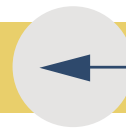


MONDAY MORNING FAITH

what does it look like to follow Jesus?



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What does it look like to follow Jesus?

Introduction

In large part, spiritual leaders have done a good job of explaining how to follow Jesus at home and at church, and how to cultivate your personal devotional life. Our focus has been on prayer, Bible study, congregational worship, evangelism, and service.

But what does it look like to follow Christ at work? Sadly, many Christians have a hard time defining what faith looks like at work on Monday morning. C.S. Lewis' colleague Dorothy Sayers points out one important reason for this disconnect:

In nothing has the church so lost her hold on reality as in her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments, and is astonished to find that, as a result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion.

But is it so astonishing? How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life? The Church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.¹

This disconnect between Sunday and Monday has not only crippled the Church's outreach into the most strategic mission field in the world, it has undermined discipleship by segregating a person's spiritual life from the part of their life that dominates their waking hours: their work.

Actually, the Bible has as much or more to say about work as it does about worship. In fact, as these three messages will explain, work is how we worship God the other six days of the week. Colossians 3:22-4:6 gives us three components that will help us reframe what it means to follow Jesus between Sundays as we go about our work.

Specifically, a vibrant Monday morning faith involves:

1. Going to work with a new attitude to serve rather than be served (Col.3:22-4:1)
2. Trusting in a new supply of personal capital, relying on God rather than our personal resources (Col.4:2-4)
3. Pursuing a new career objective, walking through open doors rather than climbing the ladder (Col. 4:5-6)

The following three messages examine each of these components.

Note: My comments and explanations are in brackets []. Certain words are italicized for emphasis, which could be considered in your delivery.

going to work for God

Colossians 3:23

Colossians 3:22-4:6 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven. Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Outline

Introduction: Does Sunday have anything to do with Monday?

- I. What does faith look like on Monday?
 - A. An attitude of service
 - B. An attitude of worship
 - C. An attitude of expectation
- II. What does this mean to me?

Conclusion

Big Idea

All work is God's work and should be done for the same reasons we go to church: to worship and glorify God and serve our fellow man.

Introduction

When the last hymn has been sung and the benediction pronounced, you walk out the door into the rest of your life. Does the hour you spend here on Sunday mornings have any relevance to the other 100-plus waking hours of your week? Sadly, many Christians don't see the connection between Sunday worship and Monday work. In fact, some Christians agree with non-Christians who believe that faith and work don't mix. Maybe this even describes you.

Consider This

As a theologian I think it's important that we own up to our contribution to this confusion, so I usually tell a story about how I came to understand the huge mistake I was making about faith and work. You could tell a similar story from your own experience about how your perspective on the topic changed.

I had just invested four years of my life and accumulated 120 graduate-hours of theology to earn a master's degree in order to enter vocational ministry so I could play a significant role in God's kingdom. I'll never forget sitting across the table from an attorney and elder of the church that had just hired this would-be hero fresh from theological studies. In our conversation over lunch, he looked me square in the eyes and said, "Bill, you know that God's heroes don't stand behind pulpits don't you?" I'm not sure I heard anything else he said after that. I was stunned! The problem was, he was right. I'm not sure how I missed this critical point. After all, most of the heroes of the Bible are workplace followers of God, not religious professionals. Just think about it: In the opening chapters of Genesis we see God both at work Himself and also putting Adam to work.

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Colossians 3:23

Then there's Jesus. He spent 90 percent of his life growing up and working in a small business, compared to only three and a half years in his ministry. Even after he laid aside his hammer and chisel, 45 of the 52 parables he told take place in a workplace setting. This makes sense because he lived in a Jewish culture which believed in a God who worked and saw every kind of work that mankind did as an extension of His work.

In Colossians 3:23 Paul tells us, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."

Abraham Kuyper, Dutch prime minister at the turn of the twentieth century said, "There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, 'This is mine. It belongs to me.'"

If this is true, then faith not only can mix with work, it must mix with work.

What does faith look like on Monday?

So, what does faith on Monday morning look like? In Colossians 3 and 4, Paul paints a sharp contrast to work habits and priorities we've learned from the world. In Colossae and other cities where Paul ministered, the bulk of business was transacted in households, usually by masters and their slaves, and it is in this context that Paul addresses the workplace of his day.

[Read Colossians 3:22-4:6.]

After describing how our new life in Christ should affect our personal life and our family life (Col 1:1-3:21), Paul explains three ways our faith should influence our work. It should give us a new attitude, a new power source, and a new career objective. This morning we're going to look at what a new attitude encompasses, and the following two Sundays we'll examine our new power source and career objective.

Here's a question: Have you ever wondered if what you're doing with your life is really worthwhile? Have you wanted to do something significant for God—to make your life really count? If so, Paul would say, "Don't change jobs; change your attitude."

Let's consider three critical attitude adjustments that will transform our work.

First is an attitude of service.

The world says you must have power. But note the contrast: God says we go to work *not* to get others to serve *us*, but to serve *them*. Not to gain power but to *empower*. And that goes for everyone, no matter where you find yourself on the corporate food chain. According to Paul, whether we are giving or taking orders we are to take the lead in seeking the welfare and success of others. Whether I am an employee or an employer, Paul says I go to work not primarily for myself, but for others. I am to treat the people I work for fairly, giving to them the work they expect of me. As for those who work for me, I am to empower them fairly to do their work.

going to work for God

Colossians 3:23

Consider This

Add an illustration of someone you have noticed working with a servant's attitude, perhaps going above and beyond expectation.

Application: If you are between jobs, you might be tempted to consider salary, benefits, or just any work that pays money. As a follower Christ, you need to be asking not only how much a job pays, but also how will you be able to serve.

Comment at a point you deem appropriate: If you want to know if you have the attitude of a servant, think about how you respond when someone treats you like one.

➔ **Second, we are to do our work with an attitude of worship.**

The world says you must have prestige. You have to make a name for yourself. But note the contrast: God says we go to work not to make a name for ourselves, but to make a name for God. Paul makes it clear that at its core, work is a means of worship—a way we ascribe worth to God. “It is the Lord Christ you are serving” so we do our work “with *sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.*”

Don't miss how scandalous these words must have sounded to the Greeks who believed that any kind of labor was demeaning. Paul says whatever you do can be and should be done for the Lord. It is hard to escape fact that Paul sees all work as meaningful and *God-honoring*. Consider that he is addressing slaves, some of whom did the most menial kinds of labor. To them, Paul's words would have been revolutionary because whatever includes a wide variety of unpleasant activities. Paul's words obliterate the idea that God's work and one's daily work are separate categories. All work is God's work. If you are meeting legitimate human needs, then you are working for God. Work is what we were created to do, and when we do it well, as an act of love and worship “as unto the Lord” our work glorifies the God we serve.

That of course means that we do quality work, and put our whole heart into it, because this is what God deserves

➔ **The third outlook Paul wants us to have about our work is an attitude of expectation.**

The world says you must have *possessions*. It's all about the money! But note the contrast: God says we go to work not primarily to make a living, but to earn an eternal reward. Think about it: Your daily work—as a teacher, banker, plumber, doctor—counts for eternity. This passage clearly teaches that God will hold us accountable as stewards for what we do in our daily work.

As we all know, profit is a strong motivation and can be a dangerous driver if not pursued in the way God intended. It's important to know that far from attacking our desire to profit from our work (since that's the way God made us), the Bible redirects us to remember the ultimate reward for good labor—to stand before God and hear, “Well done good and faithful servant.”

going to work for God

Colossians 3:23

Consider This

In his insightful essay, “Weight of Glory,” C.S. Lewis suggests that God finds our desire for profit too small, not too large. “We are,” as he says, “far too easily pleased” with worldly things, when what we really want is waiting for us before God. “It is written that we shall “stand before” Him, shall appear, and shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.”

[Review the contrasting attitudes.]

The world says, “I go to work ...”	God says, “I go to work ...”
To get people to serve me and to gain power	To serve others and to empower others
To make a name for myself	To glorify God
To earn a living	To earn an eternal reward

What does this mean to me?

Every one of us will stand before God and give account for what we did with our Monday through Saturdays. So, what does this mean to for us tomorrow morning when we show up at work?

It means that our daily work is significant to God and his kingdom—whether we’re leading a company or leading a church, changing a tire or changing a diaper, making a sales pitch or sharing Christ with a co-worker. To make our life count for God and feel the pleasure of extending His kingdom doing the work he has gifted us to do, we don’t need to change jobs. We need to change our attitude.

The truth is, we can make any job secular or sacred by our attitude. Apart from something inherently sinful, whatever we do can be done for God. [Point out that bank robbery, drug dealing, and pimping, etc. can’t be done for God’s glory.] What’s important here is not so much *what* I do, but *why* I do it and *for whom* I do it. This means I can do work that is *considered* sacred, God-honoring and valuable to the Kingdom—things like prayer, evangelism, Bible study, serving the poor—and actually secularize it by my attitude. [This is a good place for confession. I usually admit how, I turned teaching God’s word into secular work by tainting it with the desire to make a name for myself.] Anyone can turn prayer into a self-centered activity designed to manipulate God. We can share our faith with a person to get another spiritual notch on our belt or because we feel personally superior to someone with another belief system. We can even serve the poor because it looks good on our spiritual or personal résumé.

going to work for God

Colossians 3:23

Consider This

Here's the bottom line: We should all go to work for the same reasons we go to church—to worship God and serve our fellow man. In fact, if you go to work for a different reason than I [as your pastor] do, one of us is going to work for the wrong reason. Consider using a powerful video produced by Right Now Media entitled “Work as Worship.” Preview and download free at http://store.rightnow.org/Store/Downloadable_Video_Illustrations/5376/Work_as_Worship

Optional point: Work is not the enemy of my spiritual life.

Paul implies something astounding that we shouldn't miss when he says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as unto the Lord.” Paul not only contrasts biblical attitudes with those of the world, but he also contrasts them with views often taught by the religious leaders who see work as the enemy of family and spiritual life. In their opinion, you can't be serious about your work and be serious about serving God at the same time. This is certainly not to say that our work and priorities can't get off balance with other important activities of life. The point to grasp is that Paul sees work as an essential part of the spiritual life. Those who want to divide life into the secular and the sacred have a real problem making Paul's words in Colossians 3:23 fit with Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37, 38.

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment.

If work is a separate department from your spiritual life, then how can you love the Lord with all your heart and with that same heart devote all of it to your work, as Paul says? You would have to disobey one command to obey the other. On the other hand, if all work is God's work, and you do your work with all your heart, attempting to bring glory to God, then your work can be a supreme act of love and worship of God. In Paul's mind, a person would be hard pressed to please God apart from a healthy attitude toward work.

It is impossible to bring life into proper balance apart from viewing work as important to God. If I believe that God cares nothing about my work, where I spend the bulk of my waking hours, then not only will I operate as if I'm totally on my own, but God will simply be an “add-on leisure-time option” in my life. He will be something I may or may not make room for in my leisure time. I will not view my relationship with God as essential, nor will I depend on Him in my work. This mindset puts everything on my shoulders, which, as anyone knows, makes it hard to walk away from work at the end of the day and tend to other responsibilities of life.

Conclusion

In a few moments we'll sing the closing hymn, and I will pronounce the benediction. Does what happened here today have anything to do with the rest of your week? You bet it does! Is there a person you need to serve at work? Do you need to perform an attitude check and make sure your work has so much quality and integrity that it is worthy of being done for God?

Every one of us will stand before God and give account for what we did with our Monday through Saturdays. Will you hear, “Well done good and faithful servant?” Lord, make us all faithful stewards of our work.

a new source of power at work

Luke 8:22-25 & Colossians 4:2-4

Luke 8:22-25 One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s go over to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. 24The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. “Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.”

Colossians 4:2-4 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Outline

Introduction

- I. Jesus’ perspective of work and prayer
- II. Accessing God’s power in our work
 - A. How we should pray
 - B. Why we need to pray
 - C. What should we pray for

Conclusion

Big Idea

If all work is God’s work, then He is ready to work *with* us, *through* us, and *for* us, bringing His power to bear throughout the course of our daily work.

Introduction

Last Sunday I asked you if the hour we spend here in church has any relevance to the other 100-plus waking hours of your week. Sadly, today many Christians don’t see the connection between Sunday worship and Monday work. If this is the case in your life, as the saying goes, “you’re leaving money on the table.”

According to the Small Business Administration, “Starting and managing a business takes motivation, desire, and talent.” It also takes resources. Most new businesses fail in the first few years because they are underfunded. While this is true financially, did you realize that this is also true spiritually? If we are underfunded spiritually, we will fail in our most important enterprise—to glorify God in our work.

No matter what kind of work we do, all of us will stand before God one day and give account of our lives ... not just for what we did on Sundays, but with what we did with the skills, resources, relationships, and work he entrusted to us. If we want to hear God say, “Well done good and faithful servant,” it will be based on our dedication to work for His glory—and doing our work for God’s glory requires prayer.

When was the last time you prayed about your work?

a new source of power at work

Luke 8:22-25; Colossians 4:2-4

Consider This

Insert an illustration from your own experience. Here's mine: I was meeting with a group of high-powered businessmen for a weekly Bible study. As we were updating each other on what was going on in our lives, one man who was wrestling with a big business decision asked the group, "Do you think that it's all right to pray about my business?" What was surprising is that this man was a leader in his church and sat on several ministry boards. And yet, he never made the connection between God and his business. Having led men's groups for 30 years, I've learned that if I want to see a group of highly successful executives squirm, all I have to do is to mention two words: "Let's pray."

Truth is, prayer is so easy even a child can do it: "Now I lay me down to sleep" But somewhere between childhood and adulthood, prayer becomes awkward or difficult for many people. Author Robert McAfee Brown put it well. He said, "Prayer is like a foreign land. When we go there, we go as tourists. Like most tourists, we feel uncomfortable and out of place. Like most tourists, we therefore move on before too long and go somewhere else."

Have you ever been lost somewhere where you couldn't speak the language? That's not unlike how many people feel about prayer. And so even though they've read about God's incredible promises about prayer, they don't go there partly because it feels uncomfortable and unfamiliar, but also because they're relying on their own resources and think things are under control. Nowhere is this more true and more tragic than in the workplace.

But for many Christians, there comes a defining moment—a time of crisis when we decide to call on God because we're up against overwhelming odds. Or maybe we've pursued a dream, and we finally realize we cannot reach it our own, no matter how hard we try. Whether or not we discover the power of prayer will define our future.

Many people are navigating turbulent waters right now. They're in painful and difficult situations. When calamity strikes, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the odds. Even hopeless. It's at this point that either we sink under the waters, or we learn to rely on God's power.

Jesus' perspective of work and prayer

How about you? Do you pray about your work—about decisions, budgets, office conflict, legal issues, strategic plans, or even doing your very best work? If you don't, you're in good company. Jesus' own disciples had the same disconnect between faith and work. Listen to how Luke records their story.

[Read Luke 8: 22-25]

I used to puzzle over Jesus' question, "Where is your faith?" He seems a little harsh with his disciples, don't you think? After all, these guys had left everything to follow Him. So why did Jesus confront them like this? I think it's because at least four of them were professional fishermen. They were in their power zone! They were in the world they knew and understood—the last place they ever dreamed of needing God. Sure, they knew that Jesus could heal people, feed a multitude, preach a moving sermon, and even change water to wine, but what did Jesus or faith have to do with boats and sailing—their work? Only when they had no other options left to did they call on him. "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

a new source of power at work

Luke 8:22-25; Colossians 4:2-4

That day those professional fishermen learned in no uncertain terms that Jesus was the Lord of their workplace as much as He was Lord of their synagogue. In their boat was a man who had more ability in his little finger than all of their combined abilities, experience, and expertise gained from years of working those waters. They also learned that He was not only able, but willing to bring His power to bear in their workplace.

What can we take away from this passage? For one, Jesus' power is not reserved for mission projects in third-world countries or designated for religious activities at church. His power applies to boats and big waves and other real-life stuff we deal with on the job on a daily basis (like financial shortfalls, IRS audits, ethical breaches, major blow-ups with a boss and product failures). Second, he is always there, ready to move beyond our feeble competence, inadequate resources, limited thinking, and bring His power to bear into the ordinary parts of our lives, as well as our most challenging dilemmas (like conversations with co-workers, negotiating traffic on your morning commute, or technology problems).

The fact is, our work is important to God. Not only does He expect us to take our faith to work, He wants us to be absolutely dependent on Him to do our work. We have an inestimable amount of spiritual capital at our disposal, and the sooner we realize this, the better off we'll be. Imagine for a moment:

What if you could have Warren Buffet on autodial to ask about investments?

What if you could ask Dale Earnhardt, Jr. about why your car wasn't running right?

What if you could ask Sandra Day O'Connor about a legal issue?

What if you could call Bill Gates to come over and help you with a computer problem?

What if these individuals not only made themselves available to you, but also were truly interested in your success at work? And what if they were with you every day at your office or job site to walk with you through every decision and dilemma, and pat you on the back when you succeed? You'd be a fool to turn your back. And yet that's exactly what most Christians do every day when they ignore God's interest and presence in their work, and fail to depend on Him.

Of course, the experts I mentioned don't care about you or your work. But there is Someone who is infinitely smarter, wiser, and wealthier than all of the world's experts combined, and He's a committed companion who is always at your workplace before you arrive.

When God says "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you," He wasn't just talking about the time you spend at church. He means every moment of your life, in every area of your existence—including your work. That's a mighty reassuring promise, especially considering the work environment we have today.

a new source of power at work

Luke 8:22-25; Colossians 4:2-4

When you're dealing with a knotty problem or need to make a hard decision, remember: His promise is as true at work as it is anywhere.

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them. (Isaiah 42:16)

And he wasn't just talking to missionaries when He promised ...

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)

Accessing God's Power in Our Work

Last week we looked at what Paul said in Colossians 3 and 4 about new attitudes in how we go about our work. Immediately following his instructions to employees and employers, he tells us,

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful."

A Monday morning faith goes to work not in my strength, but *God's* strength. In those few words Paul tells us *how* we should pray, *why* we need to pray, and *what* we should pray for.

A. First, look at how we should pray.

In a word, we should pray persistently. The Greek word translated "devote" means "to attend to constantly." In 1 Thessalonians 5 Paul tells us to "pray without ceasing." That doesn't mean sneaking off somewhere to talk to God. It means going through the day with a stream of consistent consciousness of God's presence and interest in our work. It means consciously remembering God is with us and that we can carry on a private conversation in our mind, asking him for wisdom and to be at work with us in any given situation. It means that even when we get distracted, given a moment's pause, our thoughts return to God like a bird to its nest.

We should also pray dependently. The Greek word translated "devote" implies much more than persistence. It's actually a combination of two Greek words: "pros" which means "unto" and "kratos" which means strength, dominion, or might. In other words, Paul is telling us to lean into God's strength. By praying we declare our dependence on God to do our work.

We also need to pray expectantly. Paul reminds us that we are to pray "being watchful and thankful"—that is, with a sense of expectation and confidence that God cares and is at work in our work.

a new source of power at work

Luke 8:22-25; Colossians 4:2-4

B. Next consider why we need to pray.

Most of us probably don't have trouble praying when the storms of life roll in. However, it's not just in the storms we need Jesus. We need Him in the ordinary transactions of the day—especially at times when we feel most competent and confident, and think we can handle things on our own.

If ever there was a person who by sheer power of his personality could persuade someone to respond to the gospel, it was Paul. But even Paul, as competent as he was, depended on God in his work. That's why we find Paul asking for prayer for his work here and numerous other places in his letters. What is true for Paul and his work is true for us and our work as well.

In John 15:5, Jesus reminded his disciples of an overwhelmingly important principle.

He said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

You might misquote this passage at first to emphasize what we often think—that "apart from me you can do ... *some* things; ... *many* things; ... *a few* things"

Did you hear that? Apart from me you can do *nothing*. *Nada*. *Zilch*! Now consider this: According to Genesis 1, God put us on the earth to work to be "fruitful" and "fill the earth." That is, to be productive and develop his creation to its full potential, to bear much fruit. Think about it for a minute. Is there anything that you use in your work or produce in your work that can't be traced to God's good hand who gave us all good things to use and richly enjoy? Where do the raw materials come from? Where did the expertise come from? Even the abilities we use to do our work are from him. Remember Moses words,

"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth ... (Deuteronomy 8:17-18).

Why do we pray about our work? Because God is the source of life and strength behind everything we do, and we depend on him for everything. To neglect prayer for our work is to live half-asleep to reality. We simply can't afford to leave him back at church if we want to be both personally and spiritually successful at our work. There is no greater indication of a fragile grip on reality than failing to pray about our work.

C. Now consider what we should pray for.

The context of this passage tells us several things we should pray about.

Ourselves. We should pray for ourselves, that we remember God's presence in our work, that what we say and do would reflect God's goodness and grace to others, and that we would keep our priorities in godly order.

a new source of power at work

Luke 8:22-25; Colossians 4:2-4

Our Work. (and by extension the companies we work for). We should pray that the work we do serves other people—employers, employees, customers, clients, and co-workers. That our company would serve the community well and remain profitable.

Open Doors. Paul asked that God would “open doors.” We’ll talk about this next week, but in Paul’s work that meant an opportunity to share the message of salvation. For us, an open door certainly includes that, but it could also include any opportunity to do the good work that God created us to do—such as the opportunity to serve a customer, improve a product, teach a lesson—as well as answer a request to talk about our faith.

Pre-Christian friends. We also pray that God would draw the people we encounter in the workplace to Himself and use us to help them take one step closer to Christ.

Conclusion

It’s easy to fall asleep spiritually on the job, forgetting how much we need God every day. *But*, we do so to the harm of ourselves, our fellow-workers, our business, and the Kingdom of God. A few verses earlier in Colossians, Paul tells us

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (3:17).

If *whatever* means *whatever*, then I need God’s help every small thing as well as the big things in my life—even at the place I feel most competent and confident. None of us can do the work God gave us to do in our own strength.

Have you ever had the thought that you shouldn’t bother God with the small things? After all, He’s probably busy in the Middle East and doesn’t have time to deal with the ordinary things in my life. One Sunday after Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones had finished preaching, a proper English lady took issue with his insistence that we should pray about the small things in life. Dr. Lloyd Jones respectfully replied, “Madam, can you think of *anything* you can ask of God that is not small to Him?”

Do you recognize your need of God’s power every moment of your day? Wake up to God’s power waiting for you at work tomorrow. Recognize the importance of prayer at work.

Consider This

Some other things to consider: If you have a prayer ministry, encourage people to ask for prayer for their workplace. Tell them you want to pray for them, and ask them to let you know how you can pray for their daily work. Challenge them to ask for God’s blessing on their work when their hand hits the doorknob of their workplace. If they have a tendency to fall asleep spiritually during the day, encourage them to think of a way to remind themselves, i.e. to place a sticky note on their computer that reminds them (like “I’m here”).

a new career objective

Colossians 4:2-6

Colossians 4:2-6 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Great Opportunity Outside Your Front Door
- II. How to Walk Through Open Doors
 - A. If we want people to pay attention to our faith, we need to first pay attention to our work.
 - B. Before we talk to people about Jesus, we need to talk to Jesus about people
 - C. We're one link in the chain
 - D. Every interaction is an opportunity for spiritual influence

Conclusion

Introduction

The greatest communication success story in human history is how the gospel message spread across the Mediterranean world in the first centuries of the church. Was it due to effective preaching Peter, Paul and a few other gifted communicators? Was it Paul's strategy of targeting the key cultural centers to plant churches that then infected the countryside? These efforts were no doubt important, but even more so, ordinary Christians recognized that sharing the message of Jesus was everyone's mission. As early as Acts 8:4, while the leaders were hunkered down under persecution, we read,

"Those who had been scattered were bringing the good news of the word wherever they went."

Wherever was predominantly the workplace. The gospel spread like wildfire from home business to home business [Greek=oikos; the oikos or household was the basic economic unit of the Greco-Roman world] by men and women who personally gossiped the gospel to friends, relatives, acquaintances, colleagues, masters, slaves, students, teachers, customers, shop owners, and fellow soldiers through their everyday networks. Men and women who heard the gospel in a neighbor's household carried it back to their household, and so on and so on. As a result, the church experienced phenomenal growth. Followers of Jesus grew from a few hundred on the day of Pentecost to an estimated six-plus million by the end of the third century² –amazing numbers considering the only media were word-of-mouth encounters and hand-written letters.

Big Idea

Every workplace follower of Christ has an unprecedented opportunity to be a spiritual influence in the lives of people with whom he or she works.

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Colossians 4:2-6

The Great Opportunity Outside Our Front Door

Interestingly, something of the same magnitude is happening today. In the next 20 years missiologists estimate that 400,000,000 will come to Christ. Today alone, 77,000 men and women will come to Christ in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.³ Rumors circulate about how the Holy Spirit is drawing Muslims to Christ around the world. In fact, there is a growing movement in China to take the gospel west to the Muslim world called “Back to Jerusalem.” Sociologists tell us that Americans are on the biggest soul search in the history of our nation. But, sadly, rather than seeking answers from a local church they are trying all varieties of spiritual alternatives. Many of these seekers don’t even consider Christianity.

In a day when our culture is moving further away from Christ, we might assume that reaching people with the gospel has gotten harder. In a way this is true. It is harder to get people to visit a church, listen to a gospel presentation over a media source, or attend a crusade. But the avenue of personal relationships remains wide open.

As uninterested and even hostile as people may seem today toward the kind of Christianity they often see portrayed in the media, millions are thirsty for spiritual refreshment. George Barna uncovered this thirst in his research.

Our surveys consistently detect a large (and growing) majority of adults who are dissatisfied and are searching for something more meaningful than bigger homes, fatter paychecks, trimmer bodies, more erotic affairs, and extended leisure. Tens of millions of Americans are open to a set of spiritual truths that will set them free from the shackles of worldliness.⁴

But it’s not just the opportunity created by people’s thirst that should motivate us. The spreading of the gospel message is every Christian’s responsibility. It’s our job. All of us who have received God’s grace share the obligation to pass it on. But don’t make the mistake in thinking that you have to quit your current job and enroll in seminary to have a spiritual impact for Christ.

Consider This

Illustration. You may have a story of your own to insert here. Here’s mine: A few years ago, my friend Steve went kicking and screaming on a short-term mission trip down the Amazon. Three days into the journey, the team leader asked Steve to share his testimony at a gathering in a fishing village along the river. When villagers responded to Steve’s awkward presentation of the gospel, his life made a one-eighty. When he returned, his wife, who had cajoled him into going, discovered that she got more than she had bargained for. Before the trip Steve had no joy. He was like a zombie at church, and any spiritual conversation between the two of them lasted about forty-five seconds tops. But on Steve’s return, she saw his changed life and suddenly realized that becoming a missionary wife was a distinct possibility. That had not been part of her plan.

Steve felt a strong pull to the mission field, but before he quit his job, he discovered that he could and actually wanted to talk about spiritual things with the people with whom he worked—and they were interested in hearing what had happened on his trip. When I had the opportunity to sit down with Steve, I explained to him that following Jesus is more about a heart change than a career change. God could certainly call him to the mission field, but first God wanted him to be a missionary right where he was with the people at his workplace and his network of relationships—his oikos.

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Colossians 4:2-6

Many are surprised to learn that seventy to ninety percent of people who come to Christ, come because of a relationship with a friend or relative⁵. When most people think of evangelism, they think of Billy Graham. If he's the model that pops into your mind, you may be feeling pretty uncomfortable right now if you don't have the gift of evangelism. Fortunately, for those who don't have the gift, God has not left us in the dark about what He expects of us as His representatives. As we've seen over that last couple of weeks, Paul gives us sage advice about what it means to follow Christ at work. Taking faith to work gives us a new set of attitudes about serving others and God's kingdom while at work. We have an incredible new source of power we can access at any time through prayer. We also have a new career objective that should grip our hearts: We go to work not to climb a ladder, but to walk through open doors that he unlocks for us to become a significant spiritual influence on those with whom we work.

How to Walk Through Open Doors

At the end of his letter to the Colossian Christians, Paul gives important instructions that clear up a lot of confusion about the spiritual influence God expects us to have. He writes,

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. (Colossians 4:2-6 NIV)

Nestled in these five verses are four important principles of spiritual influence that apply to every person God has called to the workplace.

A. If we want people to pay attention to our faith, we need to pay attention to our work.

One of the most profound insights I learned years ago is that the Bible never commands us to go witnessing. It does, however, make it very clear that we are Christ's witnesses. The word *witness*—the noun, not the verb—pervades the New Testament. Witnessing—the verb—dominates our perception of evangelism⁶.

Unlike witnessing, being a witness is something Christians *are*—good or bad—whether we like it or not. Paul describes the kind of witness that attracts people to Christ in verses 5 and 6. Note that actions precede words in his instructions. “Be wise in the way you *act* toward outsiders.” What does *acting wisely* imply? Paul's words here seem to indicate that there is a cause-effect relationship between our actions and a person's curiosity about our faith. The way we act, along with our gracious conversation, creates a curiosity in people who observe us in daily life. That curiosity invites an answer from us that is wisely tailored to impart truth in response to an implied question.

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Colossians 4:2-6

But what is it that causes men and women to be curious about our faith? Three things are very apparent.

First, we must do good work. Whether doing a deal or doing the dishes, changing a diaper or mucking out a barn, studying a contract or studying for an exam. If we want people to pay attention to our faith, we need to first pay attention to our work.

Second, we must be people of godly character. What makes people interested in Jesus is seeing Jesus in us. Both what we say and what we do reveal what is in our heart.

Third, how we treat other people is incredibly important. Someone rightly said that people don't care how much we know until they know how much we care. The quality of our relationships will determine the quality of our influence.

B. Before we talk to people about Jesus, we need to talk to Jesus about people.

Last week we saw how essential prayer is for our work in general. But nowhere is it more important than in helping people along toward Christ. Before we talk to people about Jesus, we need to talk to Jesus about people. One of the more demonstrable particulars about the early church is that successful spreading of the gospel was due to more than the mass mobilization of street-level Christians—as key as that was. It was also due in no small part to the persistent prayer of early Christians. They believed prayer was essential to their mission to carry the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

C. We're one link in the chain.

Most Christians and non-Christians agree on one thing: they both hate evangelism—at least the kind of evangelism that forces a conversation on a stranger or unwilling listener. Fear of being put into a spiritual corner doesn't typically rank not too high on people's Most Pleasant Experiences list. But as we can see from this passage, pressured, in-your-face evangelism is not what God wants us to do. We are to be wise and gracious.

More often than not, evangelism is a long-term process that typically involves several people over what can seem to be a long time. It's organic—because faith takes time to grow.

Of course, the goal of evangelism is to see men and women place their trust in Christ. But just like a field needs cultivation before it can grow a crop, the human heart usually needs a lot of preparation. That preparation can't be done at a distance—there's no tele-(at a distance) evangelism in the New Testament. It's working up close and personal over time. Men and women need to see the authenticity of our faith to know that the gospel is *credible*. They need to hear it graciously explained and see it lived to know it's *plausible* before they decide if the gospel message is *reliable*. These steps aren't taken all at once, except in rare instances. Neither are they usually accomplished by one individual. In fact, the average journey to faith involves nine to sixteen individuals helping a non-Christian take incremental steps that finally lead to faith in Christ and continued spiritual growth. We're just one link in the chain of someone's journey to faith. And sure, it's great to be the last link, but an earlier link who shows a skeptical co-worker that, "Gee, all Christians aren't jerks" is just as important.

a new career objective**Colossians 4:2-6****D. Every interaction is an opportunity for spiritual influence.**

The persecution that first century followers of Jesus faced could have easily kept the gospel contained in a tight little religious community. Doubtless, some who received the gospel were fearful and kept the gospel to themselves. But overall, Christians understood that to the one much is given, much is required. And as they went through their day, doing their work and interacting with people in their community, they looked for opportunities to talk about what it was like to be a child of God—not formally or pushy, but in the relaxed, natural conversation that happens between co-workers.

Paul tells us to “make the most of every opportunity.” If what we’ve said about spiritual influence is true, then every interaction with people we encounter at work is spiritually significant. This doesn’t mean that we’re always angling for an opportunity to get into a spiritual conversation. Remember, we are to be wise as we make the most of every opportunity.

