

How to be Successful at Work
Colossians 3:23

Tomorrow is Labor Day and we're celebrating it by not working. Kind of ironic, isn't it? We should be working twice as much!

Seriously, during this pandemic, I know that the labor situation is quite grim. Millions have lost their jobs since the onset of the pandemic in March. We see a lot of businesses closed. Maybe some of you watching right now have been laid off or you're pretty anxious because your job is on the line. Let me just encourage you that God hasn't forgotten you. As his eyes are on the sparrow, his eyes are also on you who is more special to him than the sparrow. He said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." The psalmist also says in Psalm 37:25, "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." Just hang in there. This is temporary. Our beloved verse Romans 8:28 assures us, "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." God will make a way for you, where there seems to be no way, to borrow a phrase from Don Moen.

So, here we are, Labor Day weekend, I'd like to talk about work. All of us work. We do some kind of work. And all of us want to be successful in what we do. I've entitled this message, "How to be Successful at Work". My text is from Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people. Knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ."

One thing to note here is that this verse was specifically addressed by Paul to slaves who were Christians or became Christians. You will see that in the verse preceding this verse. Now, you may ask, "Did Christians practice slavery back then?" The short answer is yes.

But the long answer is that the kind of slavery they practiced is totally different to the kind of slavery that this country had in the 18th and 19th centuries. Very briefly, the differences are with respect to the motive behind slavery, how people entered into slavery, the treatment of slaves, and how slaves become free. Let's just say that the kind of slavery in the New Testament has its basis on the Old Testament laws on slavery which was humane and worked toward the benefit of the slaves compared to modern slavery which is harsh and oppressive. You can go to this article on <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/four-differences-between-new-testament-servitude-and-new-world-slavery/> to get more information.

Be it as it may, although verse 23 is for slaves, it doesn't mean we can't use it for an employee-employer relationship at present. The intent is for slaves in particular but the principles are for everyone in general. Ok. Let me now talk about success at work.

“Success” is one thing that all people are after. There's no one here who strives for failure, right? No one wants to fail. You don't study to fail. You don't work overtime to fail. Everyone wants to succeed. You work hard because you want to succeed. You play hard because you want to succeed. No wonder Americans are obsessed with books on how to succeed at something like “How to Win Friends and Influence People” or “How to Make Anyone Fall in Love with You” or “How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying” or “How to lose weight in 30 days without Really Eating.”

Today, I'd like to talk about being successful at work. The Bible has some good advice for us regarding work. After all, God started this concept called work when he began the creation of the world, the sun, the moon, the waters, the plants, animals, and human beings. Then, he rested from work on the seventh day as the Bible tells us. Does that mean he is not working anymore? Yes and No.

“Yes”, he stopped working in the sense that he stopped his “creative work”, meaning, he has created everything that has to be created in this world. And “No”, because he is still at work in maintaining order in the universe and in moving in the lives of people, especially, in saving them and in transforming them. In John 5:17, Jesus says that God, his father, is still working... in response to the Pharisees who accused him of healing an invalid on the Sabbath.

All of us are involved in some kind of work. Whether you’re a student, a housekeeper, a factory worker, an office worker, a nurse, doctor, engineer, lawyer, minister, soldier or maybe a retiree, you definitely have some type of work you are involved with. And whether or not you knew it before today, the Bible has a lot to say about your work.

What I have on our outline today is a **CODE FOR CHRISTIAN WORKERS**. This code consists of three statements or principles I have learned from the Bible pertaining to our work that I want to share with you this afternoon. These statements, if truly lived out in your work environment, will make you the type of worker that God will be proud of, and will give you the confidence you need to know that you are working as God intended. If you apply these principles in your work life, then you will find success not as the world defines it but as God defines it.

So, take your pens and paper and start writing down these principles. The first one is this:

1. MY WORK IS IMPORTANT IN THE EYES OF GOD.

Paul says, **“Whatever you do...”**. He says “whatever”. Whatever is whatever. It means everything and anything. Not the kind of whatever we hear nowadays. Whatever. So, Paul is saying, “It makes no difference”. In short, whether you have a menial job or you have an executive job, both are the same in the eyes of God.

Whether you're being paid the minimum wage or you're being paid the maximum wage, if there's such a thing, they're all the same in the sight of God. The point is, don't be ashamed of your job or don't be too proud of your job. Remember my sermon last week? Just like gifts of the Holy Spirit, all of us have been given jobs according to our abilities. One job is not better than the other. Maybe in the eyes of the world, there's a difference, but not in God's eyes.

I remember a co-worker I had years ago when I was still working in New York. He is Hispanic and a programmer like me. In one of our conversations he lamented the fact that people often have a stereotype image of Hispanics. That the only jobs they're good at or they can do are blue-collar jobs like gardening, construction, cleaning, and the like. He was sad that people think those who are successful are those who work in offices or big companies. He was right in his assessment. You see, people tend to measure success based on the kind of work they do or the amount of money they earn.

You see, your worth is just all a matter of perspective. Your impact depends on the way you view your contribution to an undertaking.

There is a story that when the famed English architect, Sir Christopher Wren, was directing the building of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, some of the workers were interviewed by a journalist who asked them, "What are you doing here?"

The first said, "I'm cutting a stone for three shillings a day."

The second replied, "I'm putting ten hours a day in on this job."

The third replied, "I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build the greatest cathedral in Great Britain for the glory of God."

That's the key: "For the glory of God." In fact, that's what Paul says in **1 Cor. 10:31**, "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Remember to always do your work, whatever it is, in such a way that God is glorified. How is God glorified through your work? By your attitude! Do you come to work with a happy disposition? Or do you come to work like you don't want to come to work? Are you thankful to God for your work or are you always complaining about your work? Some of us may not really be happy with our jobs because of co-workers we don't like or the pay is low or benefits are not good. But until we have found a job that is really to our liking we should heed the old saying that goes, "Bloom where you're planted." That means you have to be productive where you are because that is where God has placed you for the time being. It means, giving 100% of your effort to your job even though you don't like your boss. You can grow in your job despite adverse circumstances. And God is glorified when others see you working diligently even though your circumstances are not perfect. Especially if they know you're a Christian.

So, my work is important in the eyes of God. That's the first principle in order to be successful at work. The second principle is

2. MY WORK SHOULD BE DONE EXCELLENTLY.

Paul continues in verse 23, "**do it from the heart**". When you do something from the heart, it means you do it with passion. And when you have passion about something, you give it your best efforts, your utmost, you give it your all, right? There's no holding back. Actually, "heart" here is "soul" in the original Greek. So, it connotes the idea of involving your entire being when you work.

All of these simply means, that as a Christian, you do your work excellently. Excellent in the sense that no one can accuse you of being lazy, of sleeping on the job, of turning in late work, of coming in late and going home early, of being busy with social media during office hours, of grumbling and sowing intrigue, and what-have-you.

Instead, you put in a kind of work that sets a standard for others. To me, being excellent means being a model for everyone else to follow or emulate. Let me elaborate on this.

Andrew Carnegie, who was the richest man in the world years ago, once said, “The average person puts only 25% of his energy and ability into his work. The world takes off its hat to those who put in more than 50% of their capacity, and stands on its head for those few and far between souls who devote 100%.”

I believe that Carnegie is correct in his observation. Many are not putting in as much hours in their work as they’re expected to. I hope that as Christians we’re honest with our time. I hope we are known in the office as honest and hardworking people. And since we are working for God, we want to set the highest standard for what can be expected.

Peter says, “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.” – 1 Peter 2:18-19 (NIV) Now at the time this text was written, slaves and masters had a little bit different role than what we probably think because we always think of those terms based on the history of slavery in the United States. But the slaves of that day were much closer to employees than they were slaves. Some of them were laborers, but many of them were professional people, including medical doctors. Of course, they didn’t have the freedom that we do to just quit one job and go to another, but much of their situation was similar to our own.

The reason I point this out to you is to demonstrate that what Peter wrote for them is still relevant and applicable to us today. We are to accept the authority of those over us and do what they say, as long as what they tell us to do doesn’t compromise the biblical principles we are living by.

In my former church, someone confided in me that her boss wanted her to sign some documents for him whenever he was not around. No problem if that was her signature. The problem was her boss wanted her to copy his signature. Which, of course, was tantamount to forgery. Being an honest Christian, she refused. Now, I don't know what her boss thought of her after that. But I know she set a standard for her work, a standard higher than her boss's. Because it is God's standard.

So, you see, since we are ultimately working for God, we want to do such an excellent job at whatever we do that we become the standard for that particular position that others will want to copy. And when that time comes when someone asks us why we go above and beyond what is expected of us, we will have the opportunity to share the fact that we are working for God, and we want to give God the very best that we have.

To be successful at work, I need to know the first principle which is "My work is important to God" and the second principle which is "My work should be done excellently". The third principle goes like this.

3. MY WORK IS WORK DONE FOR GOD

You might be an office worker, hospital worker, factory worker, working student, housekeeper, but if you are a Christ follower, your work is ultimately done for God.

Paul says, "Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people." (Colossians 3:23)

This verse tells us that ultimately our goal in all of our work is to please God, not people.

I read the story about author Howard Hendricks who was sitting in a plane that was delayed for take-off. After a long wait, the passengers became more and more irritated. Hendricks noticed how gracious one of the flight attendants was as she spoke with them.

After the plane finally took off, he told the flight attendant how amazed he was at her poise and self-control, and said he wanted to write a letter of commendation for her to the airline.

The flight attendant replied that she didn't work for the airline company, but for Jesus Christ. She said that just before going to work she and her husband prayed together that she would be a good representative of Christ.

That is what the Bible is talking about when it says to do everything as though we were working for the Lord.

Another good verse to keep in mind is this: “Commit your work to the LORD, and then your plans will succeed.” (Prov. 16:3)

Let’s say, for instance, that my work is framing houses and I work for Acme Builders. As a Christian, when I go to work tomorrow, I am going to frame houses as if I were building that house for God to live in. Or let’s say in my job now as a computer programmer at The Buffalo Group. As A Christian, when I go to work, I am going to program as if I believe the program I am working on was going to end up on God’s computer.

Now, I know how difficult this can be in the workplace – I’ve worked in an office where there were always intrigues and gossip. I also remember working for a boss who easily blurts out the four-letter word whenever something goes wrong at work. Can you relate to that?

I say all that to let you know I’ve been out there in the marketplace and I know what it is like, and I know how difficult it can be. But I also know from personal experience that when I begin to work as if I were working for God it changes my entire perspective on what I am doing.

Now, working for the Lord also means putting in time and effort that is expected of you at work. I remember when I was working for the Development Bank of the Philippines in Makati.

We didn't have timecards that you insert in the Bundy clock and gets stamped with the current time. Many of our young workers here are asking what is a timecard? What is a Bundy clock? Anyway, what we had was just a simple log sheet where on one column, you wrote your name and in the next column you wrote the time you arrived. And you know what, everyday, almost everyday, you would see a long list of names on one page having the same arrival time. So, someone writes initially 8:05, and throughout the page, it's 8:05, it never changed. I was one of those. I wasn't a Christian then. Oh, I think I was. I was a backsliding Christian then,

Nowadays, in offices, people surf the internet more than they do their actual work. Especially now that we are working remotely, who knows what we do in our home offices. But before the internet, there was the phone. Not the smart phone. The old bulky rotary phone that was on everyone's desk and you couldn't carry around. Lots of people spent company time making phone calls to whoever. One time my boss came to see me and he caught me on the phone and I immediately hang up and he said, "Rolly, you're always on the phone." And I said, "That was my mom." My boss just nodded his head and said, "Ok." So, every time he caught me on the phone, I always said, "That was my mom."

This is just like Mrs. Smith who applied for a job. "So tell me, Mrs. Smith," asked the interviewer, "have you any other skills you think might be worth mentioning?"

"Actually, yes," said the applicant modestly. "Last year I had two short stories published in national magazines, and I finished my novel."

