

Relating to Work

2019-08-04 by Ben Deaver at Tallgrass Church on Colossians 3:22-4:1

Mingle Question: What do you do?

- What do you do? How do you earn a living? What do you do to justify your existence?

Relating Sermon Series

Relating to... Word Cloud List: Soul/Self, God, Scripture, Disciples, Friends, Technology, Past, Culture, Sexuality, Enemy, Money, Neighbors, Church, Earth, Body, Politics, Family, **WORK**

Relating to Work

Work is good!

Work was part of God's design for humanity in a perfect world.

- **Genesis 2:15** The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.
 - Address those looking for work, those unable to work, etc. One of the reasons it's difficult even beyond the struggle financially is that we were in fact made to work. Work can bring about satisfaction, quality of life, human flourishing.
- **Genesis 3:17b-19a** ^{17b}...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ^{19a}By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread...

Please turn to page ??? in your ESV giveaway Bible!

Read Colossians 3:22-4:1

Colossians 3:22-4:1 ^{3:22}Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. ^{4:1}Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Pray

What it doesn't say

- Nothing about identity from our work. "I'm a _____."
 - We already have an identity. "I'm a child of God."
 - We don't work *for* an identity; we work *from* our identity in Christ.
- Nothing about finding the work that suits your talents and interests.
 - This isn't wrong, but it simply not an option for many. Bondservants had no job mobility back then.
 - We probably have more job mobility.
 - Dream a little... What do you want to do? Let's chat! Let's pray. Let's see what God might do.

- If you don't have any job mobility and can't stop working insanely long hours then maybe you're more like a slave than you'd like to admit.
- Paul seems to think that even the slaves could live super-significant and very rewarding lives as this passage teaches.
- Job satisfaction is huge! Either battle for contentment or change jobs... Or work on both simultaneously.

Four Questions Paul Addresses:

1. *Who* do we work for?
2. *How* should we work?
3. *Why* should we work this way?
4. *Where* do we get energy to work this way?

1) *Who* do we work for?

- Address stay-at-home parents. Raising children is very hard and extremely important work. But I won't be addressing specifically working in the home as a stay at home parent. However, every point we will cover does apply to stay at home parents...so this teaching is for anyone and everyone in the room!
- Those who are too young to get jobs in the workplace can still develop a biblical work ethic in the home and/or around the neighborhood. This is a great way to shepherd our kids, get them working!
- *Tallgrassians in the workplace image*
- Every member a full-time minister
- I'm in vocational ministry.
- Take your pastor to work day! Peter Ruby, Cris Ugolini, JP Sibbitt, Bill Bickmeier, Paxton LeMoine, etc.

We work for Jesus.

- "work heartily, as for the Lord" and "Master in heaven"
- Yes, we have "earthly bosses", but we are really working for our "Boss in heaven", Jesus Christ.
- You may supervise others but even then, you are under your Supervisor, Jesus.
- Jesus is Lord over every aspect of your life, including your work.

Two radical implications of the fact that we work for Jesus:

First, worship Jesus at work.

- Worship Jesus with your whole life, not just for 15 minutes on a Sunday evening while we sing. Which, BTW, we wanna extend our singing together time to 20 minutes in the fall.
- **Romans 12:1** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your *spiritual worship*.
- **1 Corinthians 10:31** So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do *all* to the glory of God.

Second, represent Jesus at work.

- Remember, you are a Vice-Regent to King Jesus. You are His ambassador, declaring the Good News of His Kingdom!
- **Colossians 3:17** And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything *in the name* of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
- **Colossians 3:17** ^{NLT} And whatever you do or say, do it *as a representative* of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.
- Jesus as carpenter—Think about how Jesus would have worked as a carpenter/mason. Do you think He was a hard worker? Do you think He paid attention to detail? Do you think He cared about the customers?
- See also

- **Exodus 35:10** Let every skillful craftsman among you come and make all that the LORD has commanded...
- **1 Chronicles 22:15-16** ¹⁵ “You have an abundance of workmen: stonecutters, masons, carpenters, and all kinds of craftsmen without number, skilled in working ¹⁶ gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Arise and work! The LORD be with you!”
- **Proverbs 22:29** Do you see a man skillful in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before obscure men.
 - “God will make a way for your gifts.” –Wade Brown, PastorServe
 - Dignity and honor! Glory!
 - “pocket of greatness” –Jim Collins
- Peter Ruby’s workplace mission statement!

Do you work for Jesus? Do you know Jesus? Have you decided to follow this carpenter turned King from the backwoods of Nazareth who lived 2000 years ago? First things first, get your relationship right with God through the means of the Gospel so that you can put your work in its rightful place.

