

How Can I Be Content with My Job?

Eph 6:5-9 CBC 9/5/09

Central Truth: Be a servant to the ultimate Employer. Work for an audience of one.

ENGAGE: What do the initials SLIDE: T.G.I.F. [BLANK SLIDE] stand for? When people say that [Thank God (or thank goodness) it's Friday], what exactly are they saying? If people feel that their work is boring and dull, they often feel it is a necessary evil. **Is work only a necessary evil?**

A person put this bumper sticker on their car: *I'm in no hurry, I'm on my way to work.* Have you ever felt that way? The painful truth is that many people simply never find the right job/gift mix. Many people, perhaps the majority, are dissatisfied with their job and dread going to work. Someone once asked a man, "How long does it take you to get to work in the morning?" He said, **"Usually I get to work about a half-hour after I clock in."**

This attitude toward work is unfortunate since over the course of our lifetime most of us will spend about 40% of our waking hours on the job. It seems crazy to invest so much of our lives doing something we don't enjoy.

Even though many people are dissatisfied the need for money forces them into jobs that ignite boredom, frustration, and conflict. Many people feel trapped in their job and don't see any way out. Many are underpaid.

FOCUS: Today we're going to look at what the Bible says about our work. How can you be content with your job? On this Labor Day weekend **I want to help you see the value in the work you do.** Whether you love your job or hate it, the Bible has a great deal to say about work and **how your attitude can improve your work life.**

The late **Tom Landry**, former Dallas Cowboy football coach knew how to get the most of his players; he made this statement: "When people aren't happy doing what they do, they don't do it as well as when they are happy."

Also, when you excel at work, it is easier to enjoy other areas of your life. Have you ever been to a family outing, or even a vacation that you were unable to enjoy because you couldn't leave behind the worries and stress of the workplace? It happens to many of us at one time or another.

SET THE STAGE biblically: Put yourself in a time machine and go back two thousand years and imagine that you are one of the 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire. A common goal among Roman citizens was to own slaves that could do all of your work for you, enabling you to live a life of idle luxury. **As a slave in the first century you had no rights, no chance for a promotion, no court of appeals. How could such a person be content with their job?** More importantly for you, **how can you be content with your job?**

PREVIEW: From the Bible you will see today that **WORK ITSELF IS GOOD.** The Bible pictures work as having intrinsic value. Work itself is good. **We are going to see that work itself is good BECAUSE ALL LEGITIMATE WORK IS AN EXTENSION OF GOD'S WORK. Second, to help us have a proper attitude in our work we must see that THE WAY WE DO OUR WORK SHOWS OUR LOVE FOR GOD.** One way we show our love for God is in the motive and manner in which we do our work (Eph 6:5-9). God says to both Christian employees and employers: **Show your love for God by the way you do your work.**

Your work shows your love for God. **Finally**, we are going to see as well that the Bible has a great deal to say about work and **HOW OUR ATTITUDE CAN IMPROVE OUR WORK LIFE**.

ANNOUNCE the passage: Now to help us understand how we can be content and have a proper attitude in our I want to take you back to instructions that the apostle Paul gave to first century Christian slaves and Christian masters. For the Scripture reading turn with me in your Bibles to **Eph 6:5-9 [p 1041]**

[Recognize that work is good because all legitimate work is an extension of God's work (Gen 1:27-29; 2:15).]

ILL: Do you ever feel overworked, over-regulated, under-leisured, under-benefited? **Take heart.** This notice was found in the ruins of a London office building. It was dated **1852**.

1. This firm has reduced the hours of work, and the clerical staff will now only have to be present between the hours of 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays.
2. Clothing must be of a sober nature. The clerical staff will not behave playfully in clothing of bright colors, nor will men wear close-fitting leg coverings unless in good repair.
3. Overshoes and topcoats may not be worn in the office, but neck scarves and headwear may be worn in inclement weather.
4. A stove is provided for the benefit of the clerical staff. Coal and wood must be kept in the locker. It is recommended that each member of the clerical staff bring **four pounds of coal** each day during the cold weather.
5. No member of the clerical staff may leave the room without permission from the supervisor.
- 6. No talking is allowed during business hours.** [Ladies what would you do!]
7. Now that the hours of business have been drastically reduced, the partaking of food is allowed between 11:30 and noon, but work will not on any account cease.
8. Members of the clerical staff will provide their own pens. A new sharpener is available on application to the supervisor.
9. The supervisor will nominate a senior clerk to be responsible for the cleanliness of the main office and the private office. All boys and juniors will report to him 40 minutes before prayers and will remain after closing hours for similar work. Brushes, brooms, scrubber, and soap are provided by the owners.
10. **The owners recognize the generosity of the new labor laws**, but will expect a great rise in output of work to compensate **for these near Utopian conditions.** ☺ *Bits & Pieces*, May 26, 1994, Page 13-15.

As it is commonly noted: **God gives the birds their food, but He doesn't throw it into their nests.** Work was part of God's design for creation from the very beginning. **Before sin entered the world** God told Adam and Eve to **TEND the garden and care for it.** [SLIDES] "God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them. ^{1:28} God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth **and subdue it!** Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that

moves on the ground.”^{1:29} Then God said, “I now give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the entire earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food” (Gen 1:27-29 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] When God told Adam and Eve to **subdue** the earth He is saying: “**HARNESS the earth’s potential and USE its resources for your benefit.**” In an ancient Israelite context this would suggest **CULTIVATING the fields, MINING the earth’s mineral riches, USING its trees and stones for construction, and DOMESTICATING (or taming) its animals.**

In the Garden of Eden God assigned to Adam and Eve the responsibility to care for the orchard and to maintain it. SLIDE “The Lord God took the man and placed him in the orchard in Eden to care for it and to maintain it” (Gen 2:15 NET). [BLANK SLIDE] God gave Adam and Eve work to do before the fall. **While after the fall, work became more difficult (cf. Gen 3:17-19), work itself is an extension of God’s work.** [REIT:] Therefore to help us have a proper attitude about work and our jobs:

Recognize that work is good because all legitimate work is an extension of God’s work.

The work you do is part of a process to accomplish what God wants to do in sustaining His creation. **Your work is significant work to the Lord. Sometimes we set up a gap between work and faith.** We may say or think, “Work doesn’t matter as much as church or spiritual things. We often, consciously or unconsciously embrace that solution. [Cf. Haddon Robinson, *By the Sweat of Your Brow* for ideas presented here/below]

Let me give you some career choices, and then think in your mind how you think they would be rated: being a pastor, a seminary professor, a missionary, a religious broadcaster. being a truck driver, farmer, heating/air conditioner contractor, a barber, or an assembly-line worker being a real estate developer, a banker, a broker, an advertising person being a physician, a dentist, a nurse, a teacher, a counselor, a mother.

Oftentimes we put certain jobs above others. **Why do we make these choices the way we do? Why do we sometimes say, “Work doesn’t matter as much as church or spiritual things?”**

This attitude that says there’s a gap between work and faith reflects a heresy that was rampant in the early Church. It was called “**docetism.**” **Docetists** said there were two stories (as in a building): one was spiritual and the other was secular. Your soul was important and your body was not. The spiritual and the religious were very important to God, and the secular and the ordinary were less important to God.

The early Church condemned the heresy. All of life is important to God. Romans 12:1-2 tells us to present our bodies to God. Whatever you do with your body matters to God.

Now what are the implications of this when it comes to faith and work? This says that there is no difference between the secular and the sacred. **Also, we don’t find significance in our work ONLY by seeing it as a place to do evangelism.** Now don’t misunderstand me: **Evangelism is important, but evangelism is not the ONLY activity that makes your job significant.**

ILL: Imagine a conversation between two business people, Norman and George:

Norman says: George, you and I have been attending the same church together for a couple of years, and I’ve never found out what you do.

George: Well, Norm, I guess you'd say that my work in life is to be an evangelist. I want to tell people about Jesus Christ.

Norm: Oh, I didn't know you were in religious work. Somehow or other, I thought you worked for some company here in the area.

George: Oh, yeah, I do work for **Snyder's of Hanover**. They hired me to work in sales. That's what I do to make a living. But my real job is to talk to everybody in my industry about Jesus Christ. You might say that I work to exist, but I live to evangelize.

Norm: Boy, I admire your commitment. I don't think I've every thought of my work that way.

George: I think that's what every Christian should be about. I want to give myself to what is eternal. **Snyder's of Hanover** is in the snack food industry. I don't want to give my life to selling pretzels or **chips and tortillas** or veggie crisps. I want to give my life to what lasts. Christ is what really matters. **Your job isn't what's important. It's whether or not on your job you tell people about Jesus Christ.**

Norm: So you see yourself as some kind of missionary. Is that it?

George: Yes, Jesus said to go into all the world and preach the gospel. My world is the snack food business. It's my mission field. Why give yourself to something that really doesn't last much longer than an opened bag of potato chips? (pause....)

Did you note what exactly George is saying about what he thinks the relationship is between his faith and his work? George values evangelism. He sees the need to tell people about Jesus Christ. His work has value ONLY because it is a platform for evangelism. George minimizes the value of his work because it will not last for eternity. He believes that since his work selling snack food is something that won't last, it doesn't have value in itself. **George has confused DURATION with VALUE. He thinks that if something won't last for eternity, then it really doesn't matter much.**

Think about this: **God WORKED in creation, and it will not endure.** Yet it does have value. In Genesis 1, God is seen at work in the creation of the world. Yet the NT teaches that the world will be shaken and a new heaven and new earth will take its place (Heb 1:10; 12:26). You would not say that because God's creation doesn't last forever that the work God did in creation has no value. **Something that is passing may have eternal significance because it is done for the glory of God.** Paul says SLIDE: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31 NET)." BLANK SLIDE

Evangelism is well worth doing. But your lifestyle is important as a witness for Jesus Christ. **Your WORK as well as your words should be for the glory of God. There is a witness by the way you DO your work as well as a witness on your work.** The apostle Paul gave this instruction to slaves, but the principle applies to each of us in our work as well: SLIDE: Slaves must always obey their masters and do their best to please them. They must not talk back ¹⁰ or steal, but must show themselves to be entirely trustworthy and good. Then they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive in every way" (Titus 2:9-10 NLT). BLANK SLIDE Remind yourself: **How I DO my job can enhance and make attractive the teaching about God our Savior.**

REIT: Let's recognize then that work is good because all legitimate work is an extension of God's work.

APPL: When you bow your head to thank God for your food, do you give it much thought? Suppose the next time you asked a blessing at the dinner table you said, “**God is great, God is good, and we thank Him for this food.**” Then you went on to ask a blessing on all the people God used to bring that food to the table. Who are some of the people you would thank God for? **Farmers; scientists** who worked to help the farmer produce good crops; **bankers** who helped farmers with loans; **farm equipment manufacturers and distributors; workers** who help to process and package the foods; **truck drivers; truck stop operators** who help the truck drivers; **builders of roads** over which food is transported; **supermarket employees; bank employees** who help to see that the money you receive in the form of a check is cashed so you can buy food. If you stop to thank God for all the people who had a part in bringing your food to the table, your meal would get cold!

REIT/TRANS: How can you be content with your job? Recognize that work is good because all legitimate work is an extension of God’s work. A second factor that can help you be content with your job is this:

Recognize that the way you do your work shows your love for God (Matt 22:37-40 with Eph 6:5-8).

When Jesus was asked which was the greatest command, Jesus [quoting from Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18] says: SLIDE “*‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’* ^{22:38} This is the first and greatest commandment. ^{22:39} The second is like it: *‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’* ^{22:40} All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Matt 22:37-40 NET). BLANK SLIDE Jesus said **the greatest commandment is this: Love God with all of your being.**

How do you express your love for God with all of your being as it relates to your job? Jesus says: **DO your job in a way that SERVES both God and those around you.** Through daily work you show your love for God. **One way you show that you love God and reverence Him is by the way you do your work.**

ILL: I’m reminded of what Russian Church Planter, **Victor Levashov**, said as he recounted their experience from a prison warden as they went to the chief prison in **Grozny**, the capital city of **Chechnya** [chech-nyä] which has seen much war and bloodshed since 1994, when separatists tried to declare independence. **Victor and a team had gone to seek permission to minister to the prisoners. Victor writes:** “We went to the chief prison in Grozny.... We were surprised by the warm welcome we received there. As we met the warden, who held the rank of colonel, he began to tell us about his life, and we realized why he respected us. He had been a militiaman in **Kolyma** during the Soviet years when there was an effort to ban religion. At that time, Kolyma was a place of exile for political and religious people. **According to the warden, the behavior of Christian believers made a lasting impression.**

The warden said: “The political prisoners often protested against those in power and didn’t keep their quarters clean. When spring came, they didn’t care to maintain the roads, so there was a muddy mess instead. **The Christian families under my control were different.** I was never met with a hostile glance from them. The families were orderly. They dressed modestly. **When spring came, they cleaned the streets and there was no mud.** Others began to follow their example and helped. Eventually the village became exemplary in Koylma. **The godly example**

the believers set impacted others that lived in the village with them.” [Cf. *Slavic Gospel Assoc. Newsletter*, Summer '09.]

APPL: So too in your workplace. Do you work for the glory of God! Have a positive impact on those around you! **Recognize that the way you do your work shows your love for God.**

TRANS: How can you be content with your job? Recognize that work is good because all legitimate work is an extension of God's work in the world. Recognize as well that the way you do your work shows your love for God. This leads to a third and primary point:

BE A SERVANT TO THE ULTIMATE EMPLOYER.

View yourself as doing your work as to the Lord. Even if we don't consciously think about it, work is a way of serving God and loving others. If the way we do our work shows our love for God, make sure in your work you serve the ultimate Employer.

Now the apostle Paul gives specific instructions to slaves and masters in how to serve one another in **Eph 6:5-9**. These instructions have application for you and me as well. While slavery has been abolished (**so my children have told me ☺**) **ALL of us still work for someone.** No matter if you are an employer or an employee all of us work for someone. Even if you are self-employed you still work for the customer. So **how are you and I to serve God in our work?**

Be a servant to the ultimately employer BY DEEPLY RESPECTING AND OBEYING YOUR BOSS WITH ALL SINCERITY AS IF YOU WERE SERVING THE LORD HIMSELF (Eph 6:5).

Notice Paul's instruction to servants. Look again with me in your Bibles at Eph 6:5:

“Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, **as to Christ**” (Eph 6:5 NKJV). The word translated “bondservant” here is the Greek word *doulos*, which often indicates one who sells himself into slavery to another. In the Roman Empire in the first century about one-third of the residents—some sixty million people—were slaves. Slaves were used not only for manual labor they were also used for “professional” tasks such as business management, accounting, and even medical work.

By way of application Paul instructs us: **“Be obedient to those over you in the workplace.”** Paul goes on to instruct slaves in what obedience to their master looks like. These instructions provide a good model for you and me as well. What does proper obedience at work look like? Paul instructs bondservants to **obey** their human masters **with fear and trembling**. The word “fear” has the sense here of **reverence or respect, not terror**. When Paul commands slaves to obey their human masters **with fear and trembling**, he instructs slaves to **deeply respect** their human masters and obey them completely.

APPL: Obey those in authority over you as if you were serving the Lord. Show deep respect to your boss.

Now someone might say, “My boss is a jerk. He doesn't deserve respect.” Actually, whether your boss is a jerk or not is beside the point. Give deep respect to your boss. **If God sets up kings and puts them down, is it too much to think that God has placed the person who is over you in their position?** Your response to those in authority over you ultimately says more about you than it does about the person over you. **As one wise individual said:** “The question of who respects me is based on who I am. No one gives me respect; I earn it or I don't. On the

other hand, the question of who I respect is also based on who I am. **Every person deserves my respect.** Whether I like them or not, believe in them or not, support them or not, **my leaders deserve my respect.** When I am disrespectful to another human, it says more about me than it says about them.” [Anonymous; quoted by Steve May, “Job One,” a sermon on Eph 6:5-9]

You may not like your supervisor but when he tells you to do something you can look him in the eye and say, “Yes, Mr. Jones, I’ll get it done.” **Treat your boss with deep respect.** Treat your boss like he or she is an important person. They are!

TRANS: And don’t try to get on the good side of the boss simply to advance your interests. As you respectfully obey your supervisor **do so sincerely and honestly, with no ulterior motive or hidden intention.** Serve those over you as if you were serving the Lord Himself. “Serve and obey,” Paul says, **“in the sincerity of your heart as to Christ”** (Eph 6:5b NET).

REIT: Being a servant to the ultimate Employer means you deeply respect and obey your boss with all sincerity as if you were serving the Lord Himself.

Be a servant to the ultimate employer ALSO BY DILIGENTLY WORKING WHEN YOU ARE NOT BEING WATCHED AS WELL AS WHEN YOU ARE BEING WATCHED (Eph 6:6-7).

Be diligent and work hard whether those over you are watching or not. Paul continues His instruction about how to obey those we serve in **vv. 6-7**: *“Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men”* (Eph 6:6-7 NKJV). Be faithful in your work, whether someone is checking up on you or not.

ILL: A retired man became interested in the construction of an addition to a shopping mall. Observing the activity regularly, he was especially impressed by the great care and attention the operator of a large piece of equipment showed. The day finally came when the retired man had a chance to tell this equipment operator how much he’d enjoyed watching his scrupulous work. **Looking astonished,** the operator replied, **“You’re NOT the supervisor?”** [Cf. Howard A. Stein in *Reader’s Digest*.]

Don’t be like those workers who do their work only when someone is watching. When the boss shows up they work up a storm, when he leaves they settle back to their piddling around, not accomplishing much.

Rather, Paul says, “As slaves of Christ DO the will of God from the heart.” **“Obey with enthusiasm, as though serving the Lord and not people”** (Eph 6:7 NET). **PUT YOUR SOUL INTO YOUR WORK.** Work diligently as if serving the Lord. **Even if you don’t consciously think about it, work is a way of serving God and loving others.**

APPL: This means if you have a job cutting lawns and doing yard work, mow the grass, trim the bushes, do the yard work as if you were doing the Lord’s lawn. Whatever occupation you have, do your work as if you were doing it for the Lord. As you pick out the bad chips on the assembly line, do your work as if those chips are headed for the Lord’s table!

APPL: There is some work people do around the house for which they may not receive a salary but which is essential for the household. Think about a homemaker. Do you think that many people who keep house see their work as significant? Some do, some don’t.

ILL: A significant and often overlooked way we serve God is in our everyday tasks. Martin Luther understood this when he wrote, “The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays—not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.” [Cf. *Our Daily Bread*, September 5, 1994]

APPL: Do your children see their work as significant? When we have our children do chores, what lessons may we be teaching them? We need to realize and we need to help our children realize that **whatever task we do, ultimately we do this for the Lord. So children,** when your parents tell you to take out the trash or give you other household chores, do your work as to the Lord. God is preparing you for a lifetime of serving Him.

TRANS: Now why should you and I obey with enthusiasm and work diligently as though serving the Lord and not people? **The Lord will reward us! Look at Eph 6:8:** “knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free” (Eph 6:8 NKJV).

Be a servant to the ultimate Employer BY WORKING WITH ENTHUSIASM KNOWING THAT IF YOU DO SOMETHING GOOD THIS WILL BE REWARDED BY THE LORD (Eph 6:8-9).

Paul says to us: Work with enthusiasm, as though serving the Lord and not people, because you know if you do something good, **this will be rewarded by the Lord.**

APPL: As you stay late to get a job completed, as you do those tasks that others may not care to do, as you do what is in the best interests of those for whom you work, whether you are recognized by the company or those you work for or not, the Lord sees. You will be rewarded by the Lord. The Lord will make up for the wages you may not have received, or the mistreatment you endure. The Lord is the One who can accurately and impartially judge your performance and motivation (cf. 1 Peter 1:17).

This is true if you are an employee or an employer. Paul instructs Christian masters to please the Lord in their dealings with their slaves. **Look at Paul’s instructions to Masters in Eph 6:9 (NKJV):** “And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him” (Eph 6:9 NKJV).

APPL: As one who supervises other workers, don’t keep giving threats to those whom you supervise. **Treat others justly and fairly.** Remember that you have One who supervises you, the Lord, who serves as an example. Paul says: **Please the Lord in the way you treat those you supervise. Remember you are accountable to the Lord.** “Masters, treat your slaves the same way, giving up the use of threats, because you know that both you and they have the same master in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him” (Eph 6:9 NET). The Lord is the ultimate Employer of all. The Lord doesn’t have any favorites. He shows no partiality, no matter what position we might hold.

Conclusion: “Blessed are those who change masters without changing jobs! If we visualize receiving our paychecks from Christ and not our employer, we will view our work very differently. And someday we will be generously compensated. God will not only judge you for how you taught your Sunday school class but for how you did your job on Monday morning.” [Erwin Lutzer, *Your Eternal Rewards*, 94.]

Since we spend as much as 40% of our waking hours at work—as much as 150,000 hours in an average lifetime—it is crucial that we have the right attitude in our work. While God has called us to work to provide for ourselves and our families, **we work not based solely on financial matters.** Though financial considerations are important, there's more to work than simply earning a living.

Whether you love your job, or whether you are in the process of learning to love your job, remember you do not work for yourself. Ultimately you do not work just for a company or organization. **You work for the Lord. DO your work for the Lord! To help you have the right attitude on the job, remember who you ultimately serve. Be a servant to the ultimate Employer. How? Deeply respect** and obey your boss with all sincerity as if you were serving the Lord Himself. **Work as diligently** when you are NOT being watched as well as when you are being watched (since the Lord sees you at all times). **Work with enthusiasm knowing** that if you do something good this will be **rewarded by the Lord.**