"Very impressive," he commented, "but I was thinking of skills you could apply during office hours."

Mrs. Smith explained brightly, "Oh, that was during office hours."

So, my point is, working for the Lord means being honest with our time and effort as it relates to our work. Remember, our real boss is God and he knows what we are doing whenever our earthly boss is not looking.

Let me conclude by saying a few words about success.

In the Christian world today, we have two extremes views when it comes to thinking about success, especially when we talk about financial success. On the one hand we have the “prosperity” preachers, who preach what is commonly called “the health and wealth gospel” that says God wants all Christians to be rich and He wants all Christians to be healthy all the time. Then on the other hand we have Christians that think it is wrong to have a lot of money and that God wants everyone to be poor to keep them humble.

Both of these extreme views are exactly that – extreme. I believe that the Bible teaches that God wants us to be successful, but we need to be careful how we define success.

First, let’s consider financial success. “All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.” – Proverbs 14:23 (NIV)

I cannot see anything wrong with making a profit and being financially successful. I think it is great when someone is able to rise to the top of whatever profession they are in and make more money doing it. In the Bible we have the example of several men that were very wealthy by anyone’s standards – men like Abraham, or David, or Solomon – and God does not condemn them for their wealth or for seeking wealth.

If someone has the drive and the ability to make something of him or herself and make millions of dollars doing it, I say more power to them. I think that becoming financially successful can be a godly thing if done right, and it gives that financially successful person the opportunity to be generous in ways he or she could not have been otherwise.

Do you know how many missions and ministries of the church worldwide are able to prosper because of wealthy Christians that give to them? Probably a whole lot more than you think. So this can be a very good thing in many different ways. On the other hand, if we think that the accumulation of wealth alone is a good definition of success we are sorely mistaken. While most of us would consider a wealthy person a success, there are many wealthy people who have sacrificed the success of their family, or the success of their faith in their drive to possess more and more.

After nine seasons, the popular sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond* broadcast its final episode in May of 2005. The star of the show, Ray Romano, went from life as a struggling stand-up comedian to one of the highest-paid actors on television. At the conclusion of the last day's filming, Romano spoke to the studio audience, reflecting on his past and his future. He read from a note his brothers had stuck in his luggage the day he moved from New York to Hollywood, nine years earlier.

“My older brother Richard wrote, ‘What does it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul?’” said a tearful Romano. Then, he added “Now I’m going to work on my soul.”

Ray Romano is a very funny guy, and he has made a lot of money by being one of the best in his field, but he admitted that while he was successful in one area of his life, he had been neglecting the most important area...his own soul.

I know some pretty poor people who I would consider successful, and I know some pretty rich people I would consider successful, and I know a whole lot who are somewhere in between. Because true success is not based on how much money you have in the bank, but on the condition of your soul, and on the love you give and receive from your family, and on the relationship you have with God.

If you are able to make a lot of money and also be a success in these areas, that is great, but never neglect the most important areas for those are the areas that are going to count the most in the long run.

The basic biblical principle for success is this – work as hard as you can and do what you can to move ahead and achieve as much as possible – as long as you don't have to sacrifice your friends, your family, and your faith in the process.

And it all starts by acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus in your life. The following verse, verse 24 says, **“Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”** When you work hard, you will receive a reward. Normally, monetary reward on this earth, but more than that, the reward you'll receive is an inheritance in heaven. Because the truth is, you're not serving man but you are serving Jesus in whatever kind of work you're in. Jesus deserves to be served. He died for you and cleansed you of your sins. He was buried and rose from the dead to give you eternal life. He is your true master. You are his servant who he loves so much. At the end of the day, when all work is done, and you did your work with all your heart for God's glory, you will hear the Lord Jesus, your master, say, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Come and share your master's happiness!”

On Tuesday morning some of you are going to drive into the office, some into the shop, some will be working or studying from home. No matter what you do in life this Code for Christian Workers applies. God doesn't just want to be your God on Sunday mornings or during your devotional time – He wants you to take Him to work with you and allow Him to work through your life even there. Are you willing to start doing that right now?