Sacred/Secular Divide

- **Story:** After a Navigators night when I was a student at K-State I bought some beer and ran into a fellow student and they said, “I can’t believe you would buy beer right after Navs.” I was like, “You want me to just wait until tomorrow to buy beer?” Sacred/Secular Divide!
- **Story:** Let’s say I dropped a four letter expletive up here on stage. Everyone, no matter what your religious background, would be like, “I can’t believe he just said that...in church...on a Sunday!” But most of y’all, if I dropped that same word outside of here somewhere tomorrow wouldn’t feel any dissonance at all (some of you might). Sacred/Secular Divide!
- This is rooted in Gnosticism but you don’t need to worry too much about that unless you’re interested in learning more. This is the way the world systems views reality. This shows up in most every other world religion. But the Bible does not teach a sacred/secular divide!
- **Story:** From Steve, high ranking military officer who had a subordinate who talked about being a pastor and doing all these great things for Jesus but he wasn’t a good worker in the military. Reflected very poorly on Jesus. Sacred/Secular Divide!

So we work for Jesus and we are to worship and represent Jesus at work!

Big Idea: Work like you work for Jesus, because you do! And work like Jesus would work.

- Not just Mondays thru Fridays, but Sundays thru Saturdays.

2) How should we work?

Since you work for Jesus, what should characterize your work?

Four descriptions of how we should work (three from our Colossians passage plus one more):

First, work respectfully and cooperatively with your human supervisors (3:22).

- Not only to their faces but also in the break room when they are not around.
- You should do this even if they are unreasonable.
- **1 Peter 2:18** Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.
 - Think about *their* bosses back then and there!
- Disrespecting, sabotaging, arguing with, or passively resisting your supervisors is rebelling against Jesus, because He set this example (1Pet.3:21,24) and He asks you to do this for Him.

Second, work hard (3:23).

- Work heartily—six days you shall work and rest on the seventh! Work hard, rest hard.
- Whether you are recognized and/or rewarded for your hard work or not.
- You aren't doing your work merely for a raise or promotion; you are doing it for the Lord.
- Showing up late, taking off early, or loafing on the job are insubordination to the One who worked hard for your salvation.

Third, work justly and fairly—treat your employees/subordinates/coworkers with justice and fairness (4:1).

- You should not abuse your authority by disrespecting or taking advantage of them, because Jesus is your Master and He used His authority to serve you rather than to exploit you.
- Justice—disadvantaging yourself for the advantage of others
- You may need to pay your employees more than the business standard to be just and fair.

Fourth, work benevolently. Well wishing!

- **Ephesians 6:7** ...rendering service with *a good will* as to the Lord and not to man...
- Rather than being a grumbler or disputer (read Philippians 2:14).
- You should be a major contributor to good work morale!
- **1 Thessalonians 4:10b-12** ^{10b} But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Because you work for Jesus, you should be an exemplary worker in the above ways.

- Your supervisors and associates should be glad that you work for/with them.
- If you work this way, you will likely be prized and promoted (because such employees are very difficult to find today!).
- And yet (also because you work for Jesus) you should be known as one who does not live for your job, who can and does set work boundaries, who will not allow your job to undermine your other responsibilities (e.g., family; fellowship).
 - Employers often respect employees who set boundaries for good reasons.
 - E.g. Soldiers who prioritized a men's bible study or accountability group.
- Be someone who is willing to leave your job if Jesus calls you into other service for Him.
 - Paul left tentmaking for a different calling but still would use his tentmaking skills at times.
 - Jesus left carpentry for a different calling.
 - Some are in difficult work environments that includes challenging ethical dilemmas. Some may be led in a different direction, and if you're being led by the Spirit, then you best respond.
 - Military
 - Lawyer

3) Why should we work this way?

Working this way day in and day out is not easy; it requires adequate motivation!

Four motivations for working this way:

First, we work for Jesus! Already covered that one.

Second, to adorn the Gospel.

- Because at work you can attract people to Jesus or repel them from Jesus.
- Read Titus 2:10. By being good employees we can “adorn” (*kosmeo* – “make attractive”) the gospel.
- **Titus 2:9-10** ⁹ Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may **adorn the doctrine** of God our Savior.
- See also **Philippians 2:14-16** ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.
- By being good employees, we can expose by positive contrast the darkness and emptiness of life without Jesus, and we can “hold forth” (*epecho* – drinks offered at a feast) the refreshing news about Jesus.
- On the other hand, by being poor workers, we can cause Christianity to be blasphemed (read 1Tim.6:1). I wonder how many people in this city are turned off to Christianity because of Christians at work who lie, gossip, loaf, bully, etc.
- The great majority of Americans are now unchurched. They have never attended Christian churches or Bible studies. They do not have Christian friends or family members. They will not respond to billboards or websites that invite them to Christian churches. The media creatively misrepresents Christianity, and Christian hypocrites confirm their suspicions. All of this means that one of the few ways they will ever come into contact with the living Jesus is through Christians at work.

Third, because God wants to develop your character through your workplace.

- **Romans 8:28-29** ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
 - ALL THINGS, including your workplace, is working together for your good, shaping you be conformed to the image of Jesus!
 - The average person will spend approximately 150,000 hours at work in their lifetime – that is to say, about 40% of our waking lives are spent at work.
 - No grumbling or complaining. Rather give thanks!
 - “Thank You, God, for this leadership challenge that You’re using to make me more like Jesus!”
 - “Thank You, God, for this difficult coworker who You’re using to make me more like Jesus!”
 - **Philippians 2:14** Do all things without grumbling or disputing
- Being challenged by this truth as a young Christian totally changed the way I viewed my job. (At the time, I worked as a busboy and dishwasher and cook.) I began to ask the Lord: “What character lessons are You trying to teach me here?” As I began to focus on this question and respond to His answers, He helped me to quit focusing on the people with whom I worked and the many other distasteful aspects of my job. I also began to see how what I was learning at work was helping me to become a better Christian worker, son to my parents, housemate, etc. The ten years I worked at jobs like this were *crucial* preparation for marriage, parenting, and vocational Christian ministry.

Fourth, Jesus will reward you for serving Him well at work.

- If you understand these two motivations, you can understand the motivation Paul gives in this passage
- **Colossians 3:24**
- **Ephesians 6:7-8** ⁷ ...rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.
- This refers to Jesus’ evaluation of our service for Him when He returns. This is your ultimate *performance evaluation*.
- Every way you let Him transform you through work, everything you did to represent Him well to others at work will be recalled and honored and rewarded in ways that will ripple through all eternity.

- This is your ultimate *compensation package* – and it will be based on your faithfulness, not your job status (“whether slave or free”).
- There will be Christian dishwashers who are richly rewarded, and Christian executives who are not rewarded at all!
- How often do you think about your job as an opportunity for eternal reward?
- Turn your “pocket of greatness” into an “eternal weight of glory”!

4) **Where do we get energy to work this way?**

We not only need motivation to do our work this way. We also need supernatural empowerment.

Two main ways we can appropriate Jesus’ energy to serve Him at work:

First, by being vitally involved in Christian community (3:12-17).

- In the New Testament letters, exhortation to Body-life almost always comes before exhortation about our social roles (Romans 12-13; Colossians 3-4; Ephesians 5-6; 1 Peter 1-3).
- *Revisit Relating word cloud.*
- Why? Because we must be deeply involved in Body-life in order to play these roles effectively. You cannot be a good employee, manager, owner, etc. unless you are a truly engaged Christian brother/sister!
- This is where you get spiritually built up to go into the (often) spiritually-draining work-place. This is where you get prayer to be a witness at work. This is where you get advice about how to handle work challenges in a godly way. This is where you get insight on how God is trying to transform your character at work.
- This is why you should do your best to work your job around your involvement in fellowship, not vice-versa. If you are an excellent worker, you can usually get flexibility to do this. If you pray for this, God will provide ways to do it.

Second, by talking to Jesus about work (4:2).

- You work for Jesus – and Jesus is always present at work, not only to inspect your work, but also to empower you to work this way.
- As you go to work daily, present yourself to Him as His servant and ask Him for the energy and love and respect and good will that you need.
- As challenges and opportunities arise at work, turn to Him in prayer for what you need to learn from Him and represent Him well.
- And remember to thank Him that He is with at work with you every step of the way.
- It is amazing what happens when you start to pray regularly along these lines!

Third, giving thanks (4:2)!

Reflection Questions:

1. What might happen in our workplaces and in our community if we worked like we worked for Jesus?
2. What might happen in and through our church if we worshiped and represented Jesus at work?
3. What might happen if we worked respectfully and cooperatively with our supervisors and coworkers and subordinates?
4. What might happen if we were known as hard workers who could be trusted and who were fair and just and made the workplace morale go up?
5. What might happen if we worked in such a way as to make the Gospel look attractive to those we work with?
6. What might happen if we focused on character development in the workplace, welcoming each and every challenging situation and person as a gift from God?
7. What might happen if we worked for Jesus for the compensation that He promises that far outweighs dollar bills?
8. How can Christian community be more a part of your work?
9. How can prayer be more a part of your work?
10. How can giving thanks be more a part of your work?

Resources:

- The Global Leadership Summit
- *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* by Timothy Keller
- *What's Best Next* by Matt Perman
- *Propositions on Christ, Culture, and Career* at xenos.org—Article by Dennis McCallum & Scott Risley

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