

## GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

**DISCUSS:** Draw attention to the picture (**PSG, p. 124**) as you introduce **Question #1:**

**What was your first paying job?**

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 125)**. Highlight the author's explanation of the difference between what we do and who we are.

Share the following content from **The Bible Meets Life** in the Leader's Guide: "Even when we're retired, work can be descriptive of how we use our time. Our true work is to honor Christ and reflect Him in our relationships, attitude, and productivity." Reinforce the importance of work in believers' lives by reading **The Point (PSG, p. 125): Your work is a reflection of your relationship with Christ.**

**PRAY:** Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask for God's wisdom in understanding His Word in this study. Thank Him for the opportunities we have to share Christ through what we do.

# SESSION 4

## LIFE AT WORK



### ***The Point***

Your work is a reflection of your relationship with Christ.

### ***The Bible Meets Life***

Work is not always related to a paycheck. Even when we're retired, work can be descriptive of how we use our time. Our true work is to honor Christ and reflect Him in our

relationships, attitude, and productivity. Our day-to-day activities might be forgotten next week, but the way we carry out our tasks can impact eternity.

### ***The Passage***

Colossians 3:22–4:1

### ***The Setting***

The apostle Paul wrote Colossians in the early A.D. 60s during his first Roman imprisonment (4:3,18). The people of Colossae first heard the gospel from a disciple named Epaphras, whom Paul mentioned in the letter (1:7; 4:12-13). Paul wrote Colossians to counter false teaching that included a mixture of Jewish teachings and Gentile philosophies. He also exalted Jesus as the preeminent Son of God, in whom the fullness of God's nature dwells (1:15-17; 2:9).

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## Colossians 3:22

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

The structure of Paul's letter to the Colossians fits a similar pattern to many of his other letters. Paul began with his customary greeting and thanksgiving for those to whom he wrote (Col. 1:1-12). He followed with a doctrinal passage exalting God's work through the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 13-23). After a brief discussion of his own ministry (1:24-2:3), Paul denounced false teaching at Colossae, encouraging believers to walk in Christ rather than follow meaningless rituals (2:4-23).

Colossians 3:1-4:6 focuses on the practical application of Paul's words for the Christian life. Colossians 3:18-4:1 focuses on family and social relationships; Paul desired that people's families and social relationships reflect Christ. Immediately prior to this week's passage, Paul had given instruction for reflecting Christ in families (3:18-21). He next focused on the responsibilities of slaves and masters.

This week's session passage focuses on how our work is a reflection of our relationship with Christ. While the passage in its original context specifically highlighted slaves and masters, the text has much to say about employers and employees as well. As you study, ask the Lord to help you apply these truths to your specific situation.

***Do your work with integrity and dependability to those over you.***

**1** ▶ **Verse 22.** Slaves in the ancient world had few if any rights. Their purpose in life lay in completing the will of their **human masters**. Because of this, some interpreters have argued that many slaves in the ancient world were lazy, doing as little as possible. After all, slaves might reason that they had little to gain, since they were only serving those over them but without expectation of any reward or personal advancement. The reward, if any, would go to those over them. However, Paul countered what may have been the prevailing mood by instructing slaves **obey your human masters in everything.** ◀

The word translated *masters* is literally the word *lords*, the same word used of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word carried the notion of authority, whether on a smaller level

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### Colossians 3:22



10 minutes

**SUMMARIZE:** Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 128.

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read Colossians 3:22.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 1** as well as **"Digging Deeper"** on **PSG page 126** to explain a slave's status in the first century. The following principles from this verse can be applied universally, whether as a volunteer or doing chores around the house:

- *Don't work only while being watched.*
- *Don't work in order to please people.*
- *In everything you do, work wholeheartedly.*

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG pages 127-128**. Paul wanted slaves to recognize their work was something done for Christ.

*Paul understood that a slave's identity was not in his position as a servant, but through his position in Christ. They were free in Christ; thus, they were free to serve Jesus with all their hearts. They would demonstrate their service to Jesus by serving their masters with integrity and faithfulness.*

*Today, we are not servants; we have bosses instead of masters, but we still work to please Jesus. How should we work for Jesus? Wholeheartedly, and with obedience, integrity, and dependability. Therefore, we are to work for others with the same high degree of obedience, integrity and dependability.*

**DISCUSS: Question #2**  
(PSG, p. 128): **How would you describe a biblical approach to work?**

*(Alternate: How hard do you work when no one is watching?)*

or larger. The jailer at Philippi recognized the power of God on Paul and Silas and addressed them with this term (Acts 16:30, “sirs”). The apostle Paul also used it to describe the exalted rank of Jesus (Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11). The apostle John took the image even farther, applying the title “Lord of lords” to Jesus at His second coming (Rev. 19:16).

Paul encouraged slaves to completely follow their masters’ direction. Every aspect of their service should command a serious effort. The second part of verse 22 describes the nature of the slaves’ complete obedience to their masters. The command **don’t work only while being watched** provides an interesting word picture. The Greek literally means *with eye service*, which describes service performed only to attract attention. Paul used similar language in Ephesians 6:6 as he addressed slaves.

The words **as people-pleasers** could be translated “in order to please men.” Both here and in Ephesians 6:6, the term designates one who tries to please people at the sacrifice of principle. Paul did not want slaves to serve only when people were watching in the hopes of receiving the praises of men. He wanted them to serve God first and foremost with their work.

With the words **work wholeheartedly** Paul drew a strong contrast against the image of working only to be noticed. The expression literally means “with sincerity of heart.” Again, Paul used a similar expression in Ephesians 6:5. The heart was considered the center of one’s being; it encompassed the intellect, emotion, and will. In other words, Paul was instructing slaves to serve completely and faithfully, putting all they had into their work. Their effort was to be wholehearted, but so was their attitude. He would develop this concept more in verse 23.

The phrase **fearing the Lord** provided a reason for their service. Their reverence and respect for the God they served encouraged them to serve their masters wholeheartedly. After all, their heavenly Master saw everything they did! The expression also could be translated “as you fear the Lord,” stressing the manner in which they would serve.

We probably have all worked alongside people who only worked hard when supervisors were watching. We know what discouragement this can bring to a team; maybe this was actually your experience. Someone might say, “No one really cares what I do, and I’m getting paid the same regardless of how hard I work.” However, this is not the attitude we should display. Neither should we strive to please

people at the expense of principle. Instead, our fear of the Lord should motivate us to apply ourselves diligently to all we do. Working hard honors Him.

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

**23** Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people,

**24** knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ.

**25** For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism.

***Do your work enthusiastically for Christ.***

**Verse 23.** The words **whatever you do** apply to any tasks of work slaves might be assigned. A slave's acts of service might involve menial tasks, important tasks, or a mixture of both. Regardless, Paul wanted slaves to invest themselves fully in their tasks. The command **do it from the heart** literally means "do it from the soul." The Greek word is *psyche*, the word from which we get the word *psychology*. The word denotes people's innermost being, the center of their inner life. Indeed, the concept carries with it a complementary sense of working wholeheartedly (Col. 3:22). Today, we often challenge people to be "all in" to the cause to which they commit themselves. Perhaps the cause is playing on a sports team; perhaps the cause is giving to one's local church or serving in some ministry capacity there. If Paul could challenge slaves who had no rights to be "all in" with respect to their service, how much more so do his words apply to us today! The Lord deserves our full commitment to the work we have received.

**2** ▶ Paul further highlighted the focus and ultimate intent of our work with the expression **as something done for the Lord and not for people**. He intended his instructions to give slaves a proper perspective. Slaves might reason that they had no significant purpose. Perhaps they deemed their tasks unimportant or insignificant, but Paul said that was not the case. To be sure, they needed to please their earthly masters. However, Paul desired them to look past their earthly masters and look to the Lord Jesus Christ. First and foremost, they were to serve Him through their work,

**TRANSITION:** "Paul spoke about how we are to fulfill our responsibilities. In the next verses, he said in whatever we do, we are to do it from the heart."

