meeting of the diocesan council, Tirumangalam, India, December 18-20, 1951. Cited in Michael Goheen, "The Missional Calling of Believers in the World: Lesslie Newbigin's Contribution," at http://www.deepsight.org/articles/goheenb.htm.
5. Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 49.
6. Andy Crouch, "Christian Esperanto: We Must Learn Other Cultural Tongues," in *Christianity Today,* April, 2003.
7. Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 7.
8. Peter Berger, *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 18. Berger is referring specifically to the private sphere of the family, but it is an apt description of the private sphere generally.
9. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), 134.
10. Walter Kasper, "Nature, Grace, and Culture: On the Meaning of Secularization," in *Catholicism and Secularization in America: Essays on Nature, Grace, and Culture,* ed. David L. Schindler (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, Communio Books, 1990), 38.
11. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 31.
12. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 172.
13. In 1995, Smith and his team conducted 130 two-hour interviews. In 1996, they conducted 2,591 telephone surveys (2,087 of which were with churchgoing Protestants). Later in 1996, they conducted 178 two-hour interviews with evangelical Protestants. They also did phone interviews with 8 people who had identified themselves in the phone interviews as "fundamentalists" and 6 who called themselves "liberal Protestants." See Christian Smith, with Michael Emerson, Sally Gallagher, Paul Kennedy, and David Sikkink, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17.
14. The labels were based on self-definition: e.g., if someone identified himself as an evangelical Presbyterian, he was placed in the "evangelical" category, while if he identified himself as a liberal Presbyterian, he was slotted into the "liberal" category. As a result, the number of evangelicals is smaller (7 percent of the population) than in most other surveys, where subjects are identified according to standards selected by the survey-taker, such as denominational affiliation or specific doctrinal beliefs.
15. Surprisingly, evangelicals outrank even fundamentalists on all but one measure. The reason, Smith suggests, may be that fundamentalists tend to embrace a subculture mentality—remaining culturally isolated in their churches, schools, and parachurch organizations. Moreover, the doctrine of premillennial dispensationalism, which is more common among fundamentalists, is sometimes interpreted to imply that the world is on a downward slide, and thus that reform is useless. (Why polish the brass on a sinking ship?) This lack of engagement with the outside world may be the reason that fundamentalists demonstrated a slightly greater complacency about their faith as compared to evangelicals, who place more emphasis on reaching out to the surrounding culture. Regular confrontation with a hostile culture, Smith suggests, may actually make for a more alert and active faith commitment (Smith, *American Evangelicalism,* 145-147).
16. This is a result of an atomistic view of society, which conceives of social groups as merely aggregates of individuals. To understand the sources of this individualistic social philosophy among evangelicals, see part 3.
17. Smith, *American Evangelicalism,* 188, 190.
18. Ibid., 203.

About the Author

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Pearcey began writing articles on science and Christian worldview in 1977 for the *Bible-Science Newsletter,* where she worked for thirteen years, analyzing many of the themes she would develop more fully in later writings. In 1991 she became the founding editor of "BreakPoint," a daily syndicated radio commentary program, and continued as the program's executive editor for nearly nine years, heading up a team of writers. Under her leadership, the program grew into an influential organ for teaching a Christian worldview perspective on current events, with an estimated weekly audience of five million. She was also policy director and senior fellow of the Wilberforce Forum, and coauthored a monthly column in *Christianity Today* for five years.

Pearcey has served as managing editor of the science journal *Origins & Design,* as an editorial board member for Salem Communications Network, and as a commentator on Public Square Radio. Her articles have appeared in several journals and magazines, including the *Washington Times, Human Events, First Things, Books and Culture, World, Pro Rege, Human Life Review, American Enterprise, The World & I, The Family in America, Christianity Today,* and the *Regent University Law Review.*

Pearcey has authored or contributed to several works, including *The Soul of Science,* on the history of science and Christianity since the scientific revolution; and the best-selling, award-winning *How Now Shall We Live?* She is featured in a video Sunday school curriculum based on the latter, produced by LifeWay Christian Resources.

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