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Life at Work



What do you like best about the work you do?

QUESTION 1

#BSFLIdentity

Your work is a reflection of your relationship with Christ.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

As a kid, you were likely asked: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” You may have 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 your identity to get wrapped up in what you do—especially if you love your work. But what happens to your identity at the end of the workday, when you come to retirement, or if you lose your job? If you define your identity by your work or careers, these transitions can become debilitating.

The good news is that your identity doesn’t need to be defined by what you do. Who you are encompasses far more than what you do for a living. For Christians, each person’s identity is defined in Christ. And that identity makes all the difference in your work.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Colossians 3:22 (CSB)

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

Since your identity is not found in what you do but in whom you serve, God's focus is not on *what* you do but in *how* you do it.

Slavery has been an ugly and evil part of human history. In the Roman world of Paul's day, slavery was not necessarily seen as an abuse. It was simply the way many people found work. In numerous circumstances, a slave was much better off than a free person. Slaves frequently were highly skilled workers or artists; in some cases they were far more educated than their masters. This is not meant to excuse the practice but 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 was not opposed to freeing slaves, or to slaves working to become free; he simply remained focused on the mission he had been given. He wrote elsewhere: "Were you called while a slave? Don't let it concern to you. But if you can become free, by all means take the opportunity" (1 Corinthians 7:21).

How would you describe a biblical approach to work?

QUESTION 2

Paul wanted slaves to recognize their work as something done for Christ. Paul understood that a slave's identity was not in his position as a slave, 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're not slaves, and we have bosses instead of masters, but we can 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 that Paul wrote about.

Colossians 3:23-25 (CSB)

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 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 the daily grind and may turn into boredom or even drudgery.

So how do we maintain enthusiasm? I'll admit it: some jobs can be routine or boring. But that doesn't mean our attitude has to match that. Paul told us, "Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people" (v. 23). A heart centered on Christ makes all the difference.

How can your work be an opportunity to serve God?

QUESTION 3

What steps might help you focus on Christ as you work?

QUESTION 4

In the early years of planting a church, I took 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. We were on a tight budget, and I couldn't afford to quit. I ultimately 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, convicted about my bad attitude, I made an appointment to go to the school and apologized to those who had worked with me.

No matter what I do—and no matter what you do—we are to do it enthusiastically, since we're really doing it for Christ. Paul mentioned several things that can fuel our enthusiasm:

- » **His reward.** “Knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord” (v. 24). This surely appealed to slaves who had no reward or compensation in this life.
- » **His lordship.** “You serve the Lord Christ” (v. 24). The sovereign Lord who loves us deeply is the One we truly serve.
- » **His justice.** “For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism” (v. 25). 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.



"Every human activity, except sin, can be done for God's pleasure, if you do it with an attitude of praise."

RICK WARREN

MY MISSION STATEMENT



In the space below, create a personal mission statement for your work. Include why you believe God has placed you in your current work position and how you can serve Him during your work hours.

Colossians 4:1 (CSB)

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

Two thousand years ago, the slave had virtually no rights, and the master 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 were.

In this passage, however, Paul commanded Christian masters to do as Jesus would do. Even masters had “a Master in heaven” (v. 1)—the Lord Jesus Christ—and He would hold them accountable for how they treated their slaves. Society 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” (Matthew 7:2). 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.” There is a gap between the train and the platform and if you don’t “mind the gap,” you could fall in. We should “mind the gap” we might create between others and ourselves. We’re to do what is right for others just as Jesus does what is right for us. We’re to treat them “justly and fairly” (v. 1).

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



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

QUESTION 5

LIVE IT OUT

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

- » **Take inventory.** Examine your attitude and behavior at your job. Is your work marked with integrity, honesty, and dependability? Do you display a respectful, positive attitude? If your work habits aren't what you'd like them to be, ask Him to help you this coming week to work as if you're working each day for Him.
- » **Memorize Colossians 3:23.** Place this verse on the lock screen of your phone or tablet and make it your goal to commit it to memory this week. Ask God to help you approach your work with this perspective and a desire to honor Him each day.
- » **Locate a mentor.** Identify well-respected Christian leaders in your work industry, or a similar one. Ask them if you can meet from time to time to discuss how they approach and complete their work as a Christ-follower.

Whether you're an astronaut, doctor, ballerina, or something different, how you do your work matters. **How you handle and complete your work shows much of who you really are; this week, let your work show others who you are in Christ.**



My thoughts