## **STUDY THE BIBLE** **Colossians 3:23-25**



**15 minutes**

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Colossians 3:23-25.

**DISCUSS: Question #3**  
**(PSG, p. 129): Who taught you what you believe about the value of work?**

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 2** on this page and page 132 to explain the importance of doing our work for the Lord.

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG page 129**. Paul mentioned several things that can fuel our enthusiasm

- **His reward.** *“Knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance.” This surely appealed to slaves who had no reward or compensation in this life.*
- **His lordship.** *“You serve the Lord Christ.” The sovereign Lord who loves us deeply is the One we truly serve.*
- **His justice.** *“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 when I do my work enthusiastically for Him.*

**DISCUSS: Question #4**  
**(PSG, p. 130): How would our perspective on work change if we viewed work as for the Lord and not for men?**

*(Alternate: When have you seen someone use their job as an outlet for the gospel?)*

because as they did, they brought honor to Him. Some masters might notice how their slaves worked hard for them, even when they had seemingly little to gain. Perhaps those same masters would wonder as to the motivation of their slaves’ work, and perhaps would become more sympathetic to the claims of Christ as they observed their servants’ faithful service. The Scriptures many times exhort us as believers to do all we do for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 10:31). ◀

**Verse 24.** The word **knowing** that begins verse 24 links back to the command “do it from the heart” in verse 23. It could be rendered “because you know.” Workers could serve those over them faithfully because of the truth they knew. Paul’s promise **you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord** provided their ultimate motivation. Heavenly rewards that God would give them mattered more than earthly rewards. Slaves should work hard to please their masters, and God would reward them for their work.

Today, many people live from paycheck to paycheck and might work hard because they know payday is coming. They anticipate the compensation they will receive for their hard work. For slaves, however, there was no payday. Nonetheless, Paul encouraged them to consider their “heavenly payday,” the day when the Lord would provide their reward. Slaves could take comfort knowing the Lord saw their hard work and would reward their faithfulness one day. Likewise, workers today can have confidence the Lord sees our honest efforts and can use them for His glory.

The word translated “inheritance” refers to the slaves’ salvation they would receive one day. The Bible often uses the term in this way. Paul used it to describe our salvation in Ephesians 1:14, and the apostle Peter likewise did (1 Pet. 1:4).

The words **you serve the Lord Christ** are rich in meaning. Literally the word order is “the Lord Christ you serve.” The verb possibly could be translated as an imperative: “serve the Lord Christ.” Either way, the statement summarizes what Paul had instructed slaves beginning in verse 22. Ultimately, all the slaves did should reflect their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. They were to do their work as if they were serving Him rather than their earthly masters.

Believers need to remember that, first and foremost, we serve the Lord Jesus Christ in our work. Would your work

ethic be different if you knew Jesus was going to be present at the job where you serve? Does it make a difference for you to know He is there already? Sometimes people who work in the church (“professional ministers”) have an easier time understanding all they do is for the Lord. People who serve Christ in the marketplace as ministering professionals may fail to grasp that their work also is ministry—service in Jesus’ name. Regardless of the source of our paycheck, however, our ultimate supervisor is the Lord. If Jesus came back to earth and hired us to do a job, we would do it to the very best of our ability. Paul essentially instructs us to live and work as if that were the case, because He truly is with us at all times.

**Verse 25.** In verse 24, Paul had mentioned the reward faithful servants would receive. In this verse, he warned the **wrongdoer** who might serve from inappropriate motives or perhaps not consistently give the best work. Some might give less than their best effort, while some might give a dishonest effort. Probably Paul intended to include both of these groups in his warning.

