

Have you ever been offered the chance to join a family business? You know, that's where a founder started the business, perhaps even generations ago, and now you are asked to join, to further the mission and extend the organization's longevity and success. Now that kind of thing happened more often in long-ago generations past—that's because folks often remained in their home village and the sons of their fathers often fell into the same line of work due to a relative lack of opportunity, skills, and mobility.

Yeah, sometimes their father was a baker...or maybe a tanner...or perhaps a shoemaker. In fact, that's why many family names in Europe and America for generations have been known by their surnames, yeah, like the Bakers or the Tanners or the Shoemakers. Now, in those generations past, many of those kinds of apprenticeships and training evolved into modest but stable multi-generational businesses.

But in recent decades in the modern world, the tremendous opportunities created by free markets and professional training dramatically changed the landscape for many: that's right, ambitious young men and women in places like America choose vocations far different from those of their parents and grandparents.

But it's still the case today that some families do stick together in the family business for generations. We see family farms that have stayed in the family for generations. And we think of S C Johnson, an American company that proudly proclaims the fact that it is a "family company." And so it is: it's been five generations of Johnsons making sure folks can purchase and enjoy their products like Windex cleaner and Ziploc sandwich bags and Off! insect repellent and Raid roach spray.

But many in the next generation today don't have—or actually don't want—that kind of career opportunity of joining a family business. But that doesn't mean there isn't real opportunity for life success in very similar fashion—yeah, at least for Christians!

All that moves us to a particular train of thought about our lives as believers in the Kingdom of God. There's a story in the King James Version of the Bible I've always been impacted by every time I've read it—the story of Jesus staying behind after his family departed...he stayed to talk with the rabbis. When his worried parents finally found Him, "...he said unto them, 'How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?'" Luke 2:49 (KJV)

That's right, Jesus said He must be about His Father's business. That implies focus...tasks...priorities—not those that just occur to someone out of the blue, but those tasks and priorities in the business set before them by someone they are accountable to, yes, accountable, whether by agreement or simple choice.

But other modern translations of this verse in the Bible use the word "house" instead of the word "business," with the result being something like this: "Why is it that you were looking for me? Did you not know that I would have to be in my Father's house?" Yeah, they used the word "house" instead of the word "business." So, often when I have heard someone reference this, they tend to say that Jesus meant the temple building itself. But here's the thing: some Greek scholars digging into this tell us that neither of these English-language nouns of "business" and "house" is really found in the original text...those are inserted out of the blue by the translators. Instead, some Greek scholars say the right rendering is this: *"in the things of my Father."* That's it. No more words added—just *"in the things of my Father."*

Sometimes, I have heard teaching or preaching that says this passage is supposedly all about the temple, the house of God where the rabbis were found. Others might say that it was about the 12-year-old learning from the rabbis in the temple that day. But here's the key part of the passage addressing that: Jesus was found by His parents "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

Wow, take notice of that powerful last sentence: "all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers." Yes, Jesus was speaking of "the things of His father" to his listeners. And that happened over and over again in Jesus' later ministry, too...but not just in the synagogues, but also on hillsides and

on seashores. The truth is, being devoted to the Father means that you “occupy” in the things of God, and you “occupy” in whatever tasks or opportunities are directed by the Holy Spirit.

But there are some real interesting dimensions as to how some Christians think about the perceived range of choices. As for young Christians I sometimes see—sometimes they can easily tend to believe whatever activities are labeled “Christian” could be rightly classified as “the things of the Father.”

But just what are “things of the Father?” What’s very interesting to me is that Jesus didn’t say “the things of God.” He was speaking of a special intimacy, the things of His Father. The Apostle John wrote this in his gospel: “So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.’” (5:19-20)

Yes, Jesus conformed to His Father, being *about His Father’s business!* That’s right, conforming to the Father! Another way of saying that, as we see the theologians say, Jesus was *in the things of His Father.*

Now, let’s take a deep breath. It’s only by God’s grace that we are now believers, *ourselves adopted children of God!* And Galatians 4:4-7 tells us this about that: “...God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”

Now, this is really, really special—those who respond to the Gospel are adopted into the family of God! And with that we are grafted into the family business...God’s family business! And His grand business is the redemption of and full fellowship for responders to the Father through Christ and the Cross. But, wait, we have a deeper role to play, *if we listen to and obey the clear voice of God!*

But you know something? That’s been a problem for humanity from the start—listening to and obeying the voice of God, starting with the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden and continuing ever since, even for God’s people—both Old Testament and New! Here’s the story from Jeremiah 7:25-26, 28...

“From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers...This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the Lord their God.”

But what does the voice of the living God say to *Christians*, directly from the New Testament? Here’s Matthew 28:18-20: “...Jesus came and said to [his disciples], ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.’”

Now that is the clear, direct voice of God recorded for our benefit...our privilege...our thriving...our obedience! Even so, Jesus said that the fields are ready for harvest but the workers are few. And that’s pretty much the New Testament equivalent of the words just quoted from Jeremiah! Here that is again: “they did not listen to me or incline their ear.” Wow! And, again, these later words in Jeremiah: they “did not obey the voice of the Lord their God.” Sadly, in Old Testament and New, obedience is not common.

Look, in the New Covenant, the working out of being about the Father’s business and in the things of the Lord is so very elegantly captured in the Great Commission. *The very voice of Jesus our Lord gave us this command.* Wow, talk about *being in the things of our Father!* Are you following and obeying this call?

When young Jesus was at the temple, He had left his family behind, so Joseph and Mary were frantically searching for Him. But He had a different focus, tasks, priorities. So, what about you? Our Father has called all His disciples into His family business of making more disciples. Are you consistently tied down by lesser obligations? *Or are you obediently pursuing being right smack in the middle of the things of your Father?*

A&A: Application & Action

1. In the Old Testament, it's very clear that Israel did not obey God's voice, evidenced both in history and the testimony of God Himself in Jeremiah 7. Do you believe that, broadly speaking, churches over the last 2,000 years have been better than Israel at obeying God's voice? Discuss.
2. By evidence of their preaching, teaching, doctrine, and finances, is your local church doing well "at the things of the Father?" Discuss.
3. Are you operating as fully as you could be "in the things of your Father?" Discuss.