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# LIFE AT WORK



*What do you like best about the work you do?*

**QUESTION #1**

#BSFLidentity

## THE POINT

*Your work is a reflection of your relationship with Christ.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” It’s a question all of us were asked as kids. And we responded with things like: “I want to be an astronaut.” “I want to be a doctor.” “I want to be a ballerina.”

It’s interesting to think about that question in more depth. When we ask it of others, we’re typically talking about the work someone wants to *do*—what career they want to pursue. Yet we phrase the question by asking what a person wants to *be*. Hear the difference?

It’s easy for our identity to get wrapped up in what we do—especially if we love our work. But what happens to our identity at the end of the workday, when we come to retirement, or if we lose our job? If we define our identity by our work, these transitions can become debilitating.

The good news is that we’re far more than what we do for a living. For Christians, our identity is defined not by *who* we are, but by *whose* we are. Our identity is wrapped up in Christ. And that identity makes all the difference in our work.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## *Colossians 3:22*

**<sup>22</sup> Slaves, obey your human masters in everything. Don't work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.**

Since our identity isn't found in what we do, but in whom we serve, God's focus isn't on *what* we do—it's on *how* we do it. The apostle Paul addressed this by writing to those working to serve another person.

Slavery has been an ugly and evil part of human history. Yet in Paul's day, slavery wasn't seen as a form of abuse. It was simply one way many people found work. Slaves frequently were highly skilled workers or artists; in some cases, they were far more educated than their masters. None of this is meant to excuse the practice of slavery, but simply to point out that slavery in the Roman world was very different from what occurred in America leading up to the Civil War.

Of course, many slaves in Paul's day hated their conditions and wanted freedom. Paul wasn't opposed to freeing slaves, nor to slaves working to become free; he simply remained focused on the mission he'd been given. He wrote elsewhere: "Were you called while a slave? Don't let it concern you. But if you can become free, by all means take the opportunity" (1 Cor. 7:21).

Paul wanted slaves to work not for their masters, but for Jesus. He understood that a slave's identity was founded not in his position as a slave, but in his position with Christ. Slaves were free in Christ; thus, they were free to serve Jesus with all their hearts. They could demonstrate that service to Jesus by serving their masters with integrity and faithfulness.

Workers today aren't slaves; we have bosses instead of masters. But we still work to please Jesus. Therefore, we're called to work wholeheartedly and with obedience, integrity, and dependability.

***How would you describe a biblical approach to work?***

**QUESTION #2**

## ***Colossians 3:23-25***

**<sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people, <sup>24</sup> knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism.**

Do you remember the excitement of getting your first job? Most of us were thrilled when we landed our first “real” full-time job. Over time, though, that excitement and enthusiasm can morph into a daily grind—maybe even into boredom or drudgery.

So how do we maintain enthusiasm? I’ll admit it: some jobs are just plain boring. But that doesn’t mean our attitude has to match our circumstances. Paul told us, “Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people.” A heart centered on Christ makes all the difference.

In the early years of planting a church, I had to take an additional job to support my family. I was thrilled when a local private school hired me as a teacher, but two months into working, they told me the salary they had offered me was incorrect. They had made a mistake, and they would have to reduce my pay. My family was on a tight budget, and I wasn’t happy. I couldn’t afford to quit, so I finished the school year—but with a terrible attitude. When I resigned at the end of the year, I wrote a scathing letter.

Years later, I was convicted about my bad attitude. I made an appointment to go to the school and apologized to those who had worked with me.

What changed? My motivation was different. No matter what I do—and no matter what you do—we’re to do it enthusiastically, since we’re really doing it for Christ.

*Who comes to mind when you read these verses? Why?*

**QUESTION #3**

## FACING WORK

*Select the image that best represents your emotions  
when it's time to start your work each day.*



*What's a practical step you can take each day to submit your work to Christ?*

*"The man who keeps busy helping the man below  
him won't have time to envy the man above him!"*

—HENRIETTA MEARS

Paul mentioned several things that can fuel our enthusiasm for work, including the following:

- ▶ **Christ's reward.** "Knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord." This surely appealed to slaves who had no reward or compensation in this life.
- ▶ **Christ's lordship.** "You serve the Lord Christ." The sovereign Lord who loves us deeply is the One we truly serve.
- ▶ **Christ's justice.** "For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism." God will reward obedience and will justly deal with disobedience.

Who I am in Christ—my identity in Him—is seen by all when I do my work enthusiastically for Him.

*What are some practical ways you can honor Christ in your workplace?*

#### QUESTION #4

## ***Colossians 4:1***

**<sup>1</sup> Masters, deal with your slaves justly and fairly, since you know that you too have a Master in heaven.**

I've been the employee many times in my working career, and I've been the boss. Both roles have their benefits, and both have their challenges. Being the boss, supervisor, or employer generally means more responsibility as well as more pay. Historically, those with the better positions and bigger paychecks also get better treatment. Even today in America, we are aware of CEOs and corporate "big dogs" in the news who seem to get better deals in the judicial system than those who are poor or have less influence.

Two thousand years ago, slaves had virtually no rights, while masters had almost every right. Most clerical work and manual labor was performed by slaves, and 80 percent of industry and retail work was carried out by slaves. As noted earlier, many slaves were treated



well, but not all. Many slaves were considered inanimate objects, which meant the masters were usually allowed to do whatever they wanted with them and to them.

In this passage, however, Paul commanded Christian masters to do as Jesus would do. Even masters had “a Master in heaven”—the Lord Jesus Christ—and He would hold them accountable for how they treated their slaves. Culture may favor the boss with the power, more pay, and greater influence, but when we stand before God, He won’t play favorites.

When Jesus spoke about judging others and our treatment of them, He said, “For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use” (Matt. 7:2). Those are critical, practical words. We should be mindful of looking harshly on others, lest God use the same harsh standard on us when we face His judgment.

On the London subway, every time you enter and exit the subway, you hear the phrase, “Mind the gap!” Americans would say, “Watch your step.” They say that because there’s a gap between the train and the platform; if you don’t “mind the gap,” you could fall in.

In a similar way, disciples of Jesus should “mind the gap” we’re often tempted to create between others and ourselves. As Christians, we’re called to do what’s right for others—to treat them “justly and fairly”—just as Jesus so faithfully does what’s right for us.

Let’s never lose sight of the value and importance of the people who work with us and for us. Let’s see them as Jesus sees them—and let’s treat them accordingly each day.



***Why is it important to treat all people the way our Master treats us?***

#### **QUESTION #5**

## LIVE IT OUT

How will your work reflect your relationship with Christ this week? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Be positive.** Employees often speak disparagingly about their employers and companies. Choose to stand out in your workplace by being consistently positive in your speech.
- ▶ **Encourage.** Take a step to encourage someone you work with this week. Be open and direct about your desire to offer support as an act of obedience to Christ.
- ▶ **Pray.** Think of a person who is confrontational or difficult to work with. Pray for that person each day. Seek opportunities to be a witness for the love and grace of Christ as you work.



There are many of us who still don't know what we want to "be" when we grow up. But all of us will need to work even as we seek our dreams. Therefore, all of us have the opportunity to reflect Christ and the values of His kingdom in the work we do.

My thoughts

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLidentity**