

For Classroom and Small Group Study

The
Christianity 9 to 5
Bible Study

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www.Christianity9to5.org

The Christianity 9 to 5 Bible Study

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How to Use This Study



Inspired by the Beatitudes from Matthew's gospel, this study is divided into ten parts: an introduction, a chapter based on each of the eight Beatitudes, and a concluding exercise. You may find it most educational to cover one chapter a week for ten weeks, whether you're doing this study on your own or with a small group. You may also find it helpful, if you're doing this with a group, to read the weekly chapter during the weekend, to discuss it with your group at breakfast or lunchtime on Monday, and then to apply throughout your work week whatever insights God has revealed.

However you approach this study, my prayer is that it will challenge you to identify and overcome your toughest obstacles to being a faithful ambassador of Jesus Christ in your workplace.

Serving Him by serving you,

Michael Zigarelli
May, 2013

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INTRODUCTION

What Are You Doing at Work That *Really* Matters?

*Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountainside and sat down...
and he began to teach them.*

Matthew 5:1-2



If you're like I am, you work for a living. It's not always fun, it doesn't always seem meaningful, but most months it pays the bills.

Let me ask you to take a few minutes to think about this job of yours. Think about the tasks involved, the people you work with, the work environment, the product or service you provide. Think about what you like and don't like about it. And think about what you're doing in your work life that matters the most.

That last one is a little tricky, isn't it? We can easily describe our daily work routine and our co-workers' eccentricities to anyone who asks. We can talk for hours about what we like and don't like about our jobs. But identifying what *really matters* in our work – what has lasting significance? That's a whole different kind of question. A critically important question.

To answer it, come at the question from a slightly different angle. This approach has been helpful to a countless number of my students. Fast-forward the tape of your work life to several years down the road. You're now retiring and your organization is holding a dinner to honor you and all the others in your cohort who have earned the gold watch (or the pewter plaque, depending on the generosity of your employer). Imagine yourself in that place. Look around the room. Who's there? What are they wearing? Who's talking with whom?

From across the room, a co-worker glances over at you and whispers to a friend. The friend responds with a nod, a look in your direction, a smile and a casual wave. A lot of people are talking about you tonight because *this is your night*. What are they saying?

Then the time comes for those obligatory short speeches

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commemorating, thanking, sometimes roasting the retirees. One by one, employees come to the microphone to share stories and raise a glass. Some of those stories are funny, some are touching, some seem merely polite. Obviously, there wasn't much to say about *that* person.

And then up steps the person slated to say a few words about you, about your career, about your contribution...about all you've meant to the organization. Who is that person? Your boss? An employee? A long-time co-worker? Imagine this person at the podium and consider what he or she would say. What is it about all of those years – about all of your effort – that this person thinks *really mattered* in your work?

If you would, let that set in for a second. Don't sell yourself short by rushing through this mental exercise. What's being spotlighted in this brief toast to you? Your accomplishments? Your work ethic? Your personality? Your ability to move the organization forward? What will stand out when others reflect on the job to which you gave your life?

Now stay with me here. Take this scene one last step. Imagine for a moment that the person at the podium is not your co-worker, *but Jesus Christ Himself*. You didn't know he had a ticket to this shindig, but there he is, scars and all. He even managed to somehow get around the jacket-only requirement!

Unlike the other speakers, though, he elects to sit down with the microphone – and right next to you. The room falls strangely silent – more quiet than it was for the others – as he says your name. A smile comes to his face, a smile of caring, a smile of friendship. He says your name again. "I'm going to tell you good folks what this employee did at work all of these years that *really mattered*."

You listen in awe at what's chronicled over the next few minutes. In fact, *everyone* in the room seems captivated by just how different this speech is from all the others. What Jesus emphasizes as important is not what the others have emphasized.

A tear comes to your eye as you sit there. His words are so encouraging, so uplifting, but at the same time, you realize from His words that things could have been so much better in your work life, so much more enjoyable, so much more meaningful, so much more sacred. And on top of that, you realize that you could

have made so much more of a difference. Had you only known all along Jesus' perspective on what matters in our work life. Had you only known what was blinding you to this perspective. Had you only heard His words decades ago ...

You see, to those who follow Jesus, what matters most in our work life is seldom what matters most to everyone else. It's not the size of the paycheck, the impressiveness of the business card, the prestige, or the number of battles won. It's not even our productivity or the quality of our work, although these are certainly important and worthy pursuits. Instead, when it comes to our jobs, *what matters most to the Man with the microphone is the extent to which we were like Him from 9 to 5.*

Now, that may not be a new revelation for you. A lot of Christians understand this truth. We hear it from the pulpit and we say "Amen." Problem is, though, there are some powerful obstacles that prevent our Sunday responses from becoming our Monday reality. As we'll see throughout this study, some of these are work environment obstacles, others are internal to us, but each obstacle relegates God's workplace priorities to the back seat. And if we're not careful, by lunchtime on Monday, His priorities may fade from our rearview mirror entirely.

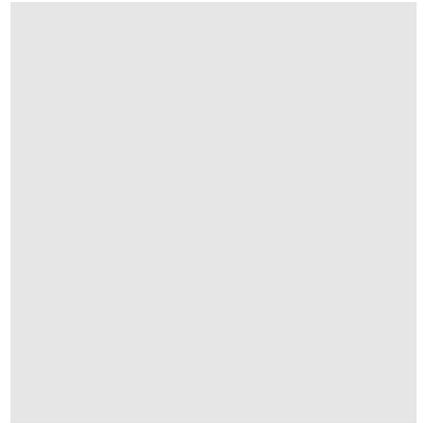
From what I've seen in my ministry, that's a source of continuing frustration for many Christians. We struggle with it. We feel guilty about it. We may even recommit for awhile to doing things differently on the job. Somehow, though, many of us soon backslide into a traditional, secular perspective about how we should think and act in the workplace.

Perhaps you too have had some personal experience with this. Perhaps you've made some effort to live out your faith in the workplace, only to be repeatedly discouraged by the results. Perhaps you've even reached the point of concluding that real, enduring change is hopeless for you. *It's not.* It's just a matter of seeing more clearly – maybe for the first time in your life – the handful of obstacles that has prevented you from emulating Jesus on a daily basis. And then it's a matter of cooperating with God to defeat them.

What are these obstacles and how can we finally overcome them? That's what *The Christianity 9 to 5 Bible Study* is all about. We're going to tap into the timeless insights of Jesus' Beatitudes to explore eight major stumbling blocks to enjoying

the kind of work life God wants us to have, and we're going to think deeply about how we can deal with these obstacles once and for all, to pursue a career of greater meaning and purpose and fulfillment.

What's keeping *you* from authentically and consistently living out your faith in the workplace? What are the barriers that have always stood in your way? And how can you overcome them to pursue what *really matters* at work? These are questions worth exploring long before your retirement dinner.



For Reflection and Discussion

1. What would you like to accomplish as a result of this study? What's your vision of the ideal result? Are you committed to achieving these goals, or at least pursuing them faithfully?

2. What's "success"? In particular, from the world's perspective what does it mean to be successful at work and in your career? List your responses below in the left column. Then, in the right column, contemplate what it means to be "successful" from God's perspective.

There will be a contrast in these two columns, and there will likely be some overlap as well. But after you've completed your lists, think about which column describes how you usually think? Which column is more likely to drive your choices and behaviors? Discuss with your group these disparate definitions and why even Christians tend to embrace a worldly view of success.

Success from the World's Perspective

Success from God's Perspective

3. At the end of this ten week study you'll be invited to write out, in whatever detail you'd like, the "retirement speech" that you'd like to hear Jesus give about you someday. Jot down in the space below some initial ideas you have for this exercise. What are some of the things you'd like to hear Him say about you on that night?



Digging Deeper

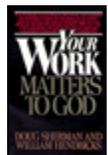
To go further with your study of this topic, consider these freely-available book chapters from the *Christianity 9 to 5* online library:



[Doing Your Job as Jesus Would Do It](#)

Dallas Willard, The Divine Conspiracy

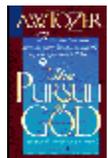
Willard may be to the 21st century what C.S. Lewis was to the 20th. He says more in this brief devotional piece than most writers say in an entire book.



[Why Your Work Matters to God](#)

Doug Sherman and William Hendrix, Your Work Matters to God

Does your work matter to God? If so, how? In this chapter, the authors explain some important ways that our work serves God's purposes: Through work we serve people, we meet our own needs, we meet our family's needs, we earn money to give to others, and we show our love for God.



[The Sacrament of Living](#)

A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God

Which parts of your job please God the most? Which parts are more sacred, and which are more secular? Don't be surprised if your answers change after you read this masterpiece from Tozer.



[The Parable of the Janitor and the CEO](#)

Buck Jacobs, A Light Shines Bright in Babylon

Here's a brief but powerful story that poignantly reminds us about what's truly important in God's eyes.

OBSTACLE 1

Your Personal Golden Calf

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
Matthew 5:3



It's a story of faith and hypocrisy.

Four-year-old Tom walked solemnly to his father's casket. It wasn't fair. It didn't make sense. Why would God take his daddy? And of all times, why on Christmas Eve?

The boy reached into the casket to shake his father. He was about to shout: "Daddy! Please wake up!" But in that instant his family pulled him away.¹ Even the mortician was moved by the scene.

His father's passing changed Tom's life forever, as did his mother's subsequent decision to give up Tom for adoption. Over the next few years, Tom and his younger brother James were shuttled in and out of Catholic orphanages because their mother was too poor to raise them. There, Tom learned a little more about God, but still remained confused by Him.

As the years progressed, it became apparent that Tom wasn't going to be an academic superstar. He did, however, earn quite a reputation in the orphanage for his efficiency. Quickness became his trademark. He could iron a pile of laundry faster than anyone, and with the next heap, he'd try to beat his own record. This distinction made Tom feel smart. It gave him a niche, a claim to fame, a place of relevance in a world where everyone else seemed to have so much more.

A family eventually adopted Tom and although it felt great to be out of the orphanage, he was self-conscious about being poor. God was still part of his life, but as Tom matured, his dreams centered more on wealth and popularity. At the time, he couldn't do much about the wealth, so he worked on the popularity. In high school, this became an obsession as he sought to excel in sports and to date only the best looking girls.

After high school, Tom wanted to attend college to study architecture, but – same story as always – no money. So he

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began to build a college fund by launching a small business selling pizzas. At first, like any eager entrepreneur, Tom worked incessantly, regularly putting in 100-hour weeks. It was his penchant for quickness, though, that evolved into the marketing strategy that paid off big time: pizza delivered in 30 minutes or less.

Decades later, Domino's Pizza had made Tom Monaghan a billionaire. And as the money poured in through the 1970s and 80s, Tom lived out his dreams: expensive cars, \$12,000 wristwatches, \$7,000 vases, helicopters, planes, yachts – there was nothing the once-impooverished orphan denied himself. He built a lavish, 2,500 acre golf course retreat, worked in a two million dollar office, and broke ground on a 20,000 square foot home. He even bought the beloved ball team of his youth, the Detroit Tigers, for a svelte \$53 million. This was truly “the American dream,” a real rags-to-riches story.

Problem is, though, a person who's living this version of the American dream doesn't easily fit through the eye of a needle. And Tom Monaghan knew it. He had risen to be the world's pizza delivery king, while only paying lip service to the King who had delivered him. Sure, he'd given plenty to charities and to the church. He was even a nationally-renown champion of pro-life causes. Tom had seemingly done many good things externally, but on the inside, he had never surrendered his life to God. His heart was hard and his extravagant living reflected that – until, that is, C.S. Lewis performed some CPR.

Lewis' chapter on “pride” in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*, opened Tom's eyes, literally as well as figuratively. The fifty-something CEO laid in bed all night taking inventory of his life, wrestling with the icy awareness that his prodigal lifestyle had been “to get attention, to have people notice me.”² Regardless of his charitable works, Tom's god wasn't really the God of Jesus Christ. No, Tom's god was Tom, his reputation, and his empire.

The insight was as shocking as his moment at the casket. “I realized that I had more pride than any person I knew,” says Tom of his revelation. “I'm the biggest hypocrite there is.”³



It's a story about a low-level employee in Tom Monaghan's company who also got caught up in pleasing the crowd.

Craig was a 19-year-old pizza delivery boy. This wasn't his first job and it certainly wasn't his career of choice. He really wanted to attend seminary someday, or at least do something that made a difference in this world. But right now, he just needed money.

The work environment wasn't bad. The guys there were pretty cool. And since Craig had to be with these people each day, he wanted to fit in.

It was sort of a strange culture, though. His co-workers would do things like put Ex-Lax™ in the manager's coffee pot just for a laugh. They would plug the office computer into a Clapper™ (a device that terminates electricity flow when someone claps loudly) and then howl when later that day the machine mysteriously shut off – taking all of the boss' work with it. During slower times of the day, they'd hang out, gossiping, complaining and telling off-color jokes. On deliveries, they'd visit friends on the way back to the restaurant. Deep down, it didn't seem right to Craig. In fact, when he thought about it in the pews each Sunday, it all seemed downright offensive. But what was he going to do? It wasn't his responsibility to set his friends straight, he decided, so he stopped worrying about it.

Years later, Craig was still driving for Domino's. Except a few things had changed. Now Craig was the one spiking the coffee. Now Craig was taking his sweet time on deliveries at company expense. Now Craig was showing rookies how to do less work without getting caught. The change just seemed to have happened overnight. He still sat attentively in church, but his Sunday thoughts no longer included his Monday behavior.



It's a story of God's High Priest run amok.

There he stood, liberated from the chains of Egypt, his footprints still fresh on the floor of the Red Sea. There he stood, called to lead the people to a life of piety and worship. Moses' brother Aaron was Israel's inaugural pastor and Moses charged him to maintain control while he ascended Mount Sinai.

But there he stood, gold dust on his hands, mouth agape at the sight of a brother who most assumed had perished on the mountainside. If Aaron's face weren't so red from being near the furnace, it would surely have been red from

embarrassment.

His words to Moses are striking and worth memorizing: “I told them (the Israelites) ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!” (Exodus 32:24).

Voila! Just like that! An extraordinary event if ever there was one. I threw in a few ingredients and miraculously, out came *this!*

It wasn’t a complete lie, but Aaron certainly intended to mask the truth and shift the blame. Here’s what really happened, as indicated several verses earlier: “He (Aaron) took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool” (Exodus 32:4).

Aaron built the thing, there’s no way around it. Rather than do God’s work, he succumbed to the will of those around him. He was more concerned about what his peers thought than what God thought. And to top it off, once his sin was exposed, he all but denied responsibility for it. Out of the fire came this calf! Don’t ask me how it happened. I’m just as amazed as you are.⁴

The Golden Calf in Our Workplace

What little difference 3,000 years can make! Consider the modern workplace. To whom or what do we bow down when we are among the crowd? What guides the many decisions that we make each work day? What determines how hard we work? Who makes the rules for how we interact with co-workers and customers? Overall, what is it that dictates our attitude and behavior on the job?

For some people, money, power and stature are primary motivators: climbing the ladder and earning a good living is paramount. For others, fitting in and being well-liked are most important: popularity, social acceptance and respect is their primary purpose. Still others just see work as a necessary evil and are preoccupied with doing the minimum that’s required. They’re just going through the motions till quitting time, motivated by little more than keeping their jobs and drawing a paycheck.

There are other workplace motivators too, and if I haven’t

listed yours, mentally tack it on to this list. But then step back and think about what's really going on here. When we think about our life at work, where's God? Is He still in church? Do we drop Him off at the company door before we walk in? Is He in a shoebox that we take out only in time of need?

More to the point, for us Christians in the workplace, *why isn't "God" the answer to each of the questions listed in the first paragraph of this section?* Let me suggest two basic reasons for this – one for the nominal believer and one for the more mature believer.

First, many nominal Christians are simply unfamiliar with the fact that God wants to be at the center of everything we do in life, including our work. They haven't been taught by anyone that there's more to Christianity than "The Golden Rule." They haven't heard that God has a plan for our lives on and off the job and that He's given us guiding principles for our work and our careers. For many Christians, this is brand new information.

But what about those of us who *are* familiar with this teaching? Why do we, too, persist in relegating God to the back-burner of the office kitchen? In my 15 years of teaching Christian graduate students, there's one reason I hear from them more than any other. To paraphrase, many of them say: "I don't really know what's happened. I tried hard to live my faith at work, especially in my young and idealistic days, but I guess the workplace changes you. It conforms you. It makes you live by a different set of rules and norms."

Read the comment again. Don't miss the implicit message. Their modern answer is also an ancient one. Without knowing it, they're basically responding as Aaron did: *I threw myself into the fire of the workplace and out came these new priorities!* It just happened.

Some of my other Christian students have placed the blame not on corporate culture, but more specifically on their dictatorial managers. Their perspective is essentially: "You have to look out for number one today. I didn't always think that, but after getting burned a few times, I now know better. Management is always asking for more, always looking for ways to squeeze more work out of you for the same pay. Well, now I just give them what they're paying for."

I threw myself into the fire of the workplace and out came this preoccupation with my rights!

Similarly, many Christian managers that I've counseled point toward their professional training and their career aspirations as the key drivers of their workplace attitudes. "The approach they teach us in business school is persuasive," they say. "We're running a business here, not a charity. Sure I'd like to give my people more, but in a world of shrinking budgets and growing competition, the reality is that employees are just another 'factor of production.' That's what the shareholder wants, right? It's what makes them the most money. Besides, if word gets out that your Christian values get in the way of rational decision-making, it's instant career cul-de-sac."

I threw myself into the fire of business school and out came this "rational," bottom-line-focused manager!

For Tom Monaghan, possessions and popularity were the motivators, even though deep down he knew better. For Craig, a delivery boy with seminary aspirations, it was the desire to belong that ultimately reshaped his perspective. The common denominator through all of this, though, is that we Christians – at times deliberately, at times unwittingly – tend to abdicate responsibility for our workplace behavior. Aaron's words to Moses reverberate throughout the ages. "It's not really my fault," many of us might think, wiping the gold dust from our hands. "This golden calf of mine – this fixation on money, position, reputation, fairness, shareholder value, or just coping until Friday afternoon – seemingly came out of nowhere. Before I knew what was going on, there it was!"

That may be true, but it's also ironic. The fact is that most of these golden calves exist because we think they'll make us happy. We think more money, more respect, a bigger office, a new title, or a shorter or easier workday will finally bring us satisfaction on the job. It might even give our work some greater meaning, something for which so many of us hunger. However, the irony for the Christian is that pursuing these things can ultimately become the number one *obstacle* to finding genuine, long-term fulfillment and purpose in our jobs. In other words, they can actually *prevent* us from pursuing what's most fulfilling and purposeful at work: being God's ambassador by doing our jobs every day as Jesus would. Then and now, a golden calf is simply a substitute for the real thing.

By contrast, a Biblical approach to working faithfully begins by identifying and slaying our personal golden calf – by pinpointing and eliminating those things that really guide our behavior – and then replacing them with God. It's why the stone tablets Moses used to kill the calf began with "you shall have no other gods before Me." (Exodus 20:3).

The Starting Point for Imitating Jesus at Work

It's a story of a man on a mountain far from Sinai. His appearance was quite ordinary. His words were not.

"Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'" (Matthew 5:1-3a).

Why did Jesus begin his sermon this way? Quite simply, because being "poor in spirit" is the beginning – the beginning of a right relationship with God, the beginning of a right relationship with neighbor, and the beginning of an authentic Christian life. An echo of the first of the Ten Commandments, being "poor in spirit" is the beginning of our ability to live the profound teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. And as we unpack these words, we'll see that it's also the beginning of true ambassadorship – of more effective witness in the workplace.

Some are confused by the term *poor in spirit*, but in reality, it's a teaching with which most of us are familiar. To be poor in spirit simply means to be humble before God, to accept God's laws, God's standards, and God's guidelines for how we should live. It is to put our will – our spirit – second, and to put God's will first.

It's pretty straightforward. In our context here, it's a teaching that invites us to slay the golden calf of doing things our own way and to turn toward the One who knows the better path for our lives. But ever since an infamous couple ate from the tree in the center of the Garden of Eden, people have rebelled against the teaching. We see, for example, the rebellion in the lust of King David, a man who had been given everything, but still desired a married woman named Bathsheba. We see it in the self-righteousness of Jonah as he bolted left instead to turning right to save pagans. We see it in the materialism of a rich young man who rejected a Messiah's message to sell all he

had. We see it in the greed of Judas as he sold out the Savior for silver.

Our challenge is to live differently. This is the calling of the very first beatitude and, as we'll see in this study, it reverberates through the others. As Christians, we are to turn from the dubious tradition of self-sufficiency and do what may seem unnatural: to surrender unconditionally to God – to give our lives back to the One who created us – by trusting in His way at work and everywhere else.

Applying the Principle in the Workplace

When these are words on a page, the teaching seems pretty basic and agreeable. Think for a moment, though, about just how radical the instruction is when we apply to our work lives. As a guiding workplace principle, being *poor in spirit* means that God's the real Boss. It means He's the one for whom we primarily work. He's the one we should aim to please in every task we undertake and in every interaction with people. He's our quality control manager and the One who hands out the performance appraisals.

The Monday morning implications are enormous and a bit overwhelming. This first beatitude implies that we should work to our potential even though we might be underpaid, passed over for a promotion, or exploited by whoever makes the schedule. It means performing with integrity and excellence no matter what the company norms are and no matter what our co-workers will think of us. It means that despite our overload or career trajectory, we faithfully put our families before our work. And it means forgiving that infuriating co-worker who's the poster child for original sin.

For the grocery clerk, it means maintaining a joyful attitude at the check-out counter and treating every customer with respect – even the ones who berate you because the line stretches into Aisle 7. For high-tech folks, it means resisting the daily temptation to visit the Internet's red-light and gambling districts. For the manager, it means to put people before profits, to advertise truthfully, to produce a safe, high-quality product, and to act as a steward, not an owner, of the financial resources with which God has entrusted you. For the overworked secretary, it means to answer that one-hundredth call of the day with the same enthusiasm with which you

answered the first. For the person gifted in building relationships, it may mean using that gift to verbally and diplomatically spread the gospel, one cubicle at a time.

Why? Because when we are poor in spirit, we no longer work for some organization. We no longer work for a paycheck, for the benefits, for the promotion, or for the acclaim. And we no longer work for a foreman, a supervisor, the CEO, the shareholders or any other mere mortal. To be poor in spirit on the job means that first and foremost, we work for the One who created our ability to work and we seek to honor Him in everything we do.

It is possible. And it can happen for you today if you're willing to make a decision to slay whatever golden calf sits on the throne of your work life and to then replace that idol with God.

This is the path of workplace wisdom, and when we finally muster the courage to set foot on it – when we stop dabbling with our “Christianity-light” approach and finally choose to surrender – we will reap the benefits Jesus promised for the poor in spirit: “Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

An Added Bonus: More Purpose and Fulfillment in Your Job

Indeed, this is a promise of the afterlife, but it is a promise for this life as well. “The kingdom of heaven” is an *experience* that has been “at hand” since the arrival of Jesus (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 12:28): an earthly experience, as Paul says, of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17). It is a promise for today, to improve the quality of our relationships and of our entire lives.

And in a workplace context, it gives every job more meaning, since all work that we do to honor God is meaningful work. This applies even to the most mundane, seemingly irrelevant tasks you have. Sweeping a floor or filing papers “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” elevates the task to genuine significance. If you're skeptical, try it for yourself.

Overall, what we're talking about is a completely new mind-set – one with the power to give you a sense of purpose on the job, perhaps for the first time in your life. It is a mind-set that allows you to work for a cause, not just a paycheck—the cause of glorifying God by your effort and your attitude; the cause of

representing Him to those who would not know Him otherwise. Think about it, my friend: Could any cause at work be nobler than this?

Let me be even more specific. That pointless meeting you have to attend? Contribute to your potential to please your real Boss. That indecisive customer who's holding up the line? Treat him or her with patience and dignity because that's what Jesus would do. That employee of yours who's in serious need of a raise or of personal time off? Find a way to meet the need.

It's a remarkable feeling when we hear God's "well done!" on the job. It's a feeling of having accomplished something that *really* matters. And when we hear that on a consistent basis, we also enjoy job satisfaction beyond anything we've ever experienced.

This is part of "the kingdom of heaven" here on earth. When we work for God in all we do (Col. 3:23-24, 1 Cor. 10:31), He returns to us the joy and peace that's been so elusive as we've pursued it through our golden calf.

Slaying the Calf at Domino's

Tom Monaghan learned that lesson. "None of these things I've bought, and I mean none of them, have ever really made me happy," he said in reflection. "So anything I've got that gives me pleasure only for selfish reasons I'm selling."⁵ Thus began in the early 1990s what the *Wall Street Journal* would later call "an extraordinary renunciation of material assets."⁶ Monaghan disposed of the helicopter, the yacht, the plane, the radio stations, the resort, and even the Detroit Tigers, earmarking most of the proceeds for the church. And in 1998, he sold his company, further accelerating the transformation from executive to philanthropist – from rich in pride to poor in spirit; from living for others' "well done!" to living for God's "well done!"

Tom's former employee Craig learned the lesson, too. A poignant sermon on Colossians 3:23 ("Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men") prompted him to become more poor in spirit by devoting his work life to honoring God. Sure, he still struggles in the face of peer pressure. He still struggles with the temptation to be popular at the expense of principle. He still struggles when he

has an opportunity to be lazy. But his successes are starting to outnumber his failures because his life at work is now premised on a radically different assumption: the assumption that God is the One for whom he is working. That's not only given Craig a sense of purpose in making and delivering pizza, he's now happier doing it than he's ever been. And it all began when he courageously killed his golden calves of "people-pleasing" and "minimal effort."

A guy from Chicago knows something about this lesson as well.



It's a story of a children's film producer who refused to sell out. But his videos sure did.

In 1991, Phil Vischer had a big idea. He wanted to produce a Christian alternative to the secular entertainment that dominates Saturday morning television. He wanted to create something that would teach kids values without sacrificing fun. Even more ambitiously, he wanted to help turn around a dying culture. If that didn't work, though, he at least wanted to provide his own kids with an animated, values-based program.

One problem. With almost no budget, Phil was severely limited in what he could produce through computer animation. Fancy special effects were definitely out. Elaborate characters would break the bank, too. Even characters with arms, legs, clothes or hair were too expensive! What possibly was left?

Talking vegetables.

Phil and his college buddy Mike Nawrocki created a twelve-second clip of Larry the Cucumber bouncing around on a counter. Then they sought funding to produce a full-blown video. No takers. But it couldn't have come as a complete shock that no one would underwrite the venture. After all, these weren't just talking vegetables, these were *religious* talking vegetables! Big ideas don't get much more bizarre than this.

But Phil's family and friends had faith in the project. His parents took out a second mortgage, his sister loaned him her son's college fund, and a couple from Phil's church invested their retirement savings. With this capital in hand, in July 1993 Phil founded Big Idea Productions out of the spare bedroom in his home and began to market a thirty-minute

“VeggieTales” video through Christian magazines. Unfortunately, by Christmas he had received only about 500 orders, putting him nowhere near black ink.

A break came in 1994 when Word Music, part of Word Publishing, agreed to distribute VeggieTales to Christian bookstores. The Veggies got rave reviews, but sales were still disappointing. But later that year came an even more enticing offer: the opportunity to place his loquacious legumes in every Wal-Mart in America. Larry had the potential to take the country by storm and make Phil an overnight millionaire. There was just one catch: To close the deal, Phil had to delete both God and the Bible from his stories.

The situation epitomized the word *dilemma*. Phil’s response epitomized the word *principled*.

“We were still starving then,” said Phil, “so that was very tempting. But how can we teach God’s truth and edit out God?”⁷ Big Idea couldn’t, so they didn’t. The company stayed its course, focusing on its lofty mission to “promote biblical values and encourage spiritual growth.”

In 1995, word-of-mouth advertising pushed video sales to 130,000. So the larger distributors came back with a revised offer: “We don’t mind the theism,” they said, “but could you take the Bible verse off the end?”

“No deal,” replied Phil. “Our teaching has a Biblical base and we don’t want to cut that off.”

Sales continued to spiral upward over the next two years. Big Idea surpassed the 750,000 mark in 1996 and distributed its two millionth video before the end of 1997. Back came the big guys, but this time they were ready to do business on Phil’s terms. “We want them just as they are,” the video distributors said of the Veggies. “How soon can we get them?”⁸

Currently Larry and his pal Bob the Tomato are available not only in Christian bookstores, but also adorn the shelves of K-Mart, Wal-Mart, Target, Musicland, Eckerd Drugs, Kroger and other large retailers. The company sells tens of thousands of videos *every month*, in addition to Veggie dolls, T-shirts, and an array of other products. Pastors are wearing VeggieTales ties to the pulpit and Christian college students are having VeggieTales parties on campuses nationwide. “Sunday morning

values and Saturday morning fun” has swept the culture because some Christians were faithful enough to remain poor in spirit, refusing to bow before a golden calf of fame, riches, or worldly success.

And so can you. In your workplace, you may feel the pressure of Aaron, but you’re always called by the words of Jesus: “Blessed are the poor in spirit...”

That’s a choice each one of us must make daily. It’s not just a one-time commitment we make tearfully as we walk the aisle at a revival. It’s not just something we do during a Bible study on workplace faith. Quite the opposite, to faithfully live the Christian life on the other six days of the week is to remain mindful of the continuing threat of golden calves. Each time one rears its ugly head, we have to cut it off.

If that’s a bit too gruesome an image for you, think about it this way instead: It’s not everyday that you get to fire your boss! But that’s precisely what you can do by accepting the calling to become poor in spirit. Your life at work can reopen *today* under God’s new management.



For Reflection and Discussion

This question builds off the discussion of “success” from last week, but drills down a bit further.

Many of us bow to at least one “golden calf” in our work life, but we may not recognize it as such. Have some of those idols come to mind as you read this chapter? Is there something that drives your work more than a desire to please God in all you do?

For most of us the answer is “yes.” As we saw in this chapter, it may be money, reputation, power, being well-liked, doing the minimum to remain employed, or a number of other things. What, if anything, is it for you? Write these down in the space below.

A few additional questions might help you pinpoint the root issues. Are you disproportionately focused on your next promotion? Working much longer hours than your peers? Or instead, working far below your potential? Are you doing or saying things at work that you’re really not comfortable with, just to fit in? Do you feel

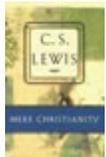
envious when your co-workers achieve great things or are praised for terrific work? Honest answers to such questions reveal much about who our “god” really is.

Identify whatever golden calves exist in your work life and discuss with your group why you think they exist and what you plan to do about them.



Digging Deeper

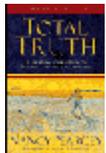
To go further with your study of this topic, consider these freely-available book chapters from the *Christianity 9 to 5* online library:



[Pride: The Great Sin](#)

CS Lewis, Mere Christianity

A “spiritual cancer,” “the complete anti-God state of mind,” and “the chief cause of misery in every nation and in every family since the world began.” These are just a few of the descriptors that C.S. Lewis uses to describe our pride. Here is his penetrating chapter on “The Great Sin” from his classic, *Mere Christianity*.



[Rediscovering Joy in Your Work](#)

Nancy Pearcey, Total Truth

No Christian, says Nancy Pearcey, can be truly happy at work when torn between a secular and a supernatural perspective on that work. In this excerpt from her profound book, *Total Truth*, Pearcey encourages Christians to discover the joy of finally thinking rightly about their work—of thinking about it from a biblical worldview.

OBSTACLE 2

Monday Mourning

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Matthew 5:4



This was *my* house. Just who did this guy think he was anyway?

A few years ago, my wife and I put our house on the market. As part of that selling process, we hosted what realtors call a “Broker’s Open House,” also known as an “Inspection.” Several dozen realtors received invitations to tour our immaculate home. I mean the place was *pristine* – certainly no small feat with three kids under five years old! As ten o’clock rolled around, I was fully prepared for the coming masses to ooh and aah at our efforts.

But my expectations were mercilessly shattered the instant the first wave of inspectors bolted through the door. “Hi!” I said cheerfully. I wore my finest “welcome-to-my-humble-abode” face and extended my hand. What they extended in return were grunts and a few business cards. They completely blew-off the handshake. Never even looked me in the eye. Worst of all, they said *nothing* about my mastery with the vacuum!

Instead they raced through the house scribbling notes on legal pads. As one came down the stairs from my kids’ bedrooms, I tried again: “There’s a basement, too. It’s right through this door.”

Nothing. No verbal response. Barely a glance in my direction. And to top it off, the guy didn’t even check out the basement. (Horror of horrors! Maybe I didn’t have to rush around to change the kitty-litter down there after all!)

As that guy whisked out my front door, I was infuriated. “This is my house!” I wanted to shout at the intruder. “I live here! I own this place! You’re trespassing!” Then, the clincher as he sped away: “I am *not* a china cabinet!”

At that moment, though, that’s exactly how I felt – like a piece

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of furniture. What was wrong with this guy anyway?

My realtor knew. She was from the same office as Mr. Personality and she had some insider information. “Don’t mind him,” she said in a consoling tone. “He’s always like that. He just hates his job.” Then she complimented me on the condition of the house.

Her perspective reminded me of some research I’d been working on that past year. When someone is dissatisfied with his or her job, all sorts of attitudinal and behavioral consequences are likely to follow. (You could no doubt guess some of these, but it’s nice to have empirical evidence to confirm our suspicions). Among those negative consequences are higher absenteeism, greater likelihood to turnover, and, of greater interest to us here, fewer “organizational citizenship” behaviors – things like being dependable, complying with company rules, advancing the company’s goals, and being willing to respect and to help people.⁹ The running realtor didn’t seem like much of a “citizen” in my home, that’s for sure. In fact, the way he was acting made me want to deport him!

For some people like this realtor, a “golden calf” may not be their primary obstacle to working as God would have us work. Hating their job is the problem. Perhaps you can personally identify with what I’m talking about. Perhaps you live it everyday. Or maybe you know somebody who fits that description. Tap into your own experience with this cause-and-effect relationship for a moment. How hard is it to work in a God-honoring manner when we can’t stand what we’re doing? For that matter, how hard is it to display *any* evidence that we’ve even *heard* about Jesus Christ?

Nearly impossible. And it’s almost as hard to reverse course here since we hesitate to ask God for help. He’s the last person we want to talk to after our misdemeanors because of the guilt we feel. We’re supposed to act one way toward people and instead we’re acting completely the opposite – all because of this job we can’t stand. Who wants to face the Father while flailing in failure? Not me, that’s for sure.

But I should. And so should anyone in this situation because God has some options for us here – options that have the power to fix the situation permanently. What is Jesus’ answer for a believer who hates his job? We get some hints in the second Beatitude.

Monday Mourning on the Mount

They lived in a land that was not their own. It hadn't been since Rome took over decades earlier. Before that, it was the Greeks, the Persians, the Babylonians. Seldom had they known peace or freedom.

As with the others, the Romans were ruthless, slowly sapping the life from these people. The Emperor Pompey had desecrated their Temple, their holiest place, and later installed Herod the Great – an Arab! – to be their “high priest.” Under Herod these people saw the children of Bethlehem slaughtered. Under Herod's son, they saw their prophet John the Baptist beheaded. Then there were the economic problems. Very few of these people earned or owned much, especially after the tax collectors were through with them.

Life was cruel for God's chosen in the first century. Their religion, their children, their money, their latest prophet – their very hope – were all stolen away by their captors.

In the midst of this maelstrom came a word from a lanky Rabbi. This man probably couldn't bench press his own weight, but in that instant, he proved capable of lifting something far greater. With just one line, he began to lift their burden, replacing it with optimism. “Don't fret over your condition,” was His response to their pain, “since a new day is at hand. God knows your suffering, your public and your private suffering, and He'll take care of every last bit of it.”

Actually, He put it more succinctly and much more memorably: *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”*

Jesus' words were at the same time a reminder of what they had heard from the prophet Isaiah and a promise to fulfill Isaiah's prophesy:

The Spirit of the sovereign Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom from captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance for our God, to comfort all who mourn. (Isaiah 61:1-2)

Comfort is ahead. Believe that. Jesus' response when we're overwhelmed by our circumstances is to shift our attention to hope – an eschatological hope, in the language of theologians. It's a hope for the future, a hope for eternity, *a call to think differently*. When things are tough, He teaches us, don't think so much about your life circumstances. Think about your *afterlife* circumstances.

It's a striking, unconventional remedy. If you can't change your situation, change your mind. Look ahead – way ahead. Rejoice by embracing hope rather than misery. In the words of Paul: “consider our present sufferings to be nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Despite all of its truth, for many people that's a challenging lesson to put into practice. What awaits us after we die is so fuzzy to some of us that it's hard to tap into the power of Jesus' invitation. If we better understood those “afterlife circumstances,” perhaps things would be different for us. Perhaps we'd be empowered to believe Jesus' words and let tomorrow's comfort eclipse today's discomfort.

Well, actually, we are empowered. We do know some things about the magnificence of life after death because God has revealed them to us. Allow me defer to a specialist on the subject.

Erwin Lutzer, in his books on the attributes of heaven, does an impressive job encapsulating in lay language what the Bible says about Heaven. Among his many helpful insights, based solidly on the Book of Revelation, he explains that in heaven there will be no more hunger, no more thirst, no more exhaustion from our work. All of our needs will be met. In our eternal paradise, there will be no more strife between nations. People will live in harmony with one another. Perhaps most notably, there will be no more death. We'll never again have to say good-bye to a friend or a relative. We'll never again have to worry about accidents and tragedies stealing loved ones away from us. After God brings us home, there will be no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain – ever.¹⁰

This is the type of “comfort” that awaits those of us who presently mourn. It's an extraordinary hope, if we truly believe it and if we take the time to meditate on it.

In the second beatitude, Jesus invites us to make the time – especially during our periods of trial and difficulty. It’s His perfect answer to alleviate pressure from our quite imperfect jobs. Look forward. Remain hopeful. Be expectant and thankful for what’s ahead once this millisecond we call “life” ticks away. Reflecting on what’s down the road can instantly change our attitude about what’s right in front of us.

Another Vehicle to Tow Your Woe

The Bible has more to say on the question of how to overcome this obstacle of a despised job. In addition to putting our present work situation in an eternal context, we can also try to see it as God sees our work. As we’ve seen in the first two chapters of this study, there are dimensions to almost every job that really do honor God. And focusing on those aspects has a way of improving our life at work. Let me again defer to some of the better contemporary thinking to make this point.

Doug Sherman and William Hendricks nicely articulate some of these God-honoring dimensions in their widely-read book, *Your Work Matters to God*. How does it matter? Among the ways are these: (1) Through your work, you serve people, (2) through your work, you meet your family’s needs, and (3) through your work, you earn money to give to others.¹¹

Did you ever think about your work in this way before? Take number one, for example. It’s a biggie. Did you ever stop to mentally list all the ways your work actually serves other people? Consider that realtor racing through my house, oppressed by the tyranny of the urgent, just trying to get to his next appointment and through his miserable day. Does his presence in my house serve others? You bet! That same realtor eventually brought two couples through the house in the weeks that followed. He served a critical need that I had to get prospective buyers to look at the house. I wanted to sell it quickly to get to my new job in Virginia, and his work was helping me in that process.

Similarly, as he showed the house, he was helping his clients find just the right place to raise their children. This is important, contributory work, but he wasn’t thinking along these lines. Had he done so, he may have reaped some of the intrinsic satisfaction that always accompanies service to others. His job probably would have been a lot more palatable – and

maybe, so would he.

Now, if those connections seem like a bit of a leap to you, I can relate. I felt the same way after I first read Sherman and Hendricks' ideas. So I put this service-attitude connection to the test over the next couple of years. Beyond using it personally when my own job has been lackluster, I've tried it out on others as well. When an opportunity presents itself – when I meet people who appear to hate their jobs – I offer this “service” perspective on their work and pay close attention to their response. The results have been as arresting as they are consistent.

Typical was a recent trip to the video store. When I got to the counter, I was assisted by a girl in her early twenties who seemed particularly unmotivated. “How are you?” I asked somewhat automatically.

“I’ll be better at 11:00,” she responded scanning the videos. Ah. An opportunity. “Not your ideal Saturday night, huh?”

“Yeah, that’s an understatement.”

“Well,” I said donning my researcher’s cap, “I’ll tell you something. Some of us sure appreciate the fact that you’re here. It really makes our night better to have these videos. I don’t know if that helps you any, but it’s true.”

She smiled and paused from her robotic scanning. “Actually, that does help,” she replied, making eye contact for the first time. “It really does. Thanks.”

Not the most scientific of experiments, I know. But almost without exception, when I’ve pointed out the service aspect of somebody’s job, that person seems refreshed by the comment. It puts the minutia and the routine into a new light. It makes the job better, at least for the moment.

That’s a moment that you can create for yourself and recapture each time your work is getting you down. The work you perform serves people, and a daily reminder of how it serves people plain and simply makes your job better. If it can happen at a video store, it can happen anywhere.

In the same way, remaining mindful of numbers two and three on Sherman and Hendricks’ list can help us adjust our attitude

toward work. In God's eyes, it's an important accomplishment to meet our family's needs. As Paul writes to Timothy, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). Beyond that, you can honor God through your work by taking some of your income and sharing it with others. Your work generates resources to meet financial needs that might otherwise go unmet. That matters.

Do you feel any of the tension draining yet? Maybe not, but let me ask it this way: Could any of these attitudinal techniques assist you tomorrow to hate your job a little less – and to model Jesus a little more? You won't really know unless you try.

What About Just Quitting?

As a last resort, remember that there's nothing in scripture that forbids you from taking another job. That may seem like a cop-out or a thoroughly secularized perspective on the situation, but it's really not. In fact, God may actually be using that dissatisfaction of yours to shepherd you into a position where you can better use the gifts He's given you. If you sense this through your time with Him, consider taking inventory of your gifts before you jump from one ship to another. There are many available on the market. Stop and evaluate what God has bestowed on you and what jobs might best fit that gift profile.

The Secret to a Better Job and a Better Witness

When we hate our job, our work environment, or anything else about being in the workplace, that can neutralize our ability to imitate Jesus, just as much as can pride, greed, ambition, or any other golden calf. So if this "Monday Mourning" obstacle resonates with you, take the time to really consider the New Testament advice for the mourner. There's a lot at stake since Christians who remain in this despondent state are seldom effective witnesses.

In fact, they're usually just the opposite. Believe me, I didn't see Jesus in the guy who was rude to me in my own home. I saw the antithesis of Jesus. I saw somebody who didn't seem to care about anything but getting his job done. And, according to my realtor, he didn't much care about that either!

That's a miserable existence, but by the grace of God, it's a fixable one. It didn't have to be that way for the realtor, nor does it for each one of us. God gives us other ways to think about our work – fresh perspectives that are profoundly different from the toxic secular perspectives we've bought into. They are life-giving perspectives: keeping our trials in an eternal context and remaining mindful of how even the little things we do at work honor God by meeting others' needs.

Try out those perspectives for yourself this week, even if it's just for this one week. They're biblical, so what do you have to lose? Be advised, though, if you do this in earnest, you'll probably notice some surprising and remarkable changes.

Some of those changes will be immediate – fewer restless nights, no more dreading the dusk of your weekend, an end to the daily countdown to quitting time, the rewarding feeling that your work actually has a purpose. Other changes – some of the larger ones – will accrue to you over time. In particular, your working conditions will no longer prevent you from modeling your faith on the job. You'll probably see positive effects on your productivity and on the quality of your work as well. And importantly, you'll never again treat anyone like a china cabinet.

The secret that running realtor didn't know is this: God has made a pathway for our exodus from Monday mourning. All we have to do is to run through it.



For Reflection and Discussion

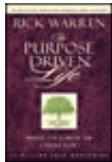
1. In the midst of life's trials, have you ever tapped into the hope described in the second beatitude? Reflect on how setting your present workplace difficulties against the backdrop of eternal comfort may improve your situation. And be honest with yourself and the others in your group: Is this a realistic, Biblical, long-term solution, or do you see it as little more than a coping mechanism?

2. What aspects of your work serve people? Be specific. How does your work meet important needs and improve the quality of other people's lives? Discuss how your work life might be different if you thought of it as a "service ministry" rather than as a job. And discuss how it might be different if you thought of the people around you as your "congregation" rather than as your co-workers and customers.



Digging Deeper

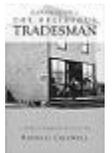
To go further with your study of this topic, consider these freely-available articles and book chapters from the *Christianity 9 to 5* online library:



[What Drives Your Life?](#)

Rick Warren, The Purpose-Driven Life

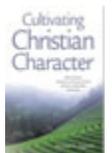
Without a clear purpose, Rick Warren, you will keep changing directions, jobs, relationships, and even churches, hoping each change will finally fill the emptiness in your heart. If this describes you even a little, this chapter is for you.



[Contentment: Wise Advice from the 17th Century](#)

Richard Steele (modern English version by Randall Caldwell), The Religious Tradesman

You probably haven't heard of 17th century author Richard Steele, but one of his books, a classic in its day, has been given new life by editor Randall Caldwell. Steele's teaching on the elusive virtue of "contentment" still rings true today and it may bless you with some timely perspective on a timeless problem.



[Restoring Joy to Your Life](#)

Michael Zigarelli, Cultivating Christian Character

What's the difference between joyful Christians and the rest of us? How do they manage to retain a joyful disposition, despite their circumstances? What's the secret to success here? This study of more than 5,000 Christians provides some answers you won't find anywhere else.

OBSTACLE 3

The “Meekness is Weakness” Myth

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Matthew 5:5



Chances are, your pastor didn't graduate from this seminary. Neither did I, but as part of my professional development, I did spend two years at Yale Divinity School (YDS) studying Christian theology. At least, that's what I thought I was getting myself into when I applied.

Take a quick tour with me and I'll show you what I mean. Even before you enter the hallowed halls, you'll catch an eyeful of culture in the parking lot. The bumper stickers flash like warning signs of what's ahead:

“God is too big to fit inside one religion.”

“In goddess we trust.”

“Keep your rosaries off my ovaries.”

That's hardly an appetizer. Let's stop in the private prayer chapel on our way to the classrooms. Kneel at the altar and open its large-print Bible. Then flip through the pages and peruse the variety of scriptures the students have *lined out* or *modified* to make God more politically-correct.

When we're finished worshipping the goddess of Sarah and Rebekkah, we'll pass the faculty offices as we head toward the classrooms. No, you're not seeing things. That is indeed lesbian rights propaganda plastered to some of their office doors. Nice complement to the students' bumper stickers, I guess.

We can also check out their exceptional library while we're in this wing of the building. The volume of resources is unique – as is the artwork. You can't miss the large crucifix in the stairwell. No, your eyes are not playing tricks on you. That's indeed a naked woman nailed to the cross. The caption reveals that her name is “Christa.”

Finally, let's take a seat at the back of a lecture hall. Don't be shy; visitors are more than welcome. Then listen closely. If

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we're lucky, we'll be in the presence of one of the few world-class scholars remaining at YDS. Chances are better than even, though, that instead we'll be immersed in political ideology and biblical revisionism. We don't know who actually wrote the gospels or whether Jesus *really* claimed to be divine. We do think, though, that he may have had homosexual relations with Lazarus. Herod the Great and the Pharisees were admirable men. And by the way, "the majority" of New Testament scholars no longer believe that superstitious resurrection story!

Welcome to a Christian seminary, Ivy League style. It's liberal theology at its finest. But what I found most intriguing about YDS is that countless students and faculty actually consider the place *conservative!* Even oppressively so. A primary reason is that Yale still requires its seminarians to take a full six credits of Old Testament and six credits of New Testament before graduation. Granted, that may not sound like a lot for prospective clergy – especially since in most evangelical seminaries, twelve credits will barely get you to Jeremiah. However, Yale's benchmarks include places like Princeton Theological Seminary, Harvard Divinity School and Union Theological Seminary in New York City. These schools require even *less* scripture study and boast student and faculty cultures that make Yalees seem like Reaganites. So from a YDS point of view, the school is delivering theological education from a relatively conservative perspective.

Does this strike you as bizarre? By most standards, these are bright people. *Really* bright. We're talking 1400+ on their SATs. Still, they're completely blind to something that should be patently obvious. They think the school culture is orthodox Christian when it's clearly the opposite. Why do they get it exactly wrong? Because they're evaluating against man's standards – in this case, other schools – not God's standards.

Here's the point for our purposes in this study: This is the same problem that plagues many workplace Christians when it comes to the issue of "meekness." We're truly blind. We interpret meekness by man's standards, not God's. Like my friends at YDS, *we too get it exactly wrong since we have the wrong benchmark.*

Because our culture says so, many of us equate meekness with weakness. We think it's a shortcoming, a liability, a sign that someone doesn't have what it takes to succeed in the corporate world. But is it? God seems to have a very different perspective

on meekness. In fact, as we'll see in this chapter, it's the reverse of all of these descriptors. Let's look at God's perspective on "meekness" and then see how the modern workplace discourages us from adopting it.

God's Standard of Meekness

When Jesus told the crowd, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth," what did he mean by *meek*? Tapping the original translation and some other scriptures will be illuminating. The word translated here as *meek* is the Greek word *praus*. It's a word that's usually translated as "gentle" in the New Testament. Jesus is not communicating that "blessed are the wimpy," as we might infer from our contemporary usage of the word "meek." Rather, it's more accurate to interpret the verse as blessed are those of us who are "gentle."

We can go further with this analysis, and as we do, we'll see just how pervasive this teaching is.

The directive toward gentleness is hardly a one-time appeal in the New Testament. Instead, the Greek root here, *prautes* (gentleness or humility), shows up in some of our most-cited New Testament verses:

- "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [*prautes*] and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).
- "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness [*prautes*] and patience" (Colossians 3:12).
- "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently [*prautes*]." (Galatians 6:1).
- "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness [*prautes*] and respect" (1 Peter 3:15b).

Repeatedly we hear that gentleness should be our calling card. It's an indicator that the Spirit is at work in our lives. It's how we are to teach others and how we are to evangelize. It's nothing less than a distinguishing characteristic of the maturing Christian.

Hard to believe? Here's even clearer evidence that growing in Christ-like character entails gentleness. Jesus seldom used adjectives to describe Himself. When He did, though, look at the very first word He chose: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle [*praus*] and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

First and foremost, Jesus called Himself gentle. That's worth contemplating. To emulate Jesus Christ, consider His disposition. It was gentle. Consider His approach to sinners. It was gentle. Consider how He typically handled conflict and adversity. Gently. Consider how He invited – and continues to invite – people to know God through knowing Him. Gently. *He* is God's standard of meekness.

Following Jesus, then, means consistently growing in gentleness. It's to become increasingly meek. That means for many of us, it's to seek a transformed disposition – in some cases, *radically* transformed.

God Can Help *Anyone* Become Meek

That may seem unrealistic, but this sort of change in our persona is possible. Here's one way that we know. Look again at that list of gentleness verses above. Did you notice who authored the last one? I've always been struck by 1 Peter 3:15 not so much because it tells us to be prepared with an apologetic defense of the gospel, but because *Peter* is teaching on gentleness.

Do you find that at all peculiar? Let's face it, from what we read about Peter in the gospels, this is not the guy you want teaching in your nursery school. He's more like those inner-city school principals who walk the halls wielding a bat and a bullhorn. He'd sooner cut off an ear than lend one. I'd also guess that the preferred method of evangelism for this gruff fisherman would not be "gentleness and respect." He'd probably be more comfortable slapping someone across the face with a trout and threatening eternal damnation.

But here he is in verse 15 discarding the bullhorn and the trout. We see a 180-degree reversal in his approach to human relations. That's significant, especially for those of us who have Peter's personality. If you think becoming more meek is

impossible because you've never been that way, take note of a 2,000 year old miracle: God softened someone like Peter, so he can soften you and me.

The beginning of transformation is but a decision and a prayer away. Choose and ask to become a gentler person, and then persist in your effort to grow. Be advised, though, that the lion's den of the workplace has a way of stunting that growth. So if you genuinely desire this transformation to take root at work, you may have to overcome an obstacle other than your Peter-like hard-wiring – a powerful and pervasive obstacle.

The Primary Obstacle to Meekness in the Workplace

If God says meekness is a virtue and He wants us to change, why, then, don't we see more meek Christians in the workplace? What is it about the work environment that inhibits us from adopting a gentle disposition? John, one of my 50-year-old graduate students, offered me this insight:

“A long time ago,” he told me, “I really did try to let my values direct my decision-making and the way I dealt with people at work. I'd even silently ask myself questions like ‘What does God want me to do in this situation?’ and ‘What decision would Jesus make here?’ But now, twenty-five years later, the questions I ask at work are different – more like ‘What's our company policy?’ ‘What will get me the biggest bonus?’ and ‘How can we get the work done faster?’ The other day I even chewed out a guy – *a single dad* – for showing up five minutes late! When I thought about that at my desk later, I realized just how much I've changed. Some days I don't even know who I am anymore.”

How did this happen? At the beginning of his career, John was essentially a God-centered employee. Then, one morning decades later he woke up and didn't recognize the person staring back at him in the mirror. Nor did he like him very much.

What John experienced is not uncommon. Some jobs and some work environments do change us, or at least they enable our dysfunctional attitudes. Each has an invisible mechanism called the “corporate culture” that tends to shape us in its own secular image. Perhaps you've felt the grate of its sandpaper slowly eroding your own Christian values.

Workplace researchers have studied this transformational process for decades and their conclusions are helpful. In a nutshell (disclaimer: I'm going to attempt to summarize eighty years of research in a few sentences), they've found that when we start a job with a new company, we become "socialized" into that environment. Basically, through formal orientations and training programs, and through informal interaction with our new co-workers, we feel some pressure to modify our attitudes, our expectations and our behaviors to fit in. We, in essence, adjust a little of who we are. Over time, like John, we may end up adjusting *a lot* of who we are.

Note that this is far from deliberate or even conscious. Even if we have no desire to let an organization shape us, extended marination in its corporate culture can still do so. John didn't intentionally morph into a person he disliked. He had no New Year's resolution to become a more aggressive, more insensitive, more demanding individual. After years of working in that environment, though, he had simply become a product of it. He became like many of the people around him, conforming to their values and their priorities.

This is exactly what the best research predicts will happen when we work closely with others for a prolonged period of time.¹² Interestingly, it's also what the Apostle Paul predicted.

Paul's Insights about Corporate Culture

Paul apparently had a 1,900 year jump on my ivory tower colleagues. For the Corinthian church, he appropriated a line from a then-popular Greek play and inserted it into the sacred canon. Because of its timeless applicability, we should also insert this into our sacred mental database: "Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Be careful about whom you hang out with, says Paul. You just might start thinking and acting like they do. Another workplace researcher, Dr. Solomon of Jerusalem University, imparted similar wisdom centuries earlier: "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (Proverbs 13:20).

So how does all this apply to the virtue of meekness? Think about your work environment. Are you a companion of "meek" people? Think about what it takes for you to climb the

corporate ladder. Is it gentleness and humility? Think about what's required for you to get that hefty merit raise. Are the meek or the aggressive rewarded more handsomely where you work?

Most of us intuitively understand this problem, but we need a regular reminder. The work environment – its “socialization” process, its reward system, its demands for faster, better performance – can subtly shape us to be the polar opposite of meek. Even worse, after years of this indoctrination, many of us actually become convinced that meekness is a *negative* trait. “Meekness is weakness,” we rationalize. “That’s just the way it is in the work world today.” So we continue along this road, measuring ourselves against man’s standard of meekness, rather than God’s.

But then one morning we wake up, strangers to ourselves, having bought into this dangerous, culture-driven myth.

If that describes you – if you’ve unwittingly adopted the counter-scriptural perspective that meekness is weakness – then it’s probably time to dispel that myth once and for all. If you think you can’t be meek on the job because meek employees get stepped on, they get passed over for promotions, or they miss out on valuable rewards, think again. Think like God thinks.

Jesus sets the record straight about the meek. They will “inherit the earth.”

He says that the Supreme Evaluator smiles on the docile and rewards them well. “Don’t worry about that promotion,” He says. “I have a *real* promotion in store for you. Stay on course! Persevere! Don’t be corrupted by whatever ‘bad company’ may be near you. Follow in My gentle footsteps and your reward – your inheritance – will far exceed that title and four percent raise you missed.”

Look in your own mirror. Has the work world convinced you that meekness is weakness? God replies that meekness is maturity.

Has the work world convinced you that meekness is foolishness? God replies through Paul, “The foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom” (1 Corinthians 1:25 NASB).

Has the work world convinced you that meekness undermines career success? God replies by raising up a counter-example in the most unlikely of places: the football gridiron.

A Testimony to the Strength of Meekness

Like those students at Yale Divinity School, he thought he was something that he was not. He too was measuring by man's standard, not God's.

Because he regularly attended a church, Tom Landry thought he was a Christian. In his own words: "I had been in and about church my whole life. But really, it was only half-heartedly...I thought of myself as a Christian but I really wasn't. I was just a church-goer, which is a lot different. If you just go to church, it's a lot like going to the Lion's Club or something like that. Oh, man, there's no comparison."¹³

Then one day in 1959, Landry accepted an invitation to a men's Bible study because, he says, he couldn't think of a graceful way to get out of it!¹⁴ It's a good thing, too, since in that meeting Tom came to realize how many passages from the Sermon on the Mount spoke directly to the personal struggles in his life. So he returned the next week. And the next. Later that year, says Tom, "I finally reached a point where faith outweighed the doubts, and I was willing to commit my entire life to God."¹⁵

In 1959, Tom was a 33-year-old assistant coach for the New York Giants and an off-season insurance salesman. Eventually, he would coach a team of his own – the Dallas Cowboys – and he would lead them to an unprecedented 20 consecutive winning seasons, five Super Bowl appearances and two championships. An impressive record, to say the least. Even more impressive to many of us who watched him, though, was that he did it without raising his voice.

Tom was meek in the best sense of the word. He was a reserved man, a soft-spoken man, a man who walked with God as he walked the sidelines. That was evident by his game-time mannerism. Were the Cowboys up by 14 or down by 14? Tom's demeanor provided no clue. Was it fourth and goal on the opponent's one yard line or first and ten on their own twenty? Did the Cowboys just fumble away the game? Did the refs just blow a call? Don't look to Tom's expression for answers. This

now-devout Christian personified gentleness and self-control.

Not exactly the norm in the world of the NFL. More typical were coaches like legendary Vince Lombardi, infamous for being unapproachable *for days* after his offense had a bad game.¹⁶ Similarly, Raider coach John Madden got so worked up in his job that he had to retire from coaching because of ulcers.¹⁷ Chicago Bears coach Mike Ditka also fit that mold. Not only was he notorious for his sideline tantrums, Ditka was apparently a bear off the field as well. When he played tennis with Landry, for example, he would smash his racket on the ground so many times it began to resemble, in Tom's words, an "aluminum pretzel."¹⁸

But Tom was different. According to sportswriter Bob St. John: "The pressures of coaching in the NFL have had adverse mental and physical effects on the majority of coaches in the profession. But Landry does not ... have ulcers or trouble sleeping."¹⁹ Tom attributes that to his faith, asserting that "My relationship with Christ gives me a source of power I would not have otherwise. What eats you up inside is fear and anxiety. God does not give us fear, but power and love and self-control."²⁰

That's meekness.

Tom Landry managed to remain meek in a world of macho football players, thunderous peers, and a hyper-critical football town. The culture of his workplace put no edge on the man. Tom did not allow it to shape him adversely. Instead, he was shaped daily by his faith. And as a result, today Tom Landry is renowned not only for his win-loss record, but for being a contemporary role model for workplace Christians everywhere. His legacy is one of both competence and character.

Ours can be too if we reject the notion that meekness is weakness. Reject that workplace myth. Through gentleness, you'll thrive no matter what the corporate norms might be. As we saw in chapter 1, it all begins by acknowledging God as our real CEO. And then it continues by taking a page from Coach Landry's playbook: Faithfully invite Him to work through you. Don't let harshness, a quick temper, or impatience continue to undermine your witness. Instead, embrace God's standard: "I am gentle and humble in heart."

No, meekness is not weakness. It's Christlikeness.



For Reflection and Discussion

1. Think about the previous week or two at work. In what situations did you fall short of God's standard of meekness? What might have been different at work had you been as meek as Jesus encourages you to be? How would your gentler behavior have affected others and yourself?
2. Almost every work environment has triggers that encourage us to be aggressive rather than meek. Can you identify the aspects of your job that push you in the wrong direction? And can you think of ways to resist those temptations and instead respond to God's call to be more gentle?
3. Ultimately, "gentleness" is a fruit of the Spirit virtue (Galatians 5:22-23). That means if we want to grow in gentleness, we shouldn't pursue it in our own strength. So how can we get there? What's your plan to make that happen?



Digging Deeper

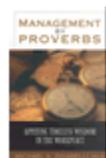
To go further with your study of this topic, consider these freely-available articles and book chapters from the *Christianity 9 to 5* online library:



[Ten Commandments for Difficult Conversations](#)

Michael Zigarelli

There's a lot of advice out there—some good, some not so good—about how to handle that conversation you've been dreading. Here's a handy checklist from the most reliable Source.



[Ten Tips for Delivering Criticism with Care](#)

Michael Zigarelli, Management by Proverbs

By most accounts, delivering negative feedback remains one of the greatest workplace challenges, even for senior managers. And when a Christian does this poorly, there's even more at stake since he or she is quickly considered a hypocrite by the person receiving the feedback. Here, then, are ten Biblically-consistent tips to deliver criticism with care.

OBSTACLE 4

A “Fight For Your Rights” Mentality

*God blesses those who are hungry and thirsty for justice,
for they will receive it in full.*

Matthew 5:6 NLT



If ever there were someone who hungered and thirsted for man-made justice, it was Donald Drusky.

Drusky was an employee of U.S. Steel in the 1960s and a member of the United Steelworkers of America, Local 1219. After a dispute with his employer and union over \$2,500 he claimed was owed to him, Drusky publicly protested, picketing outside the company gates. This performance neither amused nor intimidated U.S. Steel, who promptly sent Drusky on a permanent vacation. They suspected that Drusky’s next move would be a lawsuit, but they had no idea how right they were. His appetite for justice was simply insatiable.

Drusky first went to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the Federal agency that oversees the relationship among companies, unions and union members. He filed a complaint alleging unfair labor practices by both his employer and his union. Then he filed another. And then another. Three years later, Drusky had filed an unprecedented *375 complaints* in all. Equally unprecedented was that the NLRB dismissed *every one* of his claims as unmeritorious: 0-for-375.²¹ You’d think he’d get the message.

He didn’t. After his string of shutouts, Drusky switched tactics, suing the Regional Director of the NLRB – the person responsible for dismissing his complaints. A federal court wasted little time dispensing with these allegations as well: 0-for-376.²²

This was “equal justice under law”? Drusky was incensed. His rights had been violated and somebody had to pay. So he set his sights on those charged with guaranteeing him “equal justice.” Drusky sued the *entire federal judiciary*, claiming that they had conspired to deprive him of his rights. Calling that case “frivolous,” the court again left Drusky famished and parched: 0-for-377.²³

NOTES

Well, maybe suing a different set of lawyers would bear edible fruit. Drusky next sued the American Bar Association for its part in the conspiracy. But again, an adverse court decision yielded not a crumb of satisfaction for Drusky: 0-for-378.²⁴

Had Donald Drusky tasted enough defeat? Perhaps for awhile. But then in 1998, a full thirty years after his quest began, Drusky filed a lawsuit that produced a cornucopia of headlines worldwide.

Drusky sued God.

I kid you not. Starving for retribution and tired of waiting for God to intervene on his behalf, Drusky filed suit in U.S. District Court blaming God for refusing to remedy what U.S. Steel had done to him decades earlier. In that same action, Drusky also threw the rest of the spaghetti at the wall to see what might stick. He sued former Presidents Reagan and Bush, the television networks, all 50 states, the Federal Communications Commission, all federal judges (again), the 100th through 105th Congress, and you and me. That's right, in this action Drusky sued every person in America for sitting idly by during his ordeal. (Apparently, God is not only our Co-pilot, He's also our Co-defendant!).

The main target of the suit, though, was Drusky's Creator. The allegation read in part: "Defendant God is the sovereign ruler of the universe and took no corrective action against the leaders of his Church and his Nation for their extremely serious wrongs, which ruined the life of Donald S. Drusky."²⁵

What recompense did Drusky want for God's failure to cater? I guess he could have asked for the moon. Instead, Drusky merely asked God to return his youth, to resurrect his mother and pet pigeon (complete with halo), and to grant Drusky "the guitar playing skills of the famous guitarists." On the more socially-conscious side, Drusky also insisted that God let someone find a cure for cancer and that He return Abraham Lincoln "to serve as Your ambassador from Heaven to make a better America and world."

Will God restore Drusky's job, or respond as He did to Job? Stay tuned, friends. The decision follows these brief announcements from the Defendant's best-selling Book.

Beware of a “Fight for Your Rights” Mentality

Conflict. It’s inevitable in our lives. Somewhere, somehow, someday soon, something will strike you as unjust. Unfair. Unconscionable. It’s unavoidable.

God cares about how we react to conflict, calling us to honor Him through our reaction. But first things first. How we *react* to conflict is often determined by how we *think* about conflict. So, given that precursor, I ask you: When something unfair happens to you, what dominates your thoughts? Is it the question: “what’s a God-honoring approach to this problem?”

When an inconsiderate driver cuts you off, do you think about pleasing God? When a neighbor’s fence encroaches on your yard or his dog barks for half the night, do your thoughts turn to God’s will? When somebody at work gossips about you or insults you in a meeting, do you focus on representing God well?

More than likely, the first thing that comes to mind in such situations (and often the middle thing and the last thing!) is a different kind of question – something like “what are my rights?” We think we have the right to some space on the road, to our property and our sleep, to our dignity and reputation at work. When someone violates those “rights,” we naturally begin thinking about how to get what’s fair – what’s “owed” to us by others. And like we just said, as we think so we do: How we *think* about conflict usually determines how we *react* to it.

This is a problem for any person who desires to be an authentic, consistent ambassador of Jesus Christ. When we have a hunger and thirst to secure our rights – to be treated fairly and equitably and to claim what we’re owed – then we risk compromising two vital things that God cares about. First, *we tend to compromise our relationships with people and our witness as Christians*. When we adopt a “fight for your rights” mentality, worldly rules guide us. Worldly motives abide in us. We’ll get even with those who chide us now that Satan has made progress inside us.

Poetics aside us (sorry), we’re in real danger when we permit rights, equity or fairness to become our gods – our “personal golden calf” in the vernacular of chapter 1. Focusing on our perceived entitlements (whether at work, at home, or anywhere

else) eclipses our focus on God's will. Instead, a man-made approach to dealing with problematic people becomes our approach. Society's rules of engagement become our rules. And then there's the upshot: When the lord of rights replaces the Lord of Might, our conflicts often culminate in broken relationships and marred witness.

And that's just when we win. *When we don't get what's coming to us, we may compromise not only our relationships with others, but also our relationship with God.* Do you think Donald Drusky was audacious for suing God? For demanding that God intervene on his behalf? I do too, but in fact Drusky's resentment of God is not far removed from some of our own. We may never formalize the grievance in district court. We may never insist on a haloed pigeon or musical acumen. But when we hunger and thirst for the world to be fair – *and when despite our best efforts it still turns out to be unfair* – we may develop a hidden, unspoken grudge against God for it. After all, as Drusky said, God is sovereign. God is all-powerful. God could have done something about this problem, right? Why hasn't He?

Notice the drift from reverence to resentment? It all begins with a rights-oriented mind-set. It all begins by focusing on what we think we're owed by others and by God. Almost everyone in our contemporary culture is at risk. Are you?

Take a Brief Self-Exam

That might be a little tough to answer in the abstract, so let me make it a little plainer by putting it in a workplace context. Take this self-graded quiz. Don't think too long about these statements, just mentally respond to them and take note of your response. No trick questions here, just self-assessment, so be honest with yourself.

Here's the first one: A co-worker has stolen a great idea of yours and claimed it as his own. And now he's been publicly praised for it. What's your initial reaction? Pause for a moment and think about it. Is your reaction closer to "fight for my rights" or "how do I handle this God's way?"

Try this one: You received a lower percentage raise than someone who is doing similar work. He got five percent, you got two. You worked just as many hours and were just as

productive. What goes through your mind first? Are you thinking about what's owed to you and how you can secure it? Or are your thoughts along the lines of emulating Jesus through your response?

How about these? A co-worker regularly receives preferential treatment when the boss makes up the schedule. You were passed over for a promotion when you had clearly earned it. You were ridiculed by co-workers because of your faith. You patiently served one of those impossible customers only to learn that the customer later complained about *your* attitude to the supervisor. What's your reaction?

End of quiz; beginning of confession. If you're like I am (and like many people who have been indoctrinated by our Western culture), your knee-jerk reaction to such situations is to think first about your rights – about whether you've been violated and how to remedy that.

Jerry stole your great idea? Expose him and claim what was yours to begin with.

A lower raise than you deserve? Demand more from the boss or find a covert way to secure what's fair (you know, "borrow" some company supplies, make some personal long-distance phone calls at company expense, that sort of thing).

Unfair schedule? Complain until everyone else has to work as many Saturdays as you do.

Passed over for a promotion? Threaten to sue and then dust off your resume.

Chastised because of your faith? Add that to the lawsuit as well or just even the score by ridiculing them right back.

One part obnoxious customer, one part obnoxious supervisor?
Two parts reduced effort.

It's only fair.

That's just the problem, though. Especially on the job, our thoughts and, thereby, our behavior tend to be governed by what's "fair," by what rights we think we have. And as a result, the guiding principle when we're faced with injustice is to *recover what's due*. In the world's eyes, that's perfectly

legitimate – even encouraged – since today, “victims” are martyred heroes! But as we heroes adopt a “fight for your rights” mentality, we look less and less like the One who repudiated His rights at the Cross. Not very heroic of us.

It doesn't have to be that way. There's another approach to conflict, as Jesus suggests in the fourth Beatitude – an approach that models for everyone around us a better way to live.

Facing God in the Face of Conflict

Although some versions of Scripture render Matthew 5:6 as “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” one of the more recent translations exchanges the term *justice* for *righteousness*. That's not a stylistic exchange. The wording shift is intended to reflect the plainer meaning of the Beatitude when heard in the literary and cultural context.

The scene is a crowd of Israelites who are depressed and demoralized – people longing for God to act. So Jesus lifts some words from Psalm 107 to lift them up. Specifically, he drew from this passage:

They [in the desert on the way to Canaan] were hungry and thirsty and their lives ebbed away. They cried out to the Lord in their trouble and he delivered them from their distress...for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. (Psalm 107:5-6, 9)

Jesus' choice of scriptures was surely not a random one. His hearers that day were enduring daily injustice under Roman occupation. So He paraphrases an ancient passage that offers hope to the oppressed. *Watch closely*, the Psalm says. *Be patient. God will respond.*

This is why some think that the fourth Beatitude is more about justice than about personal righteousness.²⁶ Hence, the translational shift. Its message is that God will deliver us from all of our suffering. Be vigilant, wait for God to work, and remain confident throughout that His justice will ultimately prevail. “Stay hopeful despite your circumstances,” Jesus is telling the crowd. “Don't sin as you respond to your conflicts. God knows how unfairly you're being treated and in His time, He will satisfy your hunger with ‘good things.’”

Right ... (commence eye-rolling and head-shaking). Tell it to the guy who just lost his job and can't pay the mortgage. Tell it to the woman being sexually harassed every day by her boss. Tell it to the battered wife and her children. Tell it to just about anyone who has been wronged and has immediate needs that are going unmet. "*Hope* doesn't put food on the table or protect us from pond-scum predators," they might reply. "Is this Beatitude really about taking it on the chin and doing nothing while waiting for God to act? Sounds kind of escapist to me. Sounds like it just opens the door for evil to prevail all the more."

Fair point, if that's what you're thinking. It's easy to misinterpret the instruction of this Beatitude, so let me be clear about this. I have found nothing in Scripture that *requires* us to automatically abdicate our man-made rights. There's nothing that commands us to disregard personal abuse or danger. That's not Jesus' intent here. Rather, as with the previous Beatitudes, Jesus is teaching in verse 6 about an *attitude* we should adopt. A mind-set. A principle that is to guide our thinking when times are tough.

The principle is this: When conflict and injustice come into your life, remember that God ultimately rights all wrongs. *If you think this way, you'll be less likely to sin in response to the injustice.* Life's unfairness won't undercut your effort to conduct yourself as Jesus would. Mistreatment won't tarnish your witness. You won't be like so many other people in the world who are more rights-centered than God-centered. Instead, if you take Jesus' invitation to heart, when something unfair happens to you, you'll think about how to handle the situation in a God-honoring manner before you consider any rights you have.

If that approach to conflict sounds a bit radical to you, you're in good company. The same message probably sounded radical to the Corinthian Christians when Paul told them to relinquish their rights to sue one another. Not wanting unbelievers to see dissension among Christians, Paul says to his litigious friends, "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" (1 Corinthians 6:7). Fire your lawyers. Drop your weapons. Witness is more important than rights.

The same message probably sounded radical to the Romans too, when Paul restated this teaching: "Do not be overcome by evil,

but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). When conflict occurs, focus more on modeling Jesus and less on how you’ve been wronged. Only then can we possibly hope to repay evil with good.

And the same message probably sounded radical to Jesus’ captivated audience, especially when He built on this Beatitude by giving them specific applications of it.

“If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39).

But I have the right to strike him back, they probably thought.

“And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well” (Matthew 5:40).

But I have the right to defend myself, they probably thought.

“If someone forces you to go one mile” (the distance Roman soldiers could force Israelites to carry their gear) “go with him two miles” (Matthew 5:41).

But under Roman law, I have the right to stop after one mile!

The point is this: The New Testament presents a clear and consistent message regarding how to think about our conflicts. When life treats you unfairly, you have a choice. You can be rights-centered or you can be God-centered. Each is an obstacle to the other.

Witnessing Without the Witness Box

And now back to our show. A mere three weeks after Drusky filed his suit against God, the judge had made his decision.

Three weeks? That’s remarkable in today’s justice system! How did it happen so quickly? Did Drusky finally have his slam dunk? Maybe God didn’t show up in court, so the judge sided with Drusky on that technicality.

Not quite. The rapid disposition of this case simply reflected its lack of merit. Judge Norman Mordue threw out Drusky’s novel grovel as “nonsensical” and “frivolous.” Drusky’s hunger and thirst for justice would remain unsatisfied once again.

But that doesn't have to be the case for you. Our Supreme Judge never throws out our case. He never dismisses our plea as "nonsensical" or "frivolous." We believers always have the privilege of pleading our case to the Highest Authority in the universe, in complete confidence that justice will be done – perhaps not on our timetable and perhaps not in the manner that we'd script, but justice *will* be done. For those of us hungering and thirsting for God's justice, the Beatitude says, we "will receive it in full." When we adopt that mind-set, we can finally handle our conflicts Christianly.

Let me wrap this up by illustrating this mind-set in action. At two different universities, I have been involved in situations where, because of building renovations, my colleagues and I have had to select new offices. In both cases, some faculty would get window offices, but others would not. In the first case, a faculty member of average seniority (and less-than-average Christian commitment) made it clear from the outset that she *would* get a window office. To quote verbatim her humble and very public statement: "If I don't get a window, I'll scream!" She got her window office. In fact, she got an office with two windows.

In the second case, the most senior person in the department – a devout Christian – was appointed to assign offices to us. After soliciting our preferences, it became apparent that no one wanted the office that had no windows. So he took it. He had every right to the best office in the suite. He selected the worst.

A rights-centered mentality. A God-centered mentality. One inhibits Christlikeness, the other exhibits Christlikeness. One is "fair," the other is rare.

Focusing on fairness is a frequent flaw of the faithful. It's a correctable one, though. So the next time you experience some type of mistreatment, whether large or small, stop and reflect for awhile. *Think about what you're thinking about.* Mind what's coming to mind. Then, if you find yourself adopting a rights-centered mentality, try an experiment. Pray that through this conflict God will guide your thoughts, your words and your actions. Even your facial expressions. Pray it often as the situation unfolds. And as you do, think about what's really at stake: People will evaluate your claims about Jesus most closely when you're under pressure, not when things are going well. If you react to conflict as most others do – through

arguing, complaining, gossiping, litigating, and silent treatments – then people are unlikely to see God through you. Instead, they'll probably consider you a hypocrite and see little value in your faith.

If, on the other hand, you refuse to bow down before the god of fairness, you'll present the most powerful of testimonies. Like my colleague at the second university, you'll model what others might never read for themselves in the gospels. You may also preserve and nurture some essential relationships in the process, not the least of which is your relationship with God.

The workplace can be a hotbed of conflict. And although God doesn't always want us to stand idly by when we've been wronged, He does always want us to stand with Him – to reject the cultural conditioning to “fight for your rights” and instead, to handle conflicts His way.



For Reflection and Discussion

1. Here's a pretty easy question: What's unfair in your life – whether at work, at home or anywhere else?

2. Here are some harder questions: What's that unfairness doing to you as an employee, as a parent, as a spouse ... as a Christian? How is it affecting your relationship with others and with God?

3. Here's the hardest question: Will you consider the scriptural advice to let go of your right to be angry and to simply turn over the injustice to God? Discuss with your group what it will take to get there.



Digging Deeper

To go further with your study of this topic, consider these freely-available book chapters from the *Christianity 9 to 5* online library:



[Time Honored Advice for Coping with Your Boss](#)

Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ

“The only reason why criticism cuts you to the heart is that you are still ruled by your old nature and take more notice of men than you should.” In the fifteenth century, theologians didn't mince words or worry about people's self-esteem. They just told it like it is.



[The Hardest Prayer of All: Praying for Our Enemies](#)

G.D. Watson, Soul Food

Is there someone at work who's simply driving you crazy? Maybe someone challenging you or even undermining you at every turn? This nineteenth century classic offers some profound insight into how to pray for our enemies.

OBSTACLE 5

Compassion Fatigue

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Matthew 5:7



At 6:30 one spring morning, my four-year-old son Michael proudly marched out to the front lawn to retrieve the morning paper. It was his new job and he did it flawlessly. Walk to the end of the path, pick up the paper, bring it back. No problem, right? Well, this particular morning he decided to insert another step. Through the window I watched him pick up the paper and then look to the sky. He stared upward and remained motionless for about sixty seconds.

Seldom had anything other than Barney the Dinosaur held his attention that long, so I went out to see it for myself. There in the sky, slightly south of our home, were three news helicopters, hovering over the railroad tracks. They were documenting a tragedy – a tragedy that happened only a few hundred yards from my house, but made headlines around the world.

Four hours earlier that morning, a terrified conductor of an Amtrak train sounded the horn and pulled the emergency brake. I didn't hear it, but the thirty-second screech woke Anne Graney, whose property was much closer to the tracks. Graney would later tell the local newspaper, "At night, you don't hear train whistles unless there's something on the track."²⁷

Something was – or more correctly – someone. Julia Toledo was a forty-seven-year-old Ecuadorian immigrant and mother of four sons. All of them stood in the pathway of the train. All of them were struck at seventy-one miles per hour. The train engineer would later say that as he approached, three of the boys and their mother were on the south side of the tracks and the smallest son was on the north. Julia ran to save her baby and all of her other sons followed in a panic.

Firefighters reported that the accident scene was horrific. Julia and three of the boys, ages three, six, and eleven, were killed instantly. The ten-year-old brother, Jose, arrived at Bridgeport

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Hospital in a coma, only to succumb two days later. Lying amid the shattered bodies were school backpacks, a small tennis shoe and a Sesame Street figurine.

The tragedy shook our Connecticut community to its core. It made no sense at all. What in the world was this family doing on the tracks at that hour? Where could they possibly be going? To this day people can only speculate. Some things about Julia we did learn, though.

Julia spent a lot of time at Caroline House, an education center for immigrant women run by Catholic nuns. Her youngest son Pedro would play in the day-care area while his mother learned English. According to Sister Brenda Lynch, Julia was much more than just a student. She recalled for the media the recent Caroline House Christmas party where Julia promised to bring a turkey, even though she had no money to do so. When she missed two classes in a row before the party, many assumed that Julia wouldn't be coming. The party began without her. Then one woman, peering through a window, spotted Julia on the street walking toward Caroline House with a large turkey balanced on a platter. She wore a triumphant smile and her sons marched in step behind her.

This was typical of Julia. When Valentine's Day rolled around, the nuns were perplexed when Julia inquired about how to order flowers. Still, they gave her the information. To their surprise, the nuns later received a bouquet of carnations with a note expressing Julia's love and gratitude.²⁸

To support her family, Julia worked as a custodian at Fairfield University – my employer at the time. She covered the 4:00 P.M. to midnight shift, necessitating a lot of baby-sitting. Sister Maureen Fleming recalled that the baby-sitting became a hopeless problem. In fact, for a full week before the accident, Julia simply couldn't show up for work because she had no one to care for her children. She also was having problems with her landlord and was forced into a transitional YMCA housing shelter.

But why the train tracks? The best explanation I heard was from Sister Bernadette who told me that in the mountain towns of Ecuador, where Julia had lived almost her entire life, it's common for travelers to walk along train tracks since the tracks are typically the flattest and most direct route.

I also talked with Julia's co-workers. They were my co-workers too. Those who knew her well were as stunned by the tragedy as I was. Some saw hints that Julia was having difficulties, but no one seemed to grasp the magnitude of those problems until it was too late.

I sat with all of these people at the funeral. It was a very foreign venue for me – a Mormon church, a Spanish service, flanked by janitors and nuns. I couldn't understand a word that was said from the pulpit, but the facial expressions, the uncontrollable sobs, the prolonged hugs required no translator. At the front of the room were three caskets. It was a poignant reminder of the family's poverty. They couldn't afford five individual caskets, so Julia was buried with her three-year-old, the two middle sons lay together, and the oldest lay alone. On the exterior of the caskets were personal messages written in indelible marker. That too seemed fitting. Friends, family, classmates, and even strangers wrote of the indelible impression the victims had made on their own lives. They wrote about love. They wrote about laughter. They wrote about God. They said their good-byes.

Perhaps most moving were the large photos of five bright, smiling faces near the caskets. Midway through the service, a young boy cried and his father carried him out. Everyone seemed to be thinking the same thing: A week ago the Toledo boys were just as boisterous. Dozens of heads turned toward those photos.

I left that place shaken, thinking about the power each one of us has to affect the lives of our co-workers. I was also struck by a cold reality about Julia's workplace. Julia – a person in dire need – worked around *thousands* of people who identify themselves as Christian. She worked in a Christian school whose mission is "to foster ethical and religious values and a sense of social responsibility." She worked everyday around well-paid Christian employees and well-to-do Christian students. But no one there had any more than a superficial relationship with her. No one seemed to know of her need. All it would have taken was for *one* of these Christians to go beyond "hello," to ask Julia about herself, to inquire about her kids, maybe to ask about how a single mother could raise such a large family in a suburb of New York City on \$7.50 an hour. And then, perhaps, to go the extra mile and help her out.

All it would have taken was one person. One follower of Jesus

Christ. How sobering, that seemed. How contrary to Jesus' own approach to people.



Serving others' needs is a centerpiece of the Christian faith. Jesus summarizes this succinctly in the fifth Beatitude. When He taught "Blessed are the merciful," He encouraged us to care about each other. To look out for one another. To be especially attentive when someone might be hurting.

Beyond this, His instruction is to *take action* when someone needs assistance. We know that because the Greek translated as "merciful" in verse 7 is best understood as an *active* compassion – a compassion that entails deeds, not just empathy. In simplest terms, the "merciful" are those who care about others enough to carry their burdens.

So how could Julia be alone while surrounded at work by Christians?

The answer, I think, has a lot to do with the nature of the workplace. When we're with family, neighbors or fellow church members, caring about people and lending a hand often comes naturally for many of us. But even the most committed Christian – a person who may genuinely embrace the notion of treating his job as a ministry – may have trouble sustaining a caring attitude in the workplace. It's not that she never cared. She may have. It's not that she's unaware that mercy is a Christian virtue. She is. It's just that the pressures of the modern workplace have afflicted her with something called "compassion fatigue."

Allow me to tap for you some of the psychological research to explain this common ailment and to suggest a Biblically-based way to address it.

Why Don't I Care About My Co-Workers and Customers Anymore?

This is a well-worn question for workplace researchers. They've found that if you don't care as much about the people around you at work as you used to, you may suffer from "compassion fatigue" – a common stress that is a cousin of burnout. In simplest terms, it means just what the term implies: you've

grown tired of caring. You're depleted. You don't have anything left for anybody else.

The academic research tells us that a lot of things can contribute to this condition.²⁹ Some of these things are obvious, others may be a bit of a revelation. The top five symptoms are these:

1. Too many hours of work (researchers call this “quantitative role overload.” Most people call it “too much work to do.”)
2. Working for an unpleasant boss (I told you some were obvious.)
3. Performing work that requires skills that you don't currently have.
4. Performing work that requires you to deal with other people's problems all day long.
5. A mismatch of your values with the organization's values.

Any red flags for you? Maybe several? Then read on, my friend.

What's interesting about this line of research is that although it derives from the secular literature, it gives us tremendous insight into why many Christians struggle with caring about people at work. Take the first one – you may be working too many hours. According to the Economic Policy Institute, on average we're now working more than 120 hours longer per year than we were in 1979³⁰ – a full three weeks more per year! If you're contributing to this upward trend, beware. Too much work crowds out our willingness and ability to care about co-workers' and customers' needs. That's a bit of a no-brainer.

So is number two on the list: working for an unpleasant boss. As you may know, there's no shortage of this species in the jungle. One boss in San Francisco asked his secretary to go to a local bar and page him if she saw someone he might be attracted to. Another sent his secretary out in a blizzard to get him lunch and then later commented that the weather was “unfit for human beings.” Still another demanded that an employee check his head for lice. Then he compelled her to buy and *apply* the appropriate medication for him! True stories. I can't make up stuff like this.³¹

It's hard to overstate the emotional drain that an unfair or overbearing boss can have on employees. Every area of one's

life – from work to family to personal time to sleep – can be adversely affected by him or her. It's no wonder, then, that such a situation creates compassion fatigue. It erodes our capacity to care about other people's problems, since we have too many of our own to worry about.

Numbers three and four on the list might be less obvious pitfalls, but the research conclusions are pretty clear. People who regularly perform duties beyond their comfort zone of capability and people who are constantly addressing other people's problems (e.g., nurses, social workers, pastors, customer service representatives) can easily become overwhelmed. A frequent consequence is callousness toward others.

Lastly, look at number five. It's a huge canker sore for Christians working in secular environments. Are you ever pressured or directed to perform a task that offends your values? Do you work in an environment where gossip, office politics, or backstabbing is the norm? Do you ever have to compromise your ethics to make a sale – or keep a friend? If these kinds of things are typical of your workplace, you've probably experienced a "mismatch" between your values and the values of your corporate culture. And according to Christina Maslach, a leading academic authority on the subject, this mismatch may be the *primary* contributing factor to compassion fatigue.³² When you swim against the current of the corporate culture on a daily basis, you're in jeopardy of becoming jaded, debilitated, and ultimately deaf to the concerns of others.

The bottom line here is that any of these five factors can lead to compassion fatigue – the exhausting feeling that all of your emotional resources are used up. And once you're afflicted, say two decades worth of studies, what often follows is something called "depersonalization." In plain English, we begin to withdraw from the people around us. We reduce the frequency of our interaction with co-workers, customers and others. We have less tolerance for people and we experience more moodiness and impatience. We become less merciful, even indifferent.

Sound familiar? Sorry to tell you, but there's even more bad news. The research further suggests that your workplace-induced depersonalization will also spillover to your family and other personal relationships.

So if you're asking yourself, *Why don't I care as much about people as I should?* it may be explained in part by going back through that five item list and checking off the factors that apply to you. Are you doing too much? Are you constantly rushing from task to task? Are you regularly in over your head, undertaking work beyond your expertise? Is it just your boss? Or is it the whole corporate culture shaping you in its secular image?

Whatever the reason(s), if you've grown tired of caring about the people around you at work, you need to address that. Don't wait; this matters a lot. You see, the Julia Toledo's of this world are in almost every workplace. They're people with kids and aging parents, people with financial troubles, people with relationship problems, people barely keeping their physical or emotional health afloat. They're people from all socioeconomic classes, from all races, from both genders. Not everyone's trial is a life-or-death situation, of course, but each of these people needs the love of Jesus shown to him or her in a tangible way.

That's where you and I come in. We believers stand in that gap, tithing our time and energy. That pleases God. "Blessed are the merciful," said His Son, "for they will be shown mercy." If you think that compassion fatigue may be a problem for you, it's time to seek a solution.

Overcoming Compassion Fatigue

Many of the same doctors (in one sense of the word) who have identified the causes of compassion fatigue have also tried to find a cure. One of their conclusions is that you should get away from work for awhile. Now, you don't need a Ph.D. to reach that conclusion. It's common sense, right? If your batteries are low, you need to recharge them. But the question is how long do they stay charged? For how long does the vacation alleviate your compassion fatigue? Here's where these studies become very helpful.

Does the relief last for years? No. Months? Uh-uh. *Weeks?* Closer. Try *days*. The research indicates that the beneficial effects of some respite from work will fade *very* quickly. In particular, our best estimates show that relief from compassion fatigue and job stress wane *after a mere three days back at work*. By day twenty-one, we can expect whatever relief we

experienced to be gone completely!³³ Not good news for someone trying to remain merciful.

So how about some other strategies? Besides time off, the other “solutions” advanced by psychologists generally revolve around addressing the causes of compassion fatigue listed earlier (e.g., reduction in your workload, get another boss, get another job).³⁴ The problem with these approaches is that we have no real evidence that any of them actually work for the long-term. Before we know it, the fatigue problems of the old situation may resurface in the new one. Square-one syndrome.

It’s not hopeless, though. Often, it seems that scripture goes where academic research cannot. This is a classic case. If you want a lasting solution for your compassion fatigue – if you want to overcome your weariness for caring about others – don’t just look to vacations, to weekends, or to a new job to renew you. Look to God to renew you. In Isaiah we read that God “gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:29-31). It’s a timeless message.

Isaiah underscores a pervasive Biblical theme: When you are fatigued, when you don’t care, when you feel like you can’t give anymore than you’re already giving, stop and ask God for help. Don’t try to do it alone. God has endless strength, you don’t. *So ask Him for the sensitivity to care.* Do you really think that He’ll deny that sort of request? Do you really think He’d send His Son to teach “Blessed are the merciful” and then ignore us when we ask for a more merciful heart?

He won’t. The solution for compassion fatigue – the only solution whose effects will not fade after three days or three weeks – is to regularly tap into the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray regularly that He will work through you on the job. Pray daily for those around you at work. Pray that you’ll continue to care about them. Pray for the discernment to identify their pain. And pray for the energy and the wisdom to attend to it.

That prayer doesn’t take much time each morning. “Lord, help me to care about the people around me at work today. Give me a merciful heart.” What was that, five seconds? At that rate, you may even find the time to pray this prayer two or three times in your workday. Devote more if you can, but a few sincere seconds, when practiced habitually, is really a great

foundation for healing. No fancy research conclusions. No large-sample studies or correlation tables. Just God's empowerment.

That's not to say that the time off recommended by these studies is unnecessary, mind you. It's both deserved and healthy. (Let's give credit where it's really due, though. It was God Himself who came up with that innovation: "Six days you shall labor and do all of your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall not do any work" [Exodus 20:9-10]). But it is to say that a cure for compassion fatigue is available regardless of how many vacation days you have left.

The hallmark of a Christian is care. Mercy. Compassion. There's a lot at stake here – and not just for others. Without mercy, representing Jesus at work is impossible. With mercy, it's inevitable.



For Reflection and Discussion

1. If you're struggling with compassion fatigue at work, reflect on some of the possible reasons listed in this chapter:
 - Too many hours of work
 - Working for an unpleasant boss
 - Performing work that requires skills that you don't currently have
 - Performing work that requires you to deal with other people's problems all day long
 - A mismatch of your values with the organization's values

Circle the items that might be contributing to your compassion fatigue, and discuss with your group what might you do to address these issues.

2. When we don't care about the people around us at work, eventually they'll know. We can't hide it for very long. It shows up in everything from the amount of time we spend with them, to our willingness to listen actively when they speak, to the way we say "hello" in the morning. When we're not genuinely compassionate, it's transparent, and then as people see through us they seldom see Jesus Christ.

So think about the people who work with you. About whom does God want you to care more? To whom does God want you to be nicer or more attentive or more sacrificial? Discuss with your group how might you make that happen not just tomorrow, but for the long term.

3. This chapter suggested that radical reliance on God's Holy Spirit is the ultimate solution to compassion fatigue. Do you really believe that, and if so, what does that sort of reliance look like?



Digging Deeper

To go further with your study of this topic, consider these freely-available articles and book chapters from the *Christianity 9 to 5* online library:



[Escape the Bondage of Busyness](#)

Michael Zigarelli, Freedom from Busyness

We live in a culture that encourages us to work too much, to spend too much, to do too much, and to strive for "the good life" through accumulation and activity. The bitter irony, of course, is that the pursuit of that sort of good life makes us miserable. Excerpted from the author's book, *Freedom from Busyness*, here's some Biblically-based perspective on how to escape, once and for all.



[Practice the Significance Principle](#)

Les Carter and Jim Underwood, The Significance Principle

Whether in the board room or on the loading dock, people are starving to hear that they are significant, that they matter, that what they are doing is valued and appreciated. In this chapter, the authors argue that it is our task as Christians to be encouragers and to recognize the God-given worth of each person.



[The Power of Praising Employees](#)

Michael Zigarelli, Management by Proverbs

We've all been there and it's not a happy place. We earned a thank you but didn't get it. Few things frustrate like ingratitude. But consider that your employees may feel the same way. So may some people in your household. We can do better than our bosses have. The Old Testament Book of Proverbs offers plenty of practical advice to help us make a habit of rewarding people with praise.



[Putting People First](#)

John Beckett, Mastering Monday

According to John Beckett, one of the great ambassadors of the faith in the business world, "It is because of the Father's great love for each person that every follower of Christ is called to put people first." Despite the financial tradeoffs that may entail in management, "from God's perspective there is no greater priority on this earth than people." What does that mean on Monday morning? This excerpt from John's book, *Mastering Monday*, explores some of the practical implications.

OBSTACLE 6

Ingratitude

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Matthew 5:8



The kids had me at the end of my proverbial rope yet again. It was a familiar position. I had been regular dangler ever since becoming a parent. So I raised my voice for what seemed to be the hundredth time that month trying, as usual, to get them to keep their precious little paws off of each other. Then I huffed out of the house, muttering something about James Dobson not being able to succeed with these kids. I just needed to get to my office where it was safe and solitary.

But no sooner did I get there than a colleague of mine knocked on the door. *Not now*, I thought. *Can't you see from my expression that I'm having an off-day? Please take a hint and come back another time.* She didn't. Instead she told me something that kicked me square between the eyes, knocking some sense into me to this very day.

"I need to talk to somebody. Yesterday my daughter was diagnosed with leukemia."

Her daughter was eight years old. And it wasn't the 97 percent cure-rate kind of leukemia. The chances were one in three that she wouldn't make it.

I'd like to report that I had comforting words for my friend, but quite frankly, I don't remember much else about the conversation. What remains vivid, though, was the aftershock in my life. Her news came on the heels of my own martyrdom. One moment I was feeling sorry for myself, the next, everything had changed. How foolish was my attitude toward my own kids. How selfish of me to think I had it so tough. How blind of me to not see all that I had been blessed with.

I sat at my desk that day too distracted to work effectively. I had to get home. I had to hug the kids and to thank God for each one. When I finally walked through the door, lo and behold, they were fighting again. Angel Two had stolen a toy

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from Angel One and now One had Two pinned to the ground. But a fresh outlook insulated me from my typical exasperation. These kids were a blessing, not a burden. They were healthy. They were energetic. They were God's gift to me. That didn't mean their anarchy went unaddressed, mind you. I did, however, address it in a way that was closer to Jesus' persona than to my own.



Have you been there? Have you ever had an experience that immediately put everything in your life into a stark, new perspective? Have you lived through something that instantly converted your mind-set from how little you have to how much you have? From how tough you have it to how much tougher it could be? And if so, have you noticed how that new mind-set can instantly change your attitude and behavior toward everyone around you?

Most of us, it's safe to say, have experienced such pivotal moments. God seems to furnish them regularly. A temporarily lost child at the mall, a middle-of-the-night phone call that fortunately turns out to be a wrong number, a narrow escape from the company's reduction-in-force, a near miss with a tractor trailer entering the highway. Such events bring almost all other concerns to a screeching halt. They shine a brilliant light on what really matters and what really doesn't. They have the power to turn us from counting our problems to counting our blessings. And as we do, people notice a change in us.

How large a change? It depends. For those who already personify Jesus daily, the change may be a small but welcome one. They've gone from the 90th to the 92nd percentile on the sanctification index, so few in their circle might detect the results. For the less righteous, like the guy who had lost perspective regarding his kids, the change registers on the Richter scale.

At least for awhile.

Have you been there? Have you ever experienced such a change? If so, *for how long?*

Unfortunately, these momentous events tend to kill off our old selves in the same way that we futilely try to kill off a dandelion. The next day, there it is again! With the next crisis

du jour, that old self is back. Same attitude, same behavior, same disappointing witness.

When that happens, we've missed an opportunity, an opportunity that comes directly from God. He's just tried to give us a ride on the Concorde to Christian character – even given us a taste of its destination – but we parachuted out at the first sign of turbulence.

My guess is that we wouldn't bail if we knew what the Pilot was up to. That's what this chapter is about. If you have the time, it might be worth your while to read it closely. And if you don't have the time, at least take this away with you: The difference between gloomy Moment One and joyous Moment Two can be summarized in one word: *gratitude*.

Why did my perspective change regarding my kids? Gratitude. They didn't have any fatal diseases. Why do we celebrate life after the lab test reports that the lump is benign? Gratitude. Our worst fears are history. Why are we more satisfied with our jobs after dodging the layoff hatchet? Gratitude. I'm still employed and getting paid. In such cases, we suddenly realize what we've been taking for granted all along and we recognize how much worse things could be. And curiously, we often find ourselves to be better people as a result. That's because gratitude is the key to being what Jesus called "pure in heart."

The Secret to Purity of Heart

"Blessed are the pure in heart" is in fact the heart of the Beatitudes. It's a lesson that encompasses many of the others. But what exactly does it mean? As we look behind Jesus' words – actually His quote – we begin to understand.

As with so many of His teachings, Jesus roots his instruction in the scriptures of His day, what we now call the Old Testament. For example, the concepts of poor in spirit and comforting those who mourn come from Isaiah 61. The meek inheriting the earth comes from Psalm 37. Hungering and thirsting comes from Psalm 107. In a similar vein, the term "pure in heart" comes from Psalm 24:3-4. That passage illuminates what was in Jesus' mind when He said "pure in heart":

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

who does not lift up his soul to an idol” (Psalm 24:3-4)

So if we ask *who is pure in heart?* it appears from the context in the psalm that it’s someone who doesn’t turn to idols. Piece of cake, right? I don’t bow down before some stone pig displayed on a mantle. I don’t worship the ocean, or a forest, or some graven image. I guess I’m not an idol worshiper, then. I guess I must be reasonably “pure in heart.”

Well, not exactly. Looking back for a moment to chapter 1, “Your Personal Golden Calf,” we’ll recall that idol worship entails putting anything – *anything* – ahead of God’s will in our daily lives. Think about the enormous implications of that. Do we sometimes decide to make our own rules? To disregard God’s inconvenient instruction? To treat people how they “deserve” to be treated rather than as God would have us treat them? To respond to conflict in a way that delivers both choice words and immediate gratification? To pursue revenge, lust, or envy?

Those kinds of commonplace actions also constitute idol worship because when we engage in them, we are, in a Biblical sense, making an idol out of *ourselves*. In other words, we are doing things our own way rather than God’s way – putting our will first and God’s will wherever. The Bible calls that “pride” and according to scripture, it’s among the most egregious violations of God’s law.

If you’re struggling to buy-in to that interpretation of “pure in heart,” consider how consistently the Old and New Testaments define it. Specifically, look at James 4. After quoting a proverb on pride – “He [God] opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Proverbs 3:34, quoted in James 4:6) – James says that a prideful attitude signifies an impure heart. “Wash your hands, you sinners,” James follows in 4:8, “*and purify your hearts, you double-minded*” (italics added).

What does it mean to be “pure in heart?” James says that it’s to avoid double-mindedness – to avoid being guided simultaneously by God’s will and our own. This split personality, his context makes clear, is the fruit of pride.

And it’s not advisable, says James. Actually, being James, he’s less delicate about it. A closer paraphrase might be: “You call yourself a believer? Then knock off the schizophrenia! Adopt a *single-minded* focus on God’s will in everything you do. He

should be at the center of all your relationships. He should be at the center of all your decisions. In fact, beyond right actions, your every thought should begin and end with the question “What is God’s will?” This is what it means to be truly humble, to have no idols – to have a pure heart.”

If that’s the case, then, Jesus’ words “Blessed are the pure in heart” might indeed be problematic for some of us. If purity of heart really requires that level of God-centeredness – all the way down to our thought-life – then who could possibly pass the test? Who could aspire to Jesus’ lofty standard? Are the “pure in heart” pastors? Elders? Nuns in Calcutta? Monks in Nepal? Who exactly are among the “blessed” here?

Many people are. By setting the bar this high, Jesus did not intend purity of heart to be a *destination* so much as it is a *direction*. No one except Jesus Himself has ever attained purity of heart by this definition. Nonetheless, we’re each called to strive, to persist in the right direction, to be disciples who endeavor daily to live faithfully.

Sound like a lot of work? It is. Sound like it’s impossible? It’s not. You can move closer to being pure in heart – you can be a better person to everyone around you this very day – if you focus on being thankful for the blessings in your life. Gratitude has the effect of draining our pride and purifying our heart. It cuts in half those of us who are double-minded.

Deep down, you may know this to be true. In fact, you may be one of the legions of Christians who have personally seen this principle in its glorious operation. You may have already identified gratitude as the secret to a happy, God-honoring life and experienced its power in your home, your neighborhood, and your church.

...but then you go to work.

The Obstacle of Ingratitude in the Workplace ... and How to Overcome It

A funny thing happened after my disposition changed toward my kids. Nothing changed at work. I was the same “idol worshipping,” disgruntled cog in my employer’s wheel. Strange. Because of my new-found gratitude, I had become more like Jesus at home, but that perspective somehow missed the bus to

work each morning.

As I sat back and reflected on that phenomenon, I wondered why the principle of gratitude leading to purity of heart didn't apply on company time. Then I realized: It can. Of course it can. It's a scriptural principle! The problem is the way many people think about their jobs prevents them from tapping into the power of this principle. In other words, our usual workplace mind-set encourages *ingratitude* on our part, and as a result, it's an obstacle to purity of heart.

Let me explain it this way. How many people have you ever met who are thankful for their work? I mean *genuinely* thankful? How many times have you come to work Monday morning to find someone – let's call him Herman – effervescing with gratitude for all he has in that job? Herman's thankful for being employed. He's thankful for his five-by-five cubical and his antiquated computer. He's thankful for his paycheck, his benefits, his phone line, the air-conditioning, even for the stack of files on his desk. Herman is thankful that his garbage can was emptied last night! And most especially, he's thankful for the privilege to be working in a free country with unlimited opportunities. Week in and week out, Herman's the happiest guy in the office.

I know what you're thinking. Drug test Herman immediately. Call security, march this guy down to the men's room and send his sample off to the lab. Herman's one taco short of a combination plate.

Why would we think that about our friend? Simply because people just don't think that way in the contemporary workplace. Let's face it, in our culture it's not normal to feel grateful for what we have at work. In fact, the whole notion of gratitude might seem misplaced in that context. After all, this is a straight exchange: I give my organization something and they give me something.

And often, we don't even think of it as a fair exchange. "Why should I be grateful for what I'm doing on this job?" we might ask. "I'm slaving away for these people forty or fifty hours a week and for what? Yes, I get paid (and not enough!), but I *earn* it. I'm not going to thank anyone for what's owed to me. And as far as benefits or air-conditioning or garbage removal, well, every company offers *that*. No, I'm not the one who should be grateful in this place. It's the guys behind the desk who should

be grateful to me. But I won't hold my breath for a 'thank you'..."

Herman's a wacko. I'm realistic.

Perhaps. But Herman's got a significantly better shot at being pure in heart than do the realists. He's broken free from the choke-hold of ingratitude that's strangling the purity from his co-workers. He did that with a simple choice: He's chosen to focus on what he has rather than on what he doesn't have. It's a workplace mind-set that works miraculously.

Do you want the power to finally become more like Jesus on the job? And would you like the added benefit of perpetual job satisfaction at the same time? Then consider taking some tips from Herman.

Inside his desk, Herman has a long list of the things that his work and his company offer to him – things like pay and benefits, a safe workplace, a coffee machine, a refrigerator for his lunch, clean bathrooms, the opportunity to make friends – the list runs for three pages. Alongside it, he has another list – a list of all the things that could be worse in his job. He could have cut-throat co-workers, he could have a micromanaging boss, he could work in a hazardous occupation, his job security could be much worse... This list took longer to compile, but now it's almost as long as the first. He looks at both lists periodically and adds things he had forgotten earlier. It helps him to remain thankful.

Away from work, Herman does things like occasionally reading the obituaries or walking through a cemetery. Sounds creepy, but he finds that it reminds him of the brevity of life. Herman never watches casually when a news story comes on TV about tragedies like earthquakes, hurricanes, an urban shoot-out, or a local drowning. Instead, he pays close attention, looks into the eyes of the victims and their families, prays for them, and thanks God that he and his loved ones were not casualties.

On the lighter side, Herman sometimes likes to take out the Guinness Book of World Records and think about how much more difficult his life could be. It really helped put things in perspective one day when he learned that a guy named Charles Osborne is on record as having hiccupped from 1922 to 1990 and that Donna Griffiths began sneezing on January 13, 1981 and sneezed over one-million times in the next twelve

months.³⁵ For Herman, things might sometimes seem bad in his life, but they could sure be a lot worse!

Herman keeps in his wallet one statistic: If he lived one hundred years ago, his life expectancy would have been forty-seven years.³⁶ He'd be gone by now! He also keeps one verse in there: "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

You see, Herman has disciplined himself to think in a healthy and transformational way, both in and out of the workplace. He's made a habit of reminding himself daily just how blessed he really is. Gratitude has changed his life and made him far more pure in heart and far more content than he would have ever been otherwise. As a result, in many ways, Herman has "seen" God, as promised in the sixth Beatitude.

Not face-to-face, of course. That'll come later. But he has seen God's power in his life. He has seen God speak through his lips. He has seen God change him from an angry person into a model father, husband, co-worker, and friend. Herman has even seen God change other people through his now-infectious personality. No, Herman's not a wacko (and for the record, he did pass his drug test). Quite the contrary. Herman is a living testimony to Jesus' promise: "Blessed are the pure in heart" – the ones who successfully embrace gratitude as a core life philosophy – "for they will see God."

And as a result, countless others will see God through them.

An Invitation to Change Your Life

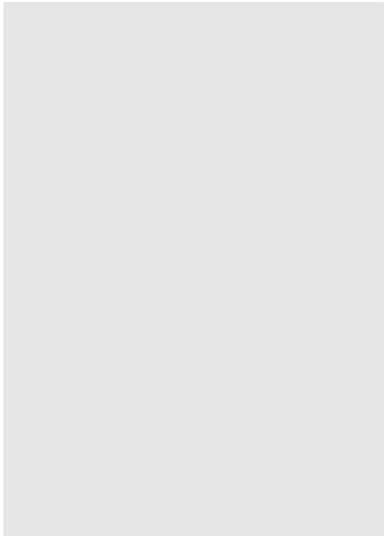
Gratitude changes everything.

You can see that for yourself the next time you have one of those stop-you-in-your-tracks experiences – the kind described in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. In the midst of such an experience, please consider something. God may want to use that event to communicate with you. He may be saying something of life-changing proportions, showing you that gratitude is the fastest route to real contentment and to the perpetual purity of heart for which so many Christians hunger.

Listen for God's voice during that time. Seldom can we hear it more clearly.

Beyond that, listen for God's voice *today*. You don't have to wait for cancer tests or a late-night phone call to begin pursuing a purer heart. You only need to make a choice – and to then stick to it.

That second part will take some work, for sure, but most worthwhile things do. You'll have to develop a new habit – a habit of doing things to remind yourself how much God has bestowed upon you. It's a habit of thinking in terms of how much worse things could be. Whether you borrow Herman's techniques or invent your own, the reward will be the best life you could possibly live. Gratitude is the gateway to joy and faithfulness. Ingratitude is the primary obstacle to them.



For Reflection and Discussion

1. In a culture where so many of us have been blessed with so much, it's natural to take things for granted. As we do, though, we become discontented with our lives and less pure in heart. Have you lost sight of the blessings in your life? Have you drifted into a daily mind-set of ingratitude? Do you go to sleep at night or wake up in the morning thinking more about what you don't have than what you do have? Do you complain? How much is your ingratitude affecting your ability to authentically live your faith?

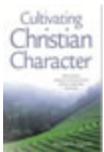
2. Take an inventory of all you have at work life that others around the world might not have. List these things below. Discuss this list with your group and discuss how we might stay in this mindset of what we have, rather than what we don't have.

3. Consider reading the article in the “Digging Deeper” section below and reflect on its findings. Do any of its practical tips about “Growing Your Gratitude” resonate with you? What other ideas might you add to this list?



Digging Deeper

To go further with your study of this topic, consider this freely-available book chapter from the *Christianity 9 to 5* online library:



[Gratitude: Pathway to Permanent Change](#)
Michael Zigarelli, Cultivating Christian Character

“Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, it is also the parent of all the others.” So said the ancient philosopher Cicero. Two millennia later, our study of thousands of Christians confirms that gratitude indeed spawns myriad elusive virtues, like joy, inner peace, patience, forgiveness, and self-control.

OBSTACLE 7

Being an “Eye for an Eye” Guy (or Gal)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
Matthew 5:9



A friend of mine in the insurance business told me this story about a wacky claim they were handling. An elderly woman in a Cadillac was having trouble finding a parking space at the mall. After circling for about ten minutes, she finally lucked out. A minivan was pulling out near the mall entrance. Her timing was perfect. She put on her blinker and waited for them to leave.

You probably know what’s coming. You’ve seen the scene. As soon as the van vacated, two kids in a sports car raced in, cutting off the woman in the process. The woman rolled down her window, keeping her temper in check, and politely told the boys that she had been waiting for the spot. So the driver said he was sorry and moved his car – yeah, right! Quite the opposite. The driver, freshly graduated from permit to license, offered up his 17-year-old middle digit and said: “In case you forgot, Granny, that’s what it’s like to be young and fast!”

Having enjoyed a laugh, he and the other choir boy proceeded to the mall entrance. Just as they got to the door, though, they heard a crash. Breaking glass, crunching metal, burning rubber. It sounded ugly. To their horror, they turned and found the front of Granny’s car buried deep into their trunk. Then she backed up, put it in drive and gunned it, ramming their car again!

One more for good measure? *Why not?* She thought. After all, the Corvette hadn’t fully penetrated the brick wall in front of it. Reverse, drive, gas. It was *The Revenge of the Granny*, Parts 1, 2 and 3.

The young, fast teens raced to their car in a panic, unleashing a torrent of obscenities longer than their pending repair bill. But the woman remained unfazed. She calmly exited her car, approached the boys and handed them a business card.

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“Here’s the number of my attorney,” she said with a smug grin. “That’s what it’s like to be old and rich!”³⁷

Admit it. Deep down, if not further up as well, you’re cheering. You can’t hide the smile, so don’t bother trying. Just let out what you want to say: “Yessssss! Way to kick butt, Granny! You go, girl!”

How can I be so sure that you liked that ending? Because I’ve been experimenting with this story. Told it to dozens of people. I’ve gotten more mileage out of this story than Granny did from her ’84 Caddie. And almost invariably, the person listening to the story gets a satisfied look on his or her face when they learn how this woman responded. It’s a look that says: “Good for her! Give those jerks what they deserve!”

Payback is fun. Settling the score satisfies. Revenge is rewarding. That’s evident throughout our culture.

Just look at what we find entertaining. One of the best parts of a hockey game is a fight. One player instigates, the other drops the gloves. Don’t touch that remote. In baseball, the show-stoppers are the bench-clearing brawls that ensue after a batter is hit by a pitch. The World Wrestling Federation, an entertainment company built on payback and pectorals, has become so popular that it’s now gone public, offering stock on the NASDAQ. Hulk Hogan and The Rock are household names. Minnesota even went so far as to elect a professional wrestler, Jesse “The Body” Ventura, to its highest office!

And then there’s daytime TV. We regularly pause from channel-surfing to watch the shouting match du jour on the Jerry Springer show. If that’s not on, there’s always a soap opera – perhaps the epitome of glorified retribution.

It’s obvious from the Nielsen ratings that most of us like that sort of thing. We have a penchant for payback. It’s in our nature. That’s further evidenced by a study conducted by *American Demographics* magazine: 43 percent of respondents to a large survey indicated that if someone hurt a loved one, they would try to hurt them back. Another 41 percent said they weren’t sure how they’d react. *That leaves only 16 percent responding that they’re confident that they would not retaliate.*³⁸

How about you? When the opportunity to retaliate comes your way, do you respond like everyone else? You might not ram any cars, but do you take actions that look just the same to God? Do you repay and eye for an eye, or turn the other cheek?

If you're more of an "eye-for-an-eye" guy (or gal), consider taking a moment to sit on the mountainside. Find a flat surface and get comfortable. Judge Jesus has something to say about Granny's road rage – and our own.

The Sage on Road Rage

Retaliation is part of our fallen condition and it's continually reinforced by our environment. As a result, it's a potent temptation – and the same temptation that many were struggling with in Jesus' day.

Jesus knew that. He knew what was in their hearts. He knew their trials. He knew their history – a saga of hostile takeovers, cultural desecration and ethnic cleansing. Not all the persecuted wallowed quietly in their despair, though. Many Israelite "zealots" actively sought to avenge the oppression of their people. They waited and they planned. And when an opportunity presented itself, they would run their Caddies over as many Roman soldiers as possible.

To hear a zealot tell it, revenge would be bloody and sweet. God would work through the sword to deliver His people as He had in the past. God had done it that way with the Judges. He had done it that way through King Saul and King David. Truly, those with the courage to fight for Israel's freedom would partake in this distinguished tradition, earning the title "sons of God."

And then with one sentence in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus turned that thinking on its head. Out of His mouth did not come "blessed are the sword shakers" or "blessed are the land takers" or "blessed are the car breakers." He taught "blessed are the peacemakers." It is *they* who will be called "sons of God."

Can you hear the collective gasp of the revolutionaries? Barabbus probably headed for the parking lot early. He gave Granny a high-five along the way. Back inside the stadium, Jesus was busy elaborating on His principle:

You have heard it said, 'Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.'
But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also ... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:38-39, 44-45).

The seventh Beatitude is a lesson for those who are tempted to avenge an offense, both then and now. Those who are worthy of being called "sons of God" are not those who retaliate, but those who live peaceably with one another. A counterstrike is not God's answer. Love and forgiveness is.

It's an uncomfortable lesson for those of us who are more gifted in conflict escalation than conflict resolution. But regardless, Jesus says put down your sword. Respect God's yield sign. Turn the wheel and go search for another parking spot.

Payback While Earning a Paycheck

And if you think that's a tough lesson to follow at the mall, try it at work. In no place is it easier or more tempting to retaliate. Think about it. If you wanted to get even with somebody at work – and do it covertly – would that be difficult for you? Probably not. It might take a little creativity and some planning, but anybody can pull it off. That's because we work in environments where almost everybody is vulnerable to everybody else. On the job, revenge isn't just sweet, it's *available*.

Consequently, it's widespread. A few years ago, I stumbled across a now-defunct web site that served as a bulletin board for people to regale others with their tales of getting even in the workplace. The public commentary was voluminous. A few of the posted escapades amounted to mere pranks. Most, though, were both costly and depraved. In addition to the time-honored techniques of pulling fire alarms and vandalizing cars, the more imaginative vigilante justice these days includes:

- Waving powerful magnets near computers, thereby erasing all of the memory
- Changing someone's computer screen to black characters and black icons on a black background (how long did it take the victim to diagnose *that*

- problem?)
- Throwing back miniscule tips at customers as they exited a restaurant
 - Dialing a 900 number from a co-worker's phone after work hours and then leaving the phone off the hook all night (\$8.95 a minute; must be at least 18 to call)
 - Giving sensitive information on pricing to a competitor
 - Submitting subscription cards with a co-worker's name and address to hundreds of magazines
 - Sending a package of "returned" lingerie to a male co-worker's house with a good-bye note from a fictional mistress – and sending the package by taxi at a time when only his wife was home to receive it!

There were dozens more on the site, but you get the idea. If you want to get back at somebody on the job, there are countless options at your disposal. Expensive options. Destructive options. Even quick verbal options – something like repaying insult for insult. The only question is whether you'll exercise any of them.

For many of us, it's hard not to. At the emotional moment of decision, we have two powerful forces pushing us toward reprisal. First, there's our *desire* to strike back, courtesy of our sinful nature and our cultural conditioning. Something inside of us just makes us want to do it. Then, as we've just seen, there's the abundant *opportunity* to strike back, courtesy of our mutual vulnerability in the workplace.

Desire times opportunity. It's a lethal formula whose product is the temptation to retaliate.

Remember, temptation isn't sin. Hebrews 4:15 says that even our sinless Savior experienced temptation: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin." But giving in to that temptation *is* sin. So to avoid acting on our temptation to retaliate, we need to attack temptation on both the desire and the opportunity fronts. Let's examine "opportunity" first, since that's the easier one.

Without opportunity, we cannot act in vengeance. The workplace misdemeanors listed above would not have occurred without an open door to perform them. A person leaves her

cubical unguarded. Exiting customers hang around the restaurant for a few minutes after leaving a mere fifty cents on the table. Files containing a colleague's work remain in public directories. It's almost too easy.

The solution here is to *run*. At the moment of temptation, run from the situation immediately. The longer you linger as opportunity knocks, the more likely you are to open the door. So run as far and as fast as you can away from that door.

The clearest biblical example is a familiar one from its first book. A young man, sold into slavery by his brothers, was being propositioned by an Egyptian official's wife. The opportunity was practically screaming at him to submit. It was a temptation. But Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife and in doing so, avoided acting on that temptation.

In the same way, when you're presented with the opportunity to get even with a co-worker (or anyone for that matter), *run*. Do whatever it takes. If the opportunity is zero, temptation will be zero (you math jocks can verify that using the formula).

From *desire*, though, we can't run because no matter where we run, there we are! Still desirous. Still craving payback. Still seeking to return and await an opportunity. Running from temptation is an important first step, but it may not be enough since we could end up running right back. Granny could have driven away from her golden opportunity, but after a few simmering laps, she might have returned to squash the Vette anyway.

How do you prevent this? How do you extinguish a flaming desire to get even? What could Granny do while searching for another spot?

The same thing that you and I could do after we've initially run from a tempting situation. We can work to forgive the offender. To give up the right to be mad at him. To completely clear his slate. To drop the matter altogether. "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you," Jesus said to the astonished crowd (Matthew 6:14). This is the path to being a "peacemaker" – the path to being a son of God.

And as you probably know, it's also one of the toughest paths you'll ever have to walk. Jesus knew that about us too. Maybe

that's why He instructed us to "pray for those who persecute you." Have you ever tried that? It's painful at first, but if you can persevere through it, it becomes a surprisingly liberating experience. It drains our desire to strike back since it's virtually impossible to remain mad at someone for whom you are praying. That opens a different door – the door to pardon – and double-locks the door to payback.

Trust me on this one. Try this approach the next time you feel the pull of temptation. I know, you don't even want to think about your persecutor, much less pray for this person, but try it anyway. Just once. The only thing you have to lose is your anger, your hatred, and your desire to get revenge.

We can summarize all of this with another equation, one derived by none other than the Creator of mathematics Himself. Run + pray + work to forgive. It's a powerful formula that may keep both your desire and opportunities under control. And when you've mastered that math problem, you'll find that the sum is zero percent temptation, 100 percent "son of God."

Rewinding *The Revenge of the Granny*

"In case you forgot, Granny, that's what it's like to be young and fast!" Having enjoyed a laugh, he and the other choir boy proceeded to the mall entrance.

Granny wasn't happy about it, that's for sure. Thoughts of turning that Vette into an accordion danced through her head. She had the money to do it with impunity. But then she thought better of it. "Blessed are the peacemakers" she recalled from her Bible study. Blessed are those who can overlook an offense, who can forgive, who can choose the path of reconciliation over retaliation. She continued down the row, silently praying that the boys would come to know Jesus and that their lives would be transformed.

Okay, that ending isn't nearly as exciting, right? No crunching metal? No piercing one-liners? It would never play in Hollywood. It would never air on daytime television. And if I had told the story that way to my friends, I suspect that most of them would have wondered why I was wasting their time. It's a disappointing ending.

...except to God.



For Reflection and Discussion

1. We live in an eye for an eye world. That's the norm. The question you might want to ask yourself, then, is: "Am I normal?" Are you like so many others else when it comes to retaliation, or are you more like Jesus?

You can better gauge this by looking at your track record. Write down in the space below the last time you really forgave someone despite a strong temptation to retaliate? Was it recently, or has it been quite awhile? If it's the latter, that might be a red flag.

2. How do you normally approach conflict? Do you tend to avoid it, just sweeping it under the rug to preserve the relationship? Do you tend to aggressively confront the person or persons who have wronged you? Do you take a more cooperative approach, seeking the other side's ideas and trying to mediate a solution that meets everyone's interests? Discuss with your group the ideal conflict resolution process that God wants us to adopt to represent Him well. How can we be effective, consistent peacemakers?

3. Think about the formula described in the chapter:

$$\text{Desire} \times \text{Opportunity} = \text{Temptation}$$

To make temptation zero, we must make either desire or opportunity zero. Select an area of your life where you're most tempted to do something you ought not do, and discuss with your group how you could address either the "desire" to do it, the "opportunity" to do it, or both.

Digging Deeper

To go further with your study of this topic, consider these freely-available book chapters from the *Christianity 9 to 5* online library:



[Time Honored Advice to Coping with Your Boss](#)

Thomas a Kempis, The Imitation of Christ

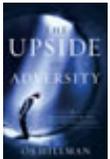
“The only reason why criticism cuts you to the heart is that you are still ruled by your old nature and take more notice of men than you should.” In the fifteenth century, theologians didn't mince words or worry about people's self-esteem. They just told it like it is.



[The Hardest Prayer of All: Praying for Our Enemies](#)

G.D. Watson, Soul Food

Is there someone at work who's simply driving you crazy? Maybe someone challenging you or even undermining you at every turn? This nineteenth century classic offers some profound insight into how to pray for our enemies.



[Adversity: How God Shapes a Leader](#)

Os Hillman, The Upside of Adversity

If you're experiencing significant adversity in your life, there may be an “upside.” According to Hillman, perhaps God has selected you to embark on the journey of a lifetime, a journey traveled by Biblical characters like Job and Joseph, Daniel and Paul—people who have undergone adversity to emerge with stronger character and enlarged leadership ability.



[Gutting Gossip: How to Kill the Poison Grapevine at Work](#)

Michael Zigarelli, *Christianity 9 to 5*

Workplace gossip is everywhere. So what's a Christian to do? This chapter explains what gossip is, why it's so pervasive, and most importantly, what a person can do to diplomatically extinguish it.

OBSTACLE 8

People-Pleasing

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven.

Matthew 5:10-12



What if the story went something like this?

Saul wasn't exactly the kind of guy you'd invite to your weekly Bible study. If you did, it might be your last. But one day on the road to Damascus he saw the light and did a complete 180, becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. He went from terrorist to activist practically overnight. His new mission: Convert the Gentiles.

To increase his chances of success, he started by adopting the Greek name Paul. Then one of his first stops was Galatia – lots of theological confusion there. So Paul took a crack at setting them straight.

Some in Galatia thought that they had to be circumcised to be right with God. Some thought they had to keep the whole Law to gain His favor. Many thought they had to do both. Still others said it was neither. And to make matters worse, these four Galatian camps were real entrenched in their positions.

That worried Paul. If he came down too firmly on one side or the other, he'd offend some people. But God commanded Paul to give them the truth, so he tabled his concerns about friendship and sided with the far left camp, preaching that salvation was by grace through faith alone. No need to cut yourself. No need to be slaves to the law. It can only condemn you anyway.

Paul's poll numbers immediately plummeted. His critics pounced on him during the next round of Sunday talk shows, claiming that Paul was preaching a gospel of cheap grace. Worse yet, he was turning Christianity into a catalyst for sin. "The guy," one said on CNN, "flunked out of the Jerusalem church and now he's spewing his heresy to whoever will listen!"

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I knew it, Paul thought. I wanted so badly to make a good impression, but now I've blown it. Maybe it's not too late.

So Paul got inclusive. “Actually, guys, you might be right,” he backpedaled. “There’s room for all of us under God’s big tent. Maybe you can work your way into heaven and maybe you can’t. Only God knows for sure.” After that, they all liked Paul and respected his willingness to tolerate different viewpoints.

Some time later, Paul visited the city of Thessalonica, a big government town that would put Washington, D.C., to shame. These folks went so far as to erect a statue and a temple in honor of Julius Caesar. They even also worshipped someone named Zeus, whom they called the father of all the gods. Zeus had his own statue down the road in Olympia.

Anyway, Paul along with his sidekicks Silas and Timothy, surmised that this too was fertile ground for evangelism. So Paul preached in the synagogue on three consecutive Sabbaths, spreading the good news of the suffering Messiah and His resurrection.

But the Thessalonians built no statue in Paul’s honor. Instead, they wanted to bury him beneath one. *Not again!* Paul lamented. *I really wanted these people to like me.* So he retracted his story on the fourth Sabbath. “What I meant to say,” he clarified, “is that Jesus is really *Zeus’* son. And you know that old adage, ‘Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar’? Well, *Jesus is the One who coined it!* Doesn’t get any more pro-government than that, huh folks?”

Unfortunately for Paul, that didn’t get him off the hook. The Thessalonians threatened him with treason, since he was still suggesting that they bow down before someone other than Caesar. “No need to do that!” the alarmed apostle responded, anxious to avoid jail. “You guys are probably right. That Damascus Road thing was probably just a hallucination on my part. Bad wine, I guess. I’ll be on my way now.” After that, they all liked Paul and he promised to write them soon.

Eventually, Paul needed some respite from the rough rhetoric, so he traveled to Corinth, the Las Vegas of the Greek world. Gambling, legalized prostitution, Budweiser on tap everywhere – these people knew how to party. Once there, though, Paul couldn’t contain himself from preaching, and, to his surprise, some of the high rollers actually bet his message was right. So

Paul hung out in Corinth for an entire year and a half.

After he left, though, Paul was told that his new Corinthian brothers and sisters had become a bit full of themselves. Adopting the name *spirit-people*, they placed themselves somewhere below God but above men. And with this new privileged status, they went back to their old ways of sexual deviance. “Everything is permissible for us,” they reasoned, “as it is for other spirit-people.”

To underscore this belief, they even bragged about their lenience with a church member who was sleeping with his stepmother! Predictably, some in their group eventually began taking swipes at Paul himself, calling him arrogant, a wimp, and a bully.

What’s a preacher to do? Paul’s ministry of making friends was in serious jeopardy once again. Yes, the Corinthian believers were twisting the gospel. Yes, they were again indistinguishable from their pagan neighbors. But hey, this was the 50s. *Perhaps I should get with the times*, Paul thought to himself. *People should feel free to do their own thing*. So he sent them an enthusiastic letter telling them to keep up the good work. After that, they all liked Paul very much.

Similar story in Rome, except this time Paul wrote them before visiting, taking it from the top with his theology. Some in the government, though, were outraged by Paul’s message, so upon his arrival they threatened to throw him in jail and kill him. Paul did a quick cost-benefit analysis and decided to rip up the letter before hundreds of people – told them it was a forgery. Then he said good-bye to his Roman friends and sailed to the coast of Spain where he retired, kept quiet about his faith, and met lots more people who liked him very much.

People-Pleasing Versus God-Pleasing

What if the story went something like that? What if Paul elected to be a people-pleaser rather than a God-pleaser? What if his primary concerns as a witness were getting along with people, not offending anyone, and minimizing confrontation? What if he had tempered his message – God’s message – so that he could avoid persecution?

Well, for starters, God probably would have raised up someone

else to write the Epistles. Paul would be an obscure Biblical footnote, having lived a life of little eternal impact. On a personal level as well, Paul's development as a Christian would probably have been unimpressive. As we'll see in this chapter, persecution has a way of fast-tracking our sanctification. People-pleasing reverses it.

Fortunately, though, like so many in the Bible, Paul chose to be a God-pleaser. His first and only allegiance was to Jesus Christ. He says this most notably, I think, in his letter to the Galatians: "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? ... If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

You see, for Paul it's one way or the other. We choose whether God's evaluation or man's evaluation comes first. We can't have it both ways: Serving Jesus Christ means putting Him first and not worrying about what people think of that.

Often, that will win you friends and build relationships as you imitate Jesus by serving others. Sometimes, though, in a world increasingly hostile to the truth, it will lead to some form of persecution. Indeed, for his God-pleasing approach, Paul made lots of beloved friends, but he was also vilified in Galatia, run out of Thessalonica, ridiculed at Corinth, and jailed and – we think – ultimately killed in Rome.

He could have avoided all of that had he been a people-pleaser. Many of us know this from personal experience: *People-pleasing prevents persecution*. God-pleasing often leads to it. So, fearing persecution, we sometimes choose the former over the latter.

But one thing many Christians don't seem to embrace is that, as difficult as it is, persecution may be part of God's design for their lives. In fact, in our moments of persecution, we are called "blessed," according to the One Paul sought to please. "Blessed are those persecuted for righteousness sake," Jesus assures us, "for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 5:10).

Persecution? A Blessing?

It sounds a little convoluted – almost like a transparent sales pitch that tries to turn a liability into an asset.

“Sure this beauty doesn’t have air conditioning,” says the user-car dealer, “but think of the gas money you’ll save as a result!”

“It’s okay that you failed the exam,” says the teacher. “We *learn* by failing.”

“I know liver tastes bad,” says your mother, “but it’s *good for you*.”

For many of us, even the slightest form of “persecution” is worse than liver. And when we’re under attack, it’s hard to see how this could possibly be “good for us.” Since no one wants to be mistreated and since Jesus offered seven less painful avenues to blessedness before he ever got to persecution, you may find yourself tempted to write off the value of persecution, jump to the next chapter, and close out this study.

If that’s the case, please consider two brief points before you go. First, as with Paul (and Noah and David and Isaiah and Daniel and John the Baptist and Jesus and the apostles and countless believers over the past two thousand years), we often encounter persecution by *God’s design*. That is, God may intend for certain trials to visit us.

If I sound a bit like that used-car salesman, let me defer to my Boss’s policy manual.

Scripture tells us that committed Christians will run into resistance. John, for example, states plainly, “Don’t be surprised, my friends, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13). *Hates you*. That’s strong language and it’s an echo of his gospel where he quotes Jesus as saying, “If you belonged to this world, the world would love you as its own; but because you do not belong to the world ... the world hates you” (John 15:19).

Hates you. Even stronger language is the Greek word that underlies Jesus’ prophecy: *miseo*. The word connotes an active hatred – that is, a hatred that is not content to remain inside of a person. It is a hatred that culminates in external action, namely persecution. It’s no wonder, then, that Jesus continues His warning with: “Remember the words I said to you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too” (John 15:20).

His point is hard to miss: When you openly and intentionally follow in My footsteps, you *will* experience persecution. It’s a

restatement of what He had already taught them: People will “insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me” (Matthew 5:11). So expect it. Brace yourself for it. “Don’t be surprised” by it. Persecution in some form or another is a thermometer of Christian commitment.

It’s also a thermostat. This is point two. Persecution is a method God uses to transform us from lukewarm to red-hot followers. Here’s where the blessings from Matthew 5:10-11 come in. You might ask, “How is it a blessing when someone is gossiping about me? How is it a blessing when my job is threatened because of my faith? Why doesn’t God instead bless me by FedExing a lightning bolt to this atheist who’s using me as a verbal punching bag?” Perhaps because such trials have the capacity to make us stronger, to ratchet up our commitment, to develop our Christian character.

Again from that same policy manual, a well-worn passage on this point for Christians in the line of fire is James 1:2-4. In his typical cut-to-the-chase fashion, James doesn’t waste a second in tackling one of the toughest of theological issues. He writes, regarding persecution:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking in anything.

...just like the One we follow was not lacking in anything. James’ message is that persecution is an expressway to sanctification. That’s how he can have the audacity to call our trials “pure joy.” Persecution thickens our skin – over time, it may even armor-plate it. It bolsters our ability to handle future assaults. We develop “perseverance,” James says – an ability to endure opposition and trust in God as Jesus did. We reach that elusive next level of “maturity and completion” that would probably have remained only a lofty goal had we not been persecuted. That’s how persecution can be a blessing.

What all this means, then, is that when someone wrongs you because of your faith, you should try to take heart. Nothing sanctifies you more quickly. See persecution for what it is – part of God’s design, part of His plan to reinforce us. There’s no need to run from it. There’s no need to become a people-pleaser to avoid it. There’s no need to retaliate against people or

despise those who are harassing you. In fact, you may even find some satisfying humor in their behavior: people who mock or disrespect you because of your beliefs are unwittingly doing God's work! Without knowing it, they're operating as God's agents to strengthen and mature those who love Him. How's that for God turning the tables?

I'm not sure I'd share that little nugget with your oppressor, but in the midst of persecution, it sure is a comforting irony, don't you think?

The Pressure to be a People-Pleaser in the Workplace

Then there's the workplace. Elsewhere, we may be able to overcome our fear of persecution and make the transition from people-pleaser to God-pleaser. But as most 9-to-5ers know, the secular workplace presents a unique challenge. There we confront built-in headwinds every day – significant *job consequences* and *social consequences* – that continually threaten to blow us back to a people-pleasing mind set. Allow me two brief stories to illustrate this point.

Ken Roberts was a fifth-grade school teacher at Berkley Gardens Elementary School in Denver. As part of his reading curriculum, Ken assigned his students to read silently at their desks for fifteen minutes per day. The students could choose their own reading material, whether from home, from the school library, or from Ken's personal classroom library.

To set an example for the students, Ken also read silently during this reading period, frequently choosing to read the Bible he kept on his desk. Ken never read the Bible aloud to the students, nor did he ever proselytize to them in any way. He simply wanted to tap into God's Word in his free moments on the job.

In 1986, Principal Kathleen Magadan twice noticed Ken at his desk with Bible in hand. On both occasions, she admonished him to cease from this subversive activity. He could bring his Bible to work, but it was to remain in his desk during the *entire* school day. No exceptions.

Ken complied, but the tension didn't end there. The next year, after a parent-teacher open house, a parent complained to Principal Magadan that there were two Christian-oriented

books among the 239 books in Ken's classroom library. The principal promptly ordered Ken to remove them. Again Ken complied but asked to discuss the matter further at a later date. A few weeks and a few pleas down the road, Ken's appeal met with a restatement of the order – this time in writing: "Failure to comply with this directive will be considered insubordination and could result in disciplinary action."

Not exactly a veiled threat. This was quite explicit: Remove the books and don't read the Bible at your desk or we'll use more persuasive means to correct this problem.

Could the principal get away with that? Could she go so far as to prohibit Ken from reading scripture silently at his desk? These days, it shouldn't be surprising that a court of law said "yes." In the case of *Ken Roberts v. Kathleen Magadan*, this was the court's conclusion: "The school district acted for the valid purpose of preventing (Ken Roberts) from promoting Christianity in a public school."³⁹

As Ken learned, overt expressions of faith – even innocuous ones like his – can have significant job consequences (e.g., effects on pay, promotion, scheduling, job security, relations with your boss). And it's not that rare. In my line of work, I regularly hear about cases like this one and I've used many of them as examples in my classroom.

Before long, though, I found myself actually living one myself!

Early in my academic life, and in response to what I thought was God's will for my career, I made an abrupt shift from doing mainstream management research (i.e., performing traditional studies and publishing the results in obscure but erudite journals) to doing Bible-based management research (i.e., researching God's Word for His guidance on workplace issues and publishing the results in book form). And I was struck by how things can fall into place when you say "yes" to God. Publishers were responding enthusiastically. Radio shows were calling. Speaking opportunities opened up. Newspaper columnists visited my office. It was, to say the least, an exciting time for me.

A colleague of mine – let's call her Lisa – was excited too: excited at the potential to get rid of me!

I was oblivious to Lisa's behind-the-scenes activities until a

friend from the next office stopped by and closed my door. “You need to know something,” she said to this naïve, untenured father of three. “Someone very influential is going door-to-door telling people to write negative letters when you come up for tenure.”

Those of you in the teaching profession know what was at stake here. When someone does not receive tenure, he is fired. Gone. Pink slipped. Yesterday’s news. It’s a bizarre (and nerve-racking) all-or-nothing moment where one is either given lifetime job security or put out onto the street. Lisa, therefore, was doing something that would not only short-circuit my career, but could threaten the well-being of my family too.

I asked my friend, who had herself been visited by my nemesis, what Lisa’s concern was. The response caught me off-guard: I had become Ken Roberts!

“Mike is doing research that clearly is not appropriate for a business school,” Lisa claimed. “Christianity has no place in our curriculum, in our research program, or in the business world.”

I had a right to be angry, I thought. I had a right to protest to the dean. And I had a right to confront Lisa about this. But fortunately, God is wiser and conferred on me an inner peace about the situation. By the time my friend had finished debriefing me about this anonymous, “very influential” person’s activities, I didn’t even want to know the assailant’s name. I simply thanked my friend for her concern and told her not to worry about it.

A year later, the tenure decision went my way. The damage was done, though. Lisa, although unsuccessful in exterminating this pest, had sufficiently poisoned the environment so that several of my colleagues now considered me eccentric. Many had lost respect for me. Some wondered aloud (to others) why someone with real potential would give it all up for that “anti-intellectual religious stuff.” On the tougher side, a few repeatedly made jokes about my work and two colleagues even stopped talking to me altogether. It had indeed become a more exciting time than I’d bargained for!

Now here’s the point of these illustrations. Persecution comes to workplace Christians and it comes in many varieties. And on the job, it’s seldom without consequence. In both my case and Ken Roberts’s case, there were, first of all, potential *job*

consequences accompanying our expressions of faith. We could have easily met on the unemployment line had we lived in the same state. Beyond that, my particular case included significant *social consequences* as well. When people know that you are a follower of Jesus Christ – and that you take that seriously – some may go out of their way to harm you. It’s a two-thousand year-old tradition. And let me tell you firsthand that it makes for a real uncomfortable situation at work. Each time I walked past someone who was no longer speaking to me, it bothered me. Each time my former friends neglected to invite me to lunch with them, it annoyed me. Each time I had reached some milestone to virtually no congratulations from my peers, it frustrated me.

Perhaps you’ve felt similar discomfort. We all want to be liked, accepted and respected by those around us in the workplace – both for job-related and social reasons. So one of the worst things that can happen to us, we reason, is to stand out as different and to risk the mistreatment at the hands of our boss or our peers. *And it is precisely this fear of persecution that leads us to be people-pleasers rather than God-pleasers in the workplace.*

Does that resonate with you? Have you felt the extraordinary pull toward pleasing people in your work environment? If you want to really understand how to overcome this, dig a little deeper with me on this point.

What Workplace Researchers Have Learned About People-Pleasing

Interestingly, organizational psychologists have investigated our tendency toward people-pleasing, reaching conclusions that are helpful to workplace Christians. Of course, these Ph.D.’s don’t use the term theological “people-pleasing.” Instead, the preferred vernacular is *impression management*: “the behaviors individuals employ to protect their self-image and influence the way they are perceived by significant others.”⁴⁰ When you strip away the jargon and the complex sentence structures, though, it’s the same thing.

The best available research on impression management nicely supplements our common sense on the matter. Although not everyone does this, most of us throughout our careers instinctively try to influence (1) how much people like us and

(2) how much they will perceive that we are similar to them. You've played this game to some extent, haven't you? We do things like agree with the people even though we don't really agree with them, do favors for higher-ups that go well-beyond what we want to do for them, subtly flatter people, smile when we don't feel like it, use false modesty and so on. It's our public face, and it's blemish-free.

Additionally, we want our co-workers to think that we fit in well here – that we're very much like they are. Having others perceive us as similar to them is one of the most effective ways to gain their friendship. (By the way, for those of you who like scientific evidence, this is one of the most consistent findings in the impression management literature.) If we come off as having similar tastes, similar attitudes, and similar worldviews, people will like us more. That outcome is naturally attractive to us. So whether we're conscious of it or not, we tend to do things to give others the impression that we are very much like they are. In doing so, we gain friends and sidestep some of the *social consequences* of being “different.”

According to the research, we also sidestep the *job consequences* by managing our boss's impression of us. These studies tell us that something very valuable accrues to people who skillfully navigate the impression management game: They will likely receive better performance evaluations. There's a prize for those who play ball here! If we say and do things that signal to the boss that we are similar to him and that we fit the model of the ideal employee, the research shows that we can affect things like the amount of work he gives us, the type of assignments he gives us, the budget he allots for our work, and his willingness to accommodate our schedule.

Not enough goodies for you? Try some of this candy: If you manage your boss's perceptions well, when your performance review rolls around, there's a tendency for your boss to selectively recall your positive work behaviors while disregarding the things you didn't do so well. No wonder we're so tempted to play this game. We can possibly affect pay and promotion decisions through people-pleasing!

So impression management can be a powerful tool for anyone trying to get ahead. But stop and think for a moment what that may imply about the person who *refuses* to play that game – the one who *refuses* to be a people-pleaser. In particular, what happens when you step out of the mainstream in a secular

workplace by admitting that your faith is important to you and that it affects the decisions you make, the way you work, and all your priorities in life?

That might seem pretty benign on the surface. In many work environments, though, it's anything but. Once you "rebel" in this way, you've communicated that you are not similar to everyone else – everyone who keeps faith issues private and never talks about them in the workplace. As a result, the impression management effects operate in reverse.

That doesn't mean that you'll have no friends or that the boss will hate you, only that you're more likely to run into those adverse job and social consequences described in the two cases earlier. In some workplaces, you may even experience *significant* persecution, anything from missing promotion to the business equivalent of capital punishment: being fired.

Such is the nature of living as a God-pleaser. It's risky and it always has been.

In the workplace, then, we have to make what seems to be a hard choice. But take it from someone who's been there: It's not really that hard a choice to make or to stick with. If you recognize and consciously resist the pressures to please people at the expense of pleasing God, and if you remember that persecution can be a blessing, you will have overcome a mountainous obstacle to doing your job as Jesus would do it.

Unwrapping God's Gift

Let's come back full circle to that independent contractor, Paul. What if, as he roved from job site to job site, he decided to avoid persecution by adopting a people-pleasing mind-set? What if he sold out the truth in order to duck confrontation, jail time, and beatings? (*And what if we did the same?*)

For one thing, those hearing to Paul's words would have suffered, having been denied access to the good news. None of them would have been able to tap the power of the gospel because Paul was too preoccupied with his image to plug them in. (*Some of the people around us every day at work might never hear the truth.*)

For another, Paul the people-pleaser would have lost out on

something too – not his salvation, but his sanctification. By avoiding persecution, Paul would have deprived himself of God’s continuing work in him through the Holy Spirit. His spiritual maturity would have stalled at Damascus. (*Have you checked your engine lately?*)

But Paul rejected people-pleasing, choosing instead to risk persecution. His experience and his words underscore two lessons covered in this chapter. First, Paul says, persecution is *inevitable* for the committed Christian: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Anticipate it. It’s an indicator that your eyes really are fixed on Christ.

Second, persecution can be a blessing because it grows our character: “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3).

If this latter verse is old terrain for you, as it is for many believers, try not to let your familiarity dilute its strength. Paul, as a God-pleaser, reminds us of both James’s insight and of what Jesus taught on the Mount decades earlier: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake ... Blessed are you when people ... persecute you ... because of me” (Matthew 5:10-11). You will, as a result, become stronger, more resistant to the world’s temptations, more like the Master.

Notice one other thing about Romans 5:3, if you would – something you may never have thought of before. The sequence begins with suffering and ends with hope. Does that ring a bell? Actually, it almost amounts to plagiarism (but I’m sure the original Author didn’t mind). You see, this is the exact journey that Jesus maps out at the end of the Beatitudes. Matthew 5:10-11 talks of our suffering (persecution) and verse 12 confers the hope: “Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven.”

Tell me something. Is it just by coincidence that plagiarizer Paul says we are to “rejoice” in our sufferings? Probably not. He’s echoing Jesus’ lesson that we will enjoy a better life if we can see our circumstances as God sees them.

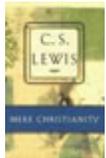
And in many ways, that notion captures a primary purpose of the Beatitudes. God has gift-wrapped for you a better life. All you have to do is open it. He says from the outset that your

Discuss your findings with your group and talk about what we can do to be God-pleasers more than we are people-pleasers.



Digging Deeper

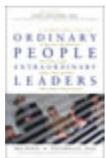
To go further with your study of this topic, consider these freely-available book chapters from the *Christianity 9 to 5* online library:



[Pride: The Great Sin](#)

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

A “spiritual cancer,” “the complete anti-God state of mind,” and “the chief cause of misery in every nation and in every family since the world began.” These are just a few of the descriptors that C.S. Lewis uses to describe our pride. Here is his penetrating chapter on “The Great Sin” from his classic, *Mere Christianity*.



[The Primary Obstacles to Christian Leadership ... And How You Can Overcome Them](#)

Michael Zigarelli, Ordinary People Extraordinary Leaders

What’s preventing you from more God-honoring leadership? And what can you do to make real progress to overcome these impediments? Based on a study of over 300 Christian leaders and managers, the author presents both the major obstacles and the primary pathways to authentic, consistent Christian leadership.

Your Retirement Dinner



You may not recognize the author's name, but you'll surely recognize the phrase he coined. Long ago, Charles Sheldon penned a story about a fictitious congregation that was challenged by its pastor to ask, in the face of every situation, "What would Jesus do?" They took him up on the challenge and experienced remarkable and exciting changes in their lives.

Now, a century later, Sheldon's book, *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* remains on Christian best-seller lists. More than that, as most readers of Christian books know, variations on Sheldon's question are published every year. Songwriters also adopt the theme and climb the pop charts on its insight. Bible study curricula use the framing as their centerpiece. Sermon series on the topic are too prevalent to count. And in perhaps the best evidence of the question's capacity to penetrate hearts, we see a growing number of teenagers wearing *WWJD* bracelets as reminders of what to consider in the heat of the moment. Some teens have even gone so far as to get a *WWJD* tattoo!

Clearly, Sheldon articulated a timeless phrase. He captured the essence of our calling with four words – with one question. Regardless of one's generation, for those who desire to be like Jesus, answering "*WWJD?*" is an essential habit. And in this study, I've made the assumptions that the Beatitudes provide a timeless answer to that question. What would Jesus do in today's workplace? He would live by the Beatitudes.

There is a second habit, though. It won't ever become a tattoo or a bumper sticker or a song, but it's a habit that is, for the serious Christian, no less important than the first. After we ask, "What Jesus would do?" our calling is then to put our answer into practice – that is, to *do what Jesus would do*. Not exactly an easy task because, as we've said throughout this study, in most cases to *do what Jesus would do* will require overcoming something that stands in your way. In your work life, it could be a golden calf: pride, career success, big bucks, popularity, people-pleasing. Or the primary obstacle for you could be a despised job. Some days it could be a misconception

NOTES

about meekness or rights. It could be compassion fatigue, ingratitude or a penchant for payback. Whatever it is, every challenge to living your faith in the workplace calls for you to do more than look at a bracelet and ask a question. God wants you to move from asking to doing – to identify the major obstacles that stand between your current work life and His will for your work life – and to co-labor with Him to defeat those obstacles one day at a time.

Okay, I'll be the first to say it: *DWJWD* will never make it in the world of wrist-fashion (notwithstanding its chic symmetry). It does remind us, though, of how easy it is to stall after the asking stage. And when we do stall, it's a real tragedy since our *behavior* is our best witness, not our knowledge of right and wrong or our impressive rhetoric. "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourself. Do what it says" (James 1:22). This is a verse that many learned way back in Sunday school for this very reason. It's bedrock. It's foundational. Being Christlike means *being* like Christ. That's how others will measure the value of our faith.

Think of it this way. If I were to inquire with your co-workers or your neighbors about your Christian character, few if any of them would point to your ability to answer theological questions or your brilliant arguments in defense of the gospel. No, they'd more likely cite your day-to-day actions, your behavior, your choices, or your attitude. Did you walk that lofty talk or did they find the hypocrisy that many of them were expecting to find all along?

You see, we have to follow through – to *DWJWD*. To help you with that transition from asking to doing, then, allow me to make one general observation about overcoming whatever obstacles stand in your way.

Throughout this study, you've probably deduced something striking about those obstacles to living your faith at work: The vast majority of them are *internal issues*. That is, they reside inside of us. Indeed, some obstacles are external – a function of circumstances (like a lousy job, an oppressive boss or a hostile work culture). But look at the others we've covered – things like pride, greed, aggressiveness, a rights-focused mind-set, fatigue, ingratitude, revenge, and the desire to please people. They're internal. And because they're internal, I have some good news to report: You can start addressing these obstacles this very day – *unilaterally*. Nothing else in your work life has to change

first. You don't have to quit your job, you don't have to change your circumstances and you don't have to pack your bags and go to seminary. Instead, the enduring, Biblically-based solution is to change your basic orientation to the work you do, to the people around you on the job, and to your entire career. Address the internal problems by co-laboring with God to change the way you think, to re-evaluate and adjust your priorities, to align your view of *why you work* and *what matters at work* to match God's view.

This is one of the most profound teachings in the New Testament. It genuinely has the power to change your life. Paul, I think, summarizes it best in his classic verse: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

The renewing of your mind. It's an internal solution to internal obstacles. The most critical battle is not external to you. It's not beyond your control. It doesn't require anyone else to change first. If you want to be more like Jesus in your job and everywhere else, the first battle is within. So train yourself to engage this battle everyday. Learn what you can about the "spiritual disciplines" – God's training program for His disciples – and then make them central to your lifestyle. This is at the core of how we become and remain committed Christians.

Please don't let that just splash off your back. Take a moment, if you would, to reflect on what victory in this area really means. It's pretty extraordinary. Think about just how much more meaningful your work will be once you have a renewed mind-set toward that work. Think about how much more you'll enjoy your work and your life. And think about how many lives you'll impact – how much more of a difference you can make for the things that matter most.

In fact, to see these likely outcomes more clearly, take these last few minutes to return full circle to where our journey began in this study. Remember the room? Remember the occasion, your retirement dinner? Remember the underdressed party-crasher holding the microphone? Imagine for a moment that you actually took his advice today – that you sought to win this internal battle and to adopt His definition of what matters most on the job. Imagine that you decided to pursue "success" only in the eyes of God throughout your career. Decades after this pivotal day of decision, what would that Man with the microphone say? Perhaps something like this?



“I want to tell you what this person did on the job that I think *really mattered*. Years ago, he turned everything around by making a decision – the decision to dedicate all of his work to My Father. Everything he did. Every project he undertook; every conversation he had; everything he produced; every person he served. *Everything*. Did you ever wonder why his work ethic has become legendary around here? Ever wonder how he was able to pursue even the little stuff with such energy? It’s because he’s what I’d call ‘poor in spirit,’ working with all of his heart as working for the Lord, not for men. Let me tell you, *that matters*.

“His decision also led him to be gentle with people – co-workers, employees, customers, suppliers – everyone. I’ll be honest with you, it wasn’t really in his nature, but he overcame that. When people pushed his buttons, he learned to handle the conflict with maturity. Gently. Emotionally-controlled. When people disagreed with his solutions, he remained calm. Respectful. He was a charitable listener and a willing collaborator. That’s typical of my servant. He’s meek in the best sense of the word. *That matters*.

“Some of you were around when the firm implemented that new customer service system, right? Everyone knows that it’s done wonders for this organization. What no one knows, though, is that the idea was conceived by someone who was then a low-level employee – the man sitting in this chair next to me. You didn’t know that, did you? You thought it was that clever guy Jacob who left the firm a few years back, right? That’s because when my servant’s idea was stolen from him, he let it go. Never said a word about it. Sure he could’ve claimed what was rightfully his, but My Father prompted him not to. The other guy needed the career boost, so my servant here put his rights on the shelf. The man is passionately God-centered. And *that matters*.

“He’s passionate about mercy, too. He really cares about people. Year after year, he led the Toys for Tots campaign at this firm. Year after year, he hired people who were otherwise considered unemployable – gave them a second chance in life. Louie, you’re one of them. Marie, you’re another. Look at you now! Self-sufficient and raising families in homes of your own. Beyond

that, my servant always made time to listen when somebody had a problem. He never seemed too busy for you, did he? Even gave you money out of his own pocket when he had some. Let me ask you, how many of your lives were personally touched by this person's caring attitude?" At least three dozen hands go up around the room. "Tell Me something, do those hands matter?"

"And how 'bout this? Can any of you ever remember this guy complaining when things weren't going quite right? Anyone? That's because he never did. Not even that time he got laid off. Not even during that recession when nobody got a pay raise for two years straight. Instead, he made a habit of being thankful for what he *did* have in life. Made him the happiest guy around. It kept him what I'd call 'pure in heart.' Folks, *that* matters.

"Let me say one other thing, my friends. I know that a few of you have been a little put off because my friend here is a Christian. Some of you have even given him a hard time about it throughout the years. A person like this doesn't always fit. And because of that, some of my other brothers and sisters have yielded to the pressure – saved their reputation at the expense of their relationship with Me. But this brother never did. Not once. He didn't get in anybody's face over those incidents either. He never got even or caused a fuss. Never thought in terms of an 'eye for an eye.' Instead, he forgave you and used that hardship to become *stronger*. It helped him to work for God all the more! It ultimately helped him to serve your needs all the better. It gave him the opportunity to show you that being a believer will see you through life's trials. And you know what? As a result, some of those persecutors eventually became friends of mine! That matters – *a lot*.

"It's true, this guy never made vice president and never earned an impressive paycheck, but in my Book, *he had the most successful of careers*. Just look around the room for a moment ... his *real* success is measured in tears. He impacted your lives with his character, with his generosity, with his compassion – indeed, with his love for you. He discovered decades ago what I invite each of you to discover tonight: *What matters most in the workplace is the extent to which you faithfully follow God*. I tell you truly, my friends, nothing else even comes close.

"Well done, My good and faithful servant!"



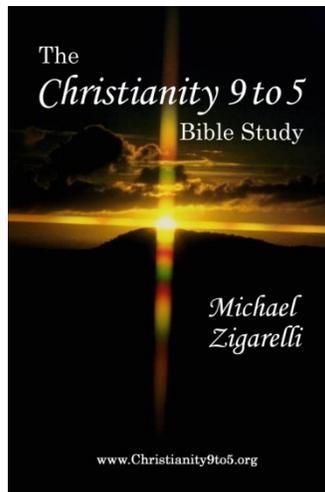
Closing Exercise

In whatever detail you think would be most helpful, write out the things you'd like Jesus to say about your work and career on the day you retire.

This has been an exceedingly powerful exercise for legions of students at several Christian universities, so please don't sell yourself short by just going through the motions. Set aside about 30 to 45 minutes right now, get away from all distractions, and reflect deeply on this.

As you write down your thoughts, recognize that these are essentially the targets or goals you'd like to achieve in your work life. This is your definition of "success," based on His definition of "success."

Some people also find it helpful to simultaneously reflect on what might prevent them from achieving this supernatural type of success. You've considered many obstacles in this study and there are plenty of others. So to finish this study well, as soon as you complete the retirement dinner exercise, identify your greatest obstacles to being a faithful ambassador of Jesus Christ in your workplace and in your career. Then, at your final group meeting, discuss these obstacles with your group and solicit their ideas for how we can permanently overcome them.



THE CHRISTIANITY 9 TO 5 BIBLE STUDY

Leader's Guide



Every Christian is called to be a leader.

Some are more gifted at leadership than others, for sure, but we worship a God who calls every one of us to influence the people around us—to *lead* them to a fuller understanding of who God is, of what He's done for us, and how He wants us to live our lives.

The Great Commission is perhaps the clearest articulation of our call to leadership (Matthew 28:18-20). It's reasonably straightforward, isn't it? Make disciples. Influence people. Love people enough to lead them from one place to another. Indeed, every Christian is called to be a leader.

Maybe you're approaching the leadership of this study with the utmost confidence. Maybe you've done this sort of thing before and you're pretty good at it. But if instead you're one of those people who's uneasy about leading a study because you think God has not specifically gifted you to lead others, try to set those concerns aside. That's not a Biblical way of thinking about who God has made you to be. God *does* want you to be a discipler, an influencer—a leader—and He will give you the ability to facilitate well, if you ask Him.

This brief *Leader's Guide* is intended to offer you helpful hints about how to lead your small group or Sunday school class through this study, whether it's your first time or your hundred-and-first.

The Art of Leading a Small Group

There's been a lot written about how to lead a small group and how not to lead one. Here's a compilation of some of the best ideas out there—twenty tips that will help you lead your group to a life-changing experience.



1. It's Not About You

Let's get one thing straight from the beginning: leading a small group study is not about you. It's about God. The more you can remain in the mindset of magnifying God and minimizing yourself, the more others will learn from the study. Take a cue from John the Baptist: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30, NAS).

For some small group leaders, this humble posture is quite natural. For others, the ego has a funny way of creeping into everything they do. If you find yourself saying and doing things out of concern for what others will think of you as the leader, that's a red flag. Instead, try not to worry about your reputation—about people-pleasing, in Paul's words (Galatians 1:10). Your job as a small group leader is simply to co-labor with God to draw people closer to Him.

So to boil it down to a sentence: To lead a small group with excellence, be the "guide on the side," not the "sage on the stage." This is God's group. Keep Him at center stage and He will bless everyone in the group.



2. Operate in God's Strength

Tip #1 said that great small group leadership happens when you make the study *about God*. Here's the flip side: Great small group leadership happens when you lead the study *through God*. The best leader is one who's a follower first. Ask God to empower you to lead beyond your abilities and return to this prayer often. Additionally, make prayer the bedrock of your group time together as well, at the very least opening and closing each session by collectively talking to God.



3. Operate in Joy

The disposition of the leader powerfully drives the disposition of the whole group. When you adopt a joyful and celebratory disposition throughout the study, others will follow. When you smile, when you're upbeat, when you're genuinely excited to be leading, when you celebrate successes, it will infect the group, and that will significantly improve the experience for everyone involved.

As you know, though, joy doesn't just happen. It's not something you can engineer on demand, nor is it something you can fake for very long. Rather, real joy starts with seeing clearly the opportunity with which God has blessed you. You have been commissioned to help Him make people's lives better through leading this study. Your work with this group is, in fact, *a sacred ministry*. This sort of perspective leads to gratitude for the opportunity and out of gratitude flows joy, both in your preparation and in your leadership of the discussion.



4. Encourage Accountability

Accountability matters and because it matters, we see it in a lot of contexts. CEOs answer to boards. Elders oversee pastoral performance. Accrediting bodies hold schools to high standards. Governments guard against excessive power of their branches by maintaining checks-and-balance systems.

Accountability matters in small groups as well. We're more likely to experience permanent change when we have an accountability partner who will support us, ask us whether we're keeping up with the studies, and checks on our progress. So, early on, encourage people to walk through the study with at least one other person.



5. Preparation, Preparation and Preparation

The familiar real estate axiom is that the three most important things in a property are location, location and location. In small group leadership—and in teaching generally—one could piggyback on this axiom and say the three most important things are preparation, preparation and preparation. There's no substitute for it (as some of us have seen from witnessing an unprepared group leader or teacher.)

If you're going to facilitate effectively, you need to have mapped out how you'll begin the group meeting, what questions you'll cover, approximately how much time you'll

be devoting to each of them, some proposed answers for each question, and a way to bring the meeting to effective closure. In your planning, though, don't worry about becoming an expert on the subject matter. Great facilitation can easily happen even though you're not an expert on the topic (remember, you're a "guide on the side.") But it's unlikely to happen without planning and thorough preparation.



6. Model the Way

If you want people to listen to one another, then listen closely to people. If you want them to be transparent and candid, then you go first. If you want them to dig deeper to identify root causes of their problems, then model that yourself. If you want them to be accountable to one another, then be sure they know of your accountability relationship. Lead by example, not just by what you say.



7. Create a Safe Environment for Sharing

In almost any small group, there will be people who are intimidated or shy about participating. There are some things you can do, though, to make it "safe" for them to engage. For starters, be transparent. Share your own struggles. Admit your own challenges with the issues being discussed. Confess your own imperfections and others will feel freer to then share their own.

It's also important to be supportive early in the study of almost every comment. That doesn't mean you tolerate heresy, but it does mean signaling that people don't need to be profound to contribute something of value. Try to avoid strongly disagreeing with people until such a point when everyone's had an opportunity to feel comfortable contributing.

Along the same lines, it's also wise to remain sensitive to others' traditions. More and more, people are crossing denominational lines to participate in small group studies. If you have an ecumenical small group, seek to understand where others are coming from and minimize the disparagement of other denominational perspectives. Of course, there will be times when it's appropriate to raise and examine these differences, but those discussions should probably be deferred until the group has matured a bit.



8. Hone Your Listening Skills

There's an old adage that says: "Being listened to is so close to being loved, that most people can't tell the difference." You may have experienced the feeling first-hand. Do what you can to make sure everyone in your group feels it as well.

Concentrate on what each person is saying, rather than thinking about your own response. Rephrase their point when appropriate, so they'll know they've been heard. Use non-verbal cues as well that show you're listening—cues like maintaining a comfortable level of eye contact with the person speaking, occasionally nodding, positioning your body to squarely face the speaker, leaning toward the speaker slightly, and so on. You'll be amazed at how such little things can make a person feel "listened to"—and loved!



9. Stay on Point

This is the bane of many small groups. One tangential comment gives license to the next, and before you know it, a series of loosely related remarks has eclipsed your entire meeting time.

Ever been there? My guess is that you know exactly what I'm talking about, since this happens with unfortunate regularity.

This is a leadership problem. To avoid it, keep the group focused on the question at hand and follow up tangential comments by bringing the group back to the actual question. Everyone benefits when a leader steers the conversation, and everyone suffers when he or she does not.



10. Be Sure That Scripture Is Your Filter

One would think we wouldn't have to say such a thing, but it seems that sometimes our filters for right and wrong get clouded, even in Christian circles. Some people use their "experience" as an arbiter of right and wrong. Others use "society's rules." Some are pragmatists, basing the right thing to do on "what works."

There are a lot of worldviews infecting Christian thinking these days, so when group members suggest solutions to problems, don't shy away from asking whether their

suggestion aligns with scripture. Ask them if Jesus did it that way, or would do it that way. Ask them for any Biblical support they can think of.

If, as group leaders, we persistently come back to the Bible as God's standards, our group members will too.



11. Listen for Segues to the Next Question

It's invaluable to always know where you want to go next with a discussion. Sometimes you simply have to announce the transition (i.e., "let's turn a corner now and look at the next question"), but the meeting flows more smoothly if you capitalize on natural transition points. Expert facilitators listen closely for comments that connect to where they want to go next and quickly use those comments to move the discussion forward.



12. Echo What's Been Said

This is such an essential facilitation technique! From time to time, you'll find it helpful to restate what somebody has just said—to "echo" it for the group. Echoing not only lets the speaker know that he or she has been understood, it also serves to clarify that person's point for everyone else. Beyond that, echoing makes it more likely that the rest of the group will respond to that person's comment, rather than just following with an unrelated comment.

So echo comments where appropriate, and then, since you have the floor at that moment, invite commentary about what's just been said. The flow of discussion will improve dramatically.



13. Connect the Dots

Another way to enhance the flow of discussion is to connect some people's comments to other people's comments. "So Sherry, you think that the verse calls us to action but Fran, two minutes ago you said you didn't understand it that way. Can somebody else

help us out here?” This is good facilitation because it clarifies where we are with the discussion and where we want it to go.



14. Cut Off Dominators

Let's face it, they're out there. Many groups are blessed with that spirited person who contributes a little too much. And that can diminish the experience for everyone else. Usually, if the leader doesn't take control of this situation, no one will.

One solution is to talk to the person privately. It doesn't take much. Start by affirming the positive and then candidly make your request. "Hank, you really have a lot of good stuff to contribute in this study, but I want to make sure that others have an adequate opportunity to share their ideas, too. Would you be willing to scale back—at least a little—the number of times you contribute?"

A second way to balance contribution is to simply cut in when the dominator takes a breath, echo what he or she has said to that point (so they know they've been heard), and invite someone to respond to that. As a last resort, you might say to the group something like: "I don't want you to feel like you're in school, but in the interest of managing this discussion, it would help me if you all would raise your hand when you want to comment." Then regulate the dominator's contributions in a way that's more helpful to the group.



15. Ask for People's Opinions

"How 'bout somebody who hasn't spoken yet?" "Anyone else want to comment on this issue?" "Does anyone have a different perspective on this?" These and similar questions are non-threatening ways to invite people into the conversation. Write out some phrases with which you're comfortable and use them at strategic points in your group meetings to draw in quiet group members. Sometimes just this little nudge can be a turning point for people.



16. Frame Questions Using “Why” and “How”

Usually, when you ask a question that begins with “why” or “how,” people tend to answer with more thoughtful, more extensive responses than if you ask a question that begins with “who,” “where,” or “when.” Think about it. Questions that begin with these latter words can lend themselves to one or two word answers, right? But try answering a “why” or “how” question with one word. Not likely. If your goal is to get people talking, think about reframing the questions you ask.



17. Permit Silence After You Ask a Question

Eventually, it’ll happen. You’ll ask a question and no one will say anything. Avoid the temptation to fill that void with your own voice. Give people time to think. Let them muster the courage to answer a tough question. Give them a moment to hear from God, if that’s the prompt they’re seeking.

Get comfortable with silence after posing a question. Often, your patience will be rewarded with some of the richest and most poignant answers of the week.



18. Stay with a Fruitful Conversation, Even if it’s Taking Too Much Time

For group leaders who are especially time-conscious, it’s natural to march through a set of questions and make sure everything gets covered in the time allotted. The best group leaders remain mindful, though, that the *real* goal of the meetings is *transformation*, not efficiency, box-checking, or getting everything done.

Sometimes a question will stimulate lots of discussion. It will go deep; it will touch a chord; it will create excitement; it will surface pains or misunderstandings that need to be addressed; it will plant the seeds of lasting change for people. Avoid cutting off God’s work in these situations. Don’t be a slave to a script, insisting on covering each question on the page in ten minutes each. Some questions may require twenty minutes, others three minutes. So be flexible and learn to discern when to deviate from your original plan.



19. Use a Board or Easel, if Appropriate

Chronicling on a board the relevant points that people make is a wonderful way of affirming, echoing, and clarifying what's being said. It will also help you to “connect the dots” more easily. Beyond that, many people will retain more of what's said if they've both heard it and seen it in writing.



20. Summarize Key Points

Many people will find it instructive if you can recap some of the more important lessons from the discussion. The end of the session is a natural time to do this, but it's also helpful to do it at the beginning of a group meeting (“this is what I think God's taught us so far in this study”), as well as after particularly important or complicated points in the discussion. Brief, oral summaries from the leader enhance learning and retention, so take notes during the discussion and bless the group by emphasizing the essential takeaways.

About the Author



Michael Zigarelli is a Professor of Leadership and Strategy at Messiah College and the former Dean of the Regent University School of Business. His research in the fields of management, practical theology, law, and ethics has appeared in a number of scholarly journals and magazines, and he is the author of ten [books](#), including *Influencing Like Jesus*, *The Minister's MBA*, *Cultivating Christian Character*, and *Management by Proverbs*. His work has been translated into several languages.

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NOTES

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³ Ibid. See also Enrico, "Roots of Ambition," 1B.

⁴ This line of thought builds on a sermon from nineteenth-century preacher, Phillips Brooks. That sermon, entitled "The Fire and the Calf," can be found in Andrew Watterson Blackwood, editor, *The Protestant Pulpit: An Anthology of Master Sermons from the Reformation to Our Own Day*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1947), 129-37.

⁵ "The Private Penance of Tom Monaghan," 1A. See also Enrico, "Roots of Ambition," 1B.

⁶ Richard Gibson, "Domino's Pizza to be Sold for \$1 Billion: Founder to Turn Attention to Philanthropy," *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, 28 September 1998, 11.

⁷ Steve Kloehn, "One Cool Cucumber," *Chicago Tribune*, 2 October 1998, "Tempo" section, p. 1.

⁸ Carolyn C. Armistead, "Vegetarian Humor...Bob the Tomato and Larry the Cucumber Reflect Christian Values," *Chicago Tribune*, 15 February 1998, Tempo, p. 1.

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¹⁰ See chapter 5 of Erwin W. Lutzer, *One Minute After You Die*, (Chicago: Moody, 1997).

¹¹ See Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987), 87.

¹² See, for example, J.R. Barker, "Tightening the Iron Cage: Concertive Control in Self-Managed Teams," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38 (1993): 408-437.

¹³ Bob St. John, *The Landry Legend: Grace Under Pressure*, (Dallas: Word, 1989), 154.

¹⁴ Tom Landry and Gregg Lewis, *Tom Landry: An Autobiography*, (New York: Walter, 1990), 109.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁷ St. John, *The Landry Legend*, 159.

¹⁸ Landry and Lewis, *Tom Landry*, 266.

¹⁹ St. John, *The Landry Legend* 159.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Drusky v. American Bar Association*, 77 LRRM 2407 (Northern District of Illinois 1971)

²² *Drusky v. Henry Shore, Regional Director, Sixth Region, NLRB*, 67 LRRM 2990 (Western District of Pennsylvania 1968)

²³ *Drusky v. Judges of the Supreme Court*, 324 F.Supp. 332 (Western District of Pennsylvania 1971)

²⁴ *Drusky v. American Bar Association*, 74 LRRM 2543, (Western District of Pennsylvania 1970)

²⁵ John O'Brien, "U.S. Court Casts Out Suit Against God," *Herald American* (Syracuse, NY), 14 March 1999, B1.

²⁶ For further illumination of this point, please consult Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glen W. Barker, John D.W. Watts (Old Testament), and Ralph P. Martin (New Testament) (Dallas: Word, 1993), 93.

²⁷ John Koziol and Debra Estock, "Whistle at Night 'Unusual,'" *Fairfield Citizen-News*, 26 May 1999, 1.

²⁸ "Friends Bemoan Fate's Cruel End to New Lives," *Connecticut Post*, 27 May 1999, A15.

²⁹ See, for example, Cynthia L. Cordes and Thomas W. Dougherty, "A Review and Integration of Research on Job Burnout," *Academy of Management Review*, 18, no.4 (1993): 621-636.

³⁰ Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and John Schmitt, *The State of Working America, 1998-99*, (Ithaca, NY: Economic Policy Institute and Cornell University Press, 1999)

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³³ Mina Westman and Dov Eden, "Effects of a Respite from Work on Burnout: Vacation Relief and Fade Out," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82, no. 4 (1997): 516-527; and Dalia Etzion, Dov Eden and Yael Lapidot, "Relief from Job Stressors and Burnout: Reserve Service as Respite," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83, no. 4 (1998): 577-585.

³⁴ See, for example, Maslach and Leiter, *The Truth About Burnout*, 61-101

³⁵ *The Guinness Book of World Records* (New York: Bantam, 1999), 171.

³⁶ Center for Disease Control and Prevention / National Center for Health Statistics, *U.S. Decennial Life Tables, 1989-91*, 1, no. 3, (1999): 10.

³⁷ My friend also told me that this incident closely resembles a scene from the movie *Fried Green Tomatoes*. He speculated that this "granny" was imitating what she saw in that movie.

³⁸ Bernice Kanner, "Turning the Other Cheek," *American Demographics*, 20, no. 2 (1998): 39.

³⁹ *Kenneth Roberts v. Kathleen Magadan and Adams County School District No. 50*, 921 F.2d 1047, at 1059.

⁴⁰ Sandy J. Wayne and Robert C. Liden, "Effects of Impression Management on Performance Ratings: A Longitudinal Study," *Academy of Management Journal* 38, no. 1 (1995): 232. Much of what follows in this section is a synopsis of the literature review and empirical findings from this study.