

The Cost  
of the American Dream . . .

What is the American Dream? It's the hard-charging corporate executive who clawed his way up from the mailroom by working eighty hours per week. And it's the entrepreneur who built her own multi-million dollar company out of a hobby. It's also the teenager who started a franchise from a summer delivery job. The American Dream is that you can accomplish anything with hard work.

Often, the dream comes true—it is possible to make a fortune with nothing except guts, long hours, and good timing. But time and again, the dream turns into a nightmare when the hidden costs come crawling out of the wall: destroyed relationships, wrecked health, and a lost soul. That is why Jesus said,

*“What will it profit a man if he gains  
the whole world and forfeits his life?  
Or what shall a man give in return for his life?”*  
(Matthew 16:26)

**Q:** “Is it wrong to be ambitious?”

Ambition is not always wrong. Ambition has two motives:<sup>1</sup>

- A *humble* desire to achieve a particular end
- A *selfish* desire for rank, fame, or power
- *Positive Ambition* to work—selflessness
  - desire* to do my best
  - desire* to serve others
  - desire* to accomplish a higher good
  - desire* to fulfill God's purpose
- *Negative Addiction* to work—selfishness
  - compulsion* to do more tasks perfectly
  - compulsion* to look good before others
  - compulsion* for self-achievement
  - compulsion* to fulfill my purpose

*“God opposes the proud  
but gives grace to the humble.”*  
(1 Peter 5:5)

## The Compulsive Worker's Checklist<sup>2</sup>

- Do I have difficulty pacing my time?
- Do I have difficulty being satisfied with the final result?
- Do I feel that my work is controlling me?
- Do I make sure others know how much and how long I work?
- Do I resent others for not working as hard as I think they should?
- Do I feel guilty when I relax or have fun?
- Do I often feel fatigued?
- Do I put work above those closest to me?
- Do I talk primarily about my activities?
- Do I fear others might think I don't work hard enough?
- Do I have difficulty saying no?
- Do I feel that the more I work, the more I will please God?
- Do I have more devotion to my work than to the Lord?

*"I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun."  
(Ecclesiastes 2:20)*

## The Passion to Push

- The push to **produce**—seeking significance
- The push to **perform**—seeking admiration and recognition
- The push to **protect**—avoiding intimate relationships
- The push to be **perfect**—being rigid and inflexible
- The push to **prosper**—overemphasizing material possessions
- The push to **please**—viewing God as rigid

*"Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one."  
(1 Thessalonians 4:11–12)*

## How to Respond to the Workaholic

- **Control** your tongue. Negative remarks only increase the pressure to perform. (Proverbs 16:21)
- **Come** to terms. Confront in love. (Ephesians 4:15)
- **Cancel** your resentment. Resentment builds bitterness. (Hebrews 12:15)

## Key Verse to Memorize

*"I commend joy, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun."  
(Ecclesiastes 8:15)*

## Key Passage to Read and Reread

**Luke 10:38–42**

## Time Tips for Workaholics

- Erase the thought that working day and night is sacrificial and spiritual. (Psalm 127:2)
- Write a to-do list daily—preferably the evening before. (Luke 14:28)
- List your priorities in order of importance. (Proverbs 21:5)
- Establish a starting and finishing time for each task. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)
- Eliminate the open door policy. (Matthew 14:23)
- Set aside specific time for family, friends, and for yourself. (Proverbs 14:22)

## Freedom for the Workaholic<sup>3</sup>

**F**irmly decide to live under grace, not law.  
(Galatians 4:8–9)

**R**elease the burden of guilt. (Hebrews 10:22)

**E**liminate your need to please others, and focus on pleasing God. (Galatians 1:10)

**E**nlarge your commitment to time for rest, relaxation, and communion with the Lord.  
(Ecclesiastes 2:23)

**D**ecide to be completely honest about your feelings, and be vulnerable to others. (Proverbs 23:23)

**O**bey the law of love rather than the law of fear.  
(1 John 4:16–18)

**M**aintain your sense of significance and satisfy your need for security by finding your identity in Christ.  
(Galatians 2:20)

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### Related Topics . . .

- Prosperity:  
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1. Robert Heavner, "Great Aspirations: How Ambitious Should a Christian Be?" *Discipleship Journal*, July/August 1988.  
2. For this section see Frank Minirth et al., *The Workaholic and His Family: An Inside Look* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 29–31, 59–64.  
3. For this section see Minirth et al., *The Workaholic and His Family*, 137–59.



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