

“Whole Life Stewardship”
“Integrating My Work and Faith”

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Key Texts: Colossians 3:12-17

23-24

I. Introduction: Why Do You Do What You Do and for Who?

When you do what you do, at work, at home, in church who are you doing for? Are you doing it to make yourself look or feel good? To be seen by others? To earn community service hours? Maybe to avoid working on other things in life that deserve some attention? I recall a person serving in the church 5 evenings a week, though she had 4 children and a husband at home. I started wondering why she was always at church and never home. I asked and found out there were marriage problems. It was actually easier being at church every evening versus being at home. When you are doing what you are doing, who are you doing it for and for what reason?

On this Labor Day weekend, I love the scripture, “Whatever you do in word and deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus”. (vs 17) Paul follows that up with, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, and not for people”. (vs 23)

II. Don’t Miss Caring For Others

That’s not to say we should have a mentality of not caring about people. No, No, No! Paul goes to great lengths to instruct us how to relate to each other. We are to show care, kindness, compassion, forgiveness and “over all these putting on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity”. (vs 14)

So, it is still all about loving God and loving neighbor. I hope you had some opportunity to interact with your neighbors this summer as you may recall we started our year off with The Art of Neighboring.

It’s just that too often we do what we do with wrong motives, or intentions or we just are not thinking much about why we are doing what we are doing or watching what we are saying.

III. Focusing on Whole Life Stewardship—An Overview

This month our focus is on Whole Life Stewardship. Stewardship is a “churchy” word which simply means being a caretaker, a trustee, of all God has given us and blessed us with. Everything. Some think stewardship only means how we handle our financial resources. It is that. It is so much more. It includes how you handle your family, your relationships, your work. It’s about how you handle the vision of your life and your purpose. It’s about how you steward your influence over others, for positive or negative. It is about the commitments you make. Scripture says, “Let your Yes be Yes and your No be No.” (Matthew 5:37) Stewardship is about the opportunities that come your way. We were just talking about how seasons come and seasons go. People come into our lives and people go. Everything changes. Change brings with it new opportunities. We have some changes going on in our church with leadership. One of those leaders said to me he saw it as a new opportunity for him and a new opportunity for others to step up and serve. Do you want a divinely appointed opportunity to step up and make a difference and impact in your community and world?

If you are a Christ follower practicing or learning about Whole Life Stewardship, you know the answer to that question.

Stewardship is about how you handle your resources, the material assets entrusted to you by God that God says you and I will need to give an accounting of one day. (Luke 16) How are you doing with that?

And at the end of the day, to have victory in this life, do you know who stewardship is about? You! Because God has given you the responsibility of managing your life and stewarding, caring for, everything that is in your hand.

Friends, life is a journey, a trek through time to an eternal destination. Whether your road is rough or smooth, stewardship is a constant priority and when we each begin to understand, grasp and come to one of those “aha” moments and get this, our lives, our families, our church and, yes, even our work can be transformed.

IV. What Living Should Look Like as a Christian

Now, let's look at Colossians a little closer because it might surprise you at the context in which Paul is writing. First off, he is writing to all Christians about how to live their lives and what should come out of our mouths which flow from our hearts. I'll be the first to admit in grasping this more and more I realize I need a whole lot of heart work and I can hear myself saying in prayer, “God help me not be like that, or think that, and help me watch my words wherever I am.” Look, you can borrow that if you like, because my best guess, I'm not alone. I can be my best self many times, but every now and then that pendulum swings and I drