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**WHERE’S MY JOB?**

***Pastor Richard Fox***

**I have lost count of how many people I’ve spoken with recently who are facing uncertain times in their jobs. Some of the stories are of small businesses and trades people having to cut their profit margins or release staff. Redundancies and terminations don’t only affect the individual but also the workplace, family life, and community they live in. When times are uncertain like this it can cause a lot of stress on the employee and the employer and their close family and friends. People rely on jobs for their income and survival.**

In some of the recent statistics released by the Australian Government, stress claims topped $10 billion and job insecurity, over-work, and under-work contributed to the cost, both personally and to the economy. Recent statistics show that living in Australia you can expect to have at least four jobs in a lifetime, and live in six different houses in four different towns! People are often working longer hours and there’s a rapid rise in part-time and casual work positions. The latest figures show that nearly half a million people want full-time work but can’t find it.

The majority of this appears to result from the changing nature of the work force and the economy. The mining boom stimulated the economy in the recent past but it’s not clear what will support and create jobs into the future.

Job uncertainty affects many aspects of our lives. Without a job, income is reduced and there might be financial pressures such as paying off a home loan and buying the necessities. As we get closer to Christmas there’s the added pressure of buying presents and entertaining family. Relationships can start to feel the strain and family life can be difficult. Uncertainty may lead to doubt, which can lead to despair and also depression.

Job uncertainty can even start to affect our identity and we may doubt ourselves as people.

We may start asking questions like; What am I going to do? How are the people around me going to manage? What should my priorities be?

And then those ‘big life’ questions may even start to flood our thoughts. Questions like; Who am I? What’s my purpose in life?

What we do, often helps make us who we are, so when what we do is uncertain, our whole existence may seem to be uncertain.

I’ve gone through times like this. In my early years I worked on a dairy and potato farm, picking blackberries, mushrooms, and cherries. I worked as a builder’s labourer while I was studying accountancy. For a few weeks I worked as a door to door book sales person. I’ve worked in the government’s registration and licensing department as a temp, and as a business manager for Lutheran Community Care. I also umpired AFL footy. After all those jobs I became a pastor in Waikerie in the South Australian Riverland and now I’m the Director of Lutheran Media. I’ve lost count of how many jobs I’ve had.

Through all this, there have been a lot of uncertain times.

I enjoyed the farm life but that didn’t last as my father became very sick with a mystery illness and we eventually had to leave and sell the family farm. Working as a builder’s labourer made me realise that I wasn’t strong enough. I didn’t enjoy the door to door book selling job. And as a temp in a government department you were never assured of a job. You could be dismissed in a day or 2 and finally after many years my number was up. Thankfully I was given the job as Business Manager at Lutheran Community Care and my working journey continued.

Through my AFL umpiring career I experienced many ups and downs. I umpired grand finals but I was also dropped from games too. Being an AFL umpire had some very uncertain times because your next decision, or lack of a decision, could affect your whole career. That was a huge amount of pressure and at times I struggled because of it. Insecurity in the workplace certainly affected my performance and energy levels, and there was also extra strain on my family life.

Through these times I relied heavily on God, and his help and guidance.

One of the things that helped me has been getting to know Jesus’ life story. Jesus was born in an animal shelter in a minority group called the Jews who were controlled by the ruling occupying forces - the Romans. The Romans were brutal and so Jesus often had to travel and live in different places to avoid being persecuted.

Jesus went to school and then worked in the family business as a carpenter. He would have been required to pay taxes to the Romans and live under their control which wouldn’t have been easy.

When Jesus took up his calling to be the saviour of the world, he was tested and put under pressure to divert him from his task. There were evil forces who didn’t want Jesus to succeed in his job.

However, Jesus continued in his work and performed miracles and healings. He was a teacher, a preacher, a prophet, and a priest. He called people to follow him and was a leader. He was a King. He carried the responsibility of not only himself, but also his disciples and everyone in the world – including us!

Jesus had his detractors. Other leaders said he wasn’t good enough and was leading people astray. Jesus spoke out and put people off side. He was even run out of his own town. Jesus was eventually rejected by everyone, tried in an unjust court, and crucified on a shame filled cross.

I can’t even imagine the pressures that Jesus was put under and I am very certain I wouldn’t have wanted his job.

Some may say that Jesus failed. But 3 days later he rose from the dead and defeated the hold that death has over us. Because of Jesus staying true to his job, he has given us the gift of eternal life with God in heaven. Jesus’ life is not just an example of someone empathising with our struggles, his journey is for us. Jesus gives us himself to be with us always, including the uncertain times in our lives.

We will have our difficult and uncertain times. But God calls us to look to Him as he is always there carrying us through.

I have my concerns as I work in media to provide hope and love through words and images to people. But sharing these concerns with God by talking to Him definitely helps.

Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28) and this is summed up in this well known poem, “Footprints in the Sand”;

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.

Sometimes there were two sets of footprints,

other times there were one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed

that during the low periods of my life,

when I was suffering from

anguish, sorrow or defeat,

I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,

"You promised me Lord,

that if I followed you,

you would walk with me always.

But I have noticed that during

the most trying periods of my life

there have only been one

set of footprints in the sand.

Why, when I needed you most,

you have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied,

"My precious child, I love you and I would never leave you.

The times when you have

seen only one set of footprints,

is when I carried you."

We can assess our gifts and strengths, we can do further study, and maybe some volunteering may help. But one of the main things that helps is talking with God.

In regards to our uncertain times in our lives, do not despair - put your hope in Jesus.



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