

Henry's Glory: A Story for Discovering Lasting Significance in Your Daily Work

by John Elton Pletcher

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John Elton Pletcher is Lead Pastor at Manor Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Pletcher says up front that this story was “written for grease-covered car guys, running-fast real estate gals, plumbers, pastors, farmers, entrepreneurs, teachers, busy soccer moms, CEOs, and everybody else who is working so hard day after day” (p. xi). How does that work connect to God and the life of faith?

The protagonist in the story is Zach, a young architect about 30 years old, working in his eighth year at a design firm in Valley Forge PA. The firm is under pressure because of a downturn in business and Zach is concerned they are now cutting corners. Zach is a young star recognized for his “innovative style, bold lines, and something like an ancient-future approach to his commercial projects. . . admired for his playful panache and creative use of bold color . . . amazing drive to tackle a host of new projects each year, yielding robust revenues . . . ” (p.2). But Zach is wondering about the significance of his work and career.

Zach's old Uncle Clyde is a pastor whose frequent message is “Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last” --- interpreted as a focus on the afterlife and a focus on mission and evangelism in a narrow sense. Work, for Uncle Clyde, is just a necessary burden on the way to glory.

Zach is in an especially reflective mood because he has taken five days off to join the family at the Ohio home of his Grandpa who is expected to live only two or three days longer. Zach was accompanied on the eight-hour drive from Pennsylvania by Maggie (“Mags”) his platonic friend going back to middle school days. Her dad is the head of Zach's architectural firm. “Henry” is the nickname of an old F-100 Ford pick-up truck Grandpa gifts to Zach. A folksy pipe-smoking old neighbor named Marshall volunteers to help get Henry repaired and road-worthy. Marshall had been drawn to faith by the long-term friendship and care of Zach's Grandpa. Hospital chaplain Ben also gets into the discussions. Pastor Tom is raising eyebrows by ordaining his parishioners for their various workplaces. Even George Washington Carver shows up in the form of a letter to Zach's great grandpa.

Henry's Glory is a light-hearted, folksy story that reminded me (jaded old urban intellectual and kingdom-activist) constantly of the fictional television town of Mayberry. I kept hearing Sheriff Andy Griffith and Detective Barney Fife in my head. These townspeople cuss by saying “doggone” and drop their “g's” off words whenever they can, and add a preliminary “a” if possible (as in “we're “a-fixin' to go a-eatin' 'n' a-talkin”). But don't let this fool you: almost every page has extended dialogues and monologues about the theology of work. It is actually a very robust, biblically-informed theology of work you get in this story. And romance! Zach and Mags flirt for 100 pages then walk off holding hands at the end. Sentimentality, nostalgia . . . I could almost smell the bacon in the air as saintly Grandma was cooking breakfast.

Each of the twelve chapters closes with several discussion/reflection questions just to be sure you get the point. Almost every page has “call-outs” (blocked out quotations) so you won't miss the author's points of emphasis. I actually found both of those features distracting and wished they were collected at the end of the book. But in the end my strongest impression was of the parallels between *Henry's Glory* and Ayn Rand's *Fountainhead*. Both are centered on a young architect. Both have a romantic interest. Both have long philosophical/theological dialogues. And there the similarity ends. Rand is a cynical, mammon-worshipping, selfish, cruel atheist; Pletcher is a hopeful, God-worshipping, neighbor-loving, kind and creative believer. If you can handle a trip to Mayberry for some truth, pick up this book!