Here are a few foolish approaches

- Failing to build trust. Remember that people need to see the gospel lived out before we tell them the gospel message. People need to trust the messenger before they will trust the message.
- Failing to build a relationship. We need to take time to find out where people are on their spiritual journey—to discern how God is already at work in someone’s life and join Him at that point—not force things along on our agenda. If we try to make more of an opportunity than really exists by being pushy or judgmental, we’re not being wise.
- Failing to speak up about our faith when given the opportunity. One thing is clear. No one is good enough to witness by his or her actions alone. Competence, character, and concern lay the foundation for wise communication.
- Failing to pray. Ultimately this isn’t about our carefully crafted responses, the clarity of our message, or even our winsome behavior. It’s the Holy Spirit who takes our words draws people.

Consider This

You may want to use a powerful video here produced by Right Now Media, entitled “Morning Prayer.” Preview and purchase at http://store.rightnow.org/Store/Downloadable_Video_Illustrations/3319/Morning_Prayer

Conclusion: Two questions

Tomorrow morning you’ll step out your door into the most strategic place for spiritual impact in our culture. Your work is your mission field and, whether you like it or not, your life is a witness for Christ—positively or negatively. I’d like to ask you two questions before we leave.

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Colossians 4:2-6

First, who's watching you?

Have any people at work come to mind over the past few minutes—perhaps a manager or a client you would love to see come to Christ? If so, let's pray for them right now.

Consider This

I often ask people to jot down initials or whisper their names silently to God as I lead them in the prayer based on the following Scriptural requests.⁷ It might be helpful to print these in the bulletin or handout.

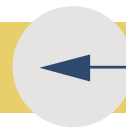
- The Father would draw them to himself (John 6:44)
- They seek to know God (Dt. 4:19; Acts 17:27)
- They would believe the Bible (Rom. 10:17; 1 Thes. 2:13)
- Satan would be restrained from blinding them to the truth (Mt. 13:19; 2 Cor. 4:4)
- The Holy Spirit would convict them of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-13)
- God would send other Christians into their lives as a positive influence toward Christ. (Mt. 9:37, 38)
- They would believe in Christ as their Savior (John 1:12; 5:24)
- They would turn from sin (Acts 3:19; 17:30, 31)
- They would confess Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9, 10)
- They would yield their lives to follow Christ (Rom. 12:1, 2; 2 Cor. 5:15; Phil. 3:7, 8)
- They would take root and grow in Christ (Col. 2:6, 7)
- They would one day become a positive influence for Jesus Christ in their workplace (2 Tim. 2:2)

And then one more question: Do they see Jesus in you?

Consider This

In closing you can lead your congregation in praying for themselves personally using the following requests from Scripture.

- I would do excellent work that attracts other's attention (Proverbs 22:29)
- That my work would bring glory to God (Matthew 5:16)
- I would treat people fairly (Colossians 4:1)
- I would have a good reputation with unbelievers (1 Thessalonians 4:12)
- Others would see Jesus in me (Philippians 2:12-16)
- My life would make my faith attractive (Titus 2:10)
- My conversation would be wise, sensitive, and enticing (Colossians 4: 5, 6)
- I would be bold and fearless (Ephesians 6:19)
- I would be alert to open doors (Colossians 4:3)
- I would be able to clearly explain the gospel (Colossians 4:4)
- God would expand my influence (1 Chronicles 4:10)



What does it look like to follow Jesus?

end notes

1. Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (Manchester, NH.: Sophia Institute Press, 1996) p. 76-77.
2. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), Page 6.
3. David Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopedia*
4. George Barna, *Evangelism that Works* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995) page 22.
5. Win and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), p. 45, 46.
6. Author and songwriter John Fischer in his book *Fearless Faith*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2002, page 198) says this: When witnessing is a verb it becomes something we do or don't do. We turn it on or we turn it off. It becomes a segment of the spiritual compartment of our lives, as in prayer, Bible study, going to church, and witnessing—a very small segment. It's something we are supposed to go out and do, and poor, unsuspecting non-Christians often have to bear the brunt of our spiritual obligation. ... Witnessing, in this sense, involves tactics, methods, training, and planning. It tends to make us goal-oriented, opening the door to results, expectations, and, ultimately, the numbers game. With witnessing there are corners of cards to tear off, hands to raise, numbers to tally, reports to make. Witnessing is all one-way. We witness. We talk. We say what we came to say and try to make people listen to us. Such witnessing can have only two results: You either “pray the prayer” or you don't. And in the end, our witnessing can be judged as a success or a failure based on one response one point of time.
7. William Carr Peel and Walt Larimore, *Workplace Grace*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), p. 193-194.