Paul warned that those who served poorly would be **paid back**, and he used a different Greek word than the word *reward* that he used in verse 24. Just as faithful work brought good compensation, likewise poorly done work would bring compensation, but in a bad sense. In such a case, even if **whatever wrong he has done** was not noticed by the master, God nevertheless would take note.

The words speak powerfully to our circumstances today as well. We should display honesty and integrity in all our work. I remember one summer when I was helping my son-in-law Jack build a fence around the back yard of a home he was selling. Rather than cut corners, my son-in-law installed the fence to the best of his ability, as if he were still going to live there. I commended him for his integrity, and we talked a little about these verses from Colossians.

The word translated **favoritism** (“respect of persons,” KJV) literally means “to receive a face.” Favoritism occurs when we serve people better or worse depending on what we perceive we will get in return from them. Cautioning against favoritism or partiality, James, the half-brother of Jesus, warned believers about showing such favoritism in church relationships (Jas. 2:1-9). James encouraged his readers not to favor the rich over the poor. Again, Paul’s warning to workers here implies that God sees everything and is taking note of everything. He will judge all our actions impartially.

**OPTION:** Display photos of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. These men made significant contributions to our world and culture. But you may not know that each one had to overcome challenges and failures in his vocation.

- *As an inventor, Edison was unsuccessful 1,000 times before inventing the light bulb. When asked how it felt to fail 1,000 times, Edison responded, “I didn’t fail 1,000 times. The light bulb was an invention with 1,000 steps.”*
- *As a business man, Henry Ford went broke five times before he became successful. He commented, “Failure provides the opportunity to begin, more intelligently.”*

Each man succeeded because he was diligent and persistent. Thomas Watson, Sr., the founder of IBM said, “The fastest way to succeed is to double your failure rate.” Ask: What have you learned from your “failures”? (<http://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Pajares/OnFailingG.html>)

**TRANSITION:** “In the next verses Paul addressed those in authority.”

## STUDY THE BIBLE

## Colossians 4:1



10 minutes

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read Colossians 4:1.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 3** to explain the responsibility employers have to treat well those who work for them.

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG pages 130-132**. In this passage, 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.*

*Those with responsibility over people carry heavy loads and can become stressed out. Let’s never lose sight of the value and importance the people who work with us and for us.*

*See them as Jesus sees them—and treat them accordingly.*

## Colossians 4:1

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

*Do what is right and just as Christ does with you.*

**3** ▶ **Verse 1.** Paul next turned his attention to the **masters**. Paul had given instructions to slaves, but he was concerned that masters also bore a solemn responsibility. They had a responsibility to **deal with** their slaves with all they needed to do their jobs well. Paul’s admonition implies a certain respect and care for those slaves who worked for their masters. The parallel between the first-century setting and today’s setting is obvious. Workers have a responsibility to work hard and to do their work with integrity that comes from the heart. Employers likewise have a responsibility to provide for their workers what they need to do their jobs well. They should not use their positions of authority to lord it over those who report to them. Rather, they need to do **justly and fairly** by their employees. The words imply taking care of one’s workers in a respectable and righteous way, and treating each one equitably without favoritism.

The Greek word translated **since you know** is the same Greek word translated “knowing” in verse 24. In verse 24, the spiritual truth slaves knew was to motivate them to do a good job. Here, it describes the spiritual truth masters should know. The truth that earthly masters **have a Master in heaven** whom they serve should motivate them to be good masters or supervisors in all their dealings. ◀

During the course of my life, I have worked for other people and other people have worked for me. I have fulfilled both the role of worker and the role of supervisor. By God’s grace, I strive to do my work or my supervision wholeheartedly and for the Lord, remembering He ultimately is the one who holds me accountable for my actions. My work is something I want to do as an offering for Him; I want Him to see my very best on display. I also want to convey to those who are on my team their value and dignity as people made in the image of God. I try to remember to say “thank you” on a regular basis and to affirm them regularly for a job well done.

Your work is a reflection of your relationship with Christ. Do you consistently put in an honest day's work? Are you willing to work hard even when others do not notice or do not appear to appreciate what you do? Can you learn to be content with the approval of the Lord Jesus Christ whom you ultimately serve?

I love to read, and I have read many books on leadership. One theme stands out to me: ordinary people who are committed to an extraordinary cause can accomplish extraordinary things. Some organizations may have greatly talented people, but if they do not work together to fulfill the purpose of the organization, the organization will flounder. On the other hand, ordinary people united around a common purpose often accomplish amazing results.

The Bible tells us that God is writing an amazing story and that He has included us in that story. The Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus died and rose on our behalf so that now, as we live for Him, we might no longer live for ourselves, but for Him (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Such truth motivates us to be driven people for the sake of His kingdom. God does not call us to be workaholics, but He does tell us that our work is a reflection of our relationship with Him. What do others learn about your relationship with God by the work they observe you doing?

As you reflect on this week's passage, ask the Lord to guide you. Are there areas of your work life you could more completely surrender to Him? How can your work bring glory and honor to the Lord and be a testimony to those with whom you work? As you fulfill your God-given calling to do your work wholeheartedly, others will take notice. Some will follow your example, and others may be drawn to Jesus.

**DISCUSS: Question #5**

**(PSG, p. 132): What are the qualities of the best boss you ever had?**

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

**DO:** Invite volunteers to share their responses to the activity on **PSG page 132: "But I'm Retired."**

**OPTION:** When we hear the word "work," we think of "working for" an employer. Ultimately, as retirees, when we work, we are working for the Lord, "not for men." Encourage group members to consider whether their attitudes reflect that they are enthusiastically working for God when serving, volunteering or doing "honey-do" jobs around the house.

**LIVE IT OUT****5 minutes****GUIDE:** Emphasize **The Point:**

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

**REVIEW:** Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 133;** see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

**WRAP IT UP**

**GUIDE:** Emphasize that regardless of our position in our work, God gives us the responsibility to do our work for Him.

**PRAY:** "Father, help us to carry out our work and treat others around us in such a way that people will bring glory to You."

**LIVE IT OUT**

How will you let your work reflect your relationship with Christ?

- ▶ **Share.** Tell others in your group about acts of service you do at the church or in the community and how you find fulfillment in doing this work.
- ▶ **Encourage.** Identify a way you can express appreciation for those who do work for you.
- ▶ **Pray.** Think of a person who is having difficulty finding work and pray for that need. Or pray for someone you know who is experiencing problems or stress in his or her job.



BIBLICAL  
**ILLUSTRATOR**



Terra cotta vessel in the form of a comic actor impersonating a slave.

Interestingly, Paul used the same Greek word (*kyrios*) to refer to earthly masters (lords) and to the Master (Lord) who is in heaven. Paul could have chosen either of two Greek words that designate a master. The *despotes* (found 10 times in the New Testament) typically means *master* in areas of family and public life and often carries overtones of harshness and instability. The word *kyrios* occurs over 700 times in the New Testament and is used most often in the literal sense of a master/owner of property; that is,

house, vineyard, servants, and so forth. It can also convey a title of courtesy (sir/mister) or a religious title (Master/Lord). In the New Testament, *kyrios* can refer directly to Jesus or to God the Father. In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament), *kyrios* is used primarily to replace the tetragrammaton *YHWH* (*Yahweh*). This enabled readers to reverence the personal name of God by not speaking it aloud.

One's relationship with God cannot be separated from one's relationship with others. The idea of a common Lord provides a constant, dominating motive for how believers are to approach their relationships. Jesus Christ is Lord of the slave. He is Master of masters. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

The excerpt above is from the article "God as Master" (Spring 2002), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

## SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

***The promise of the reward of an inheritance from the Lord is given to all who confess Jesus as Lord and serve Him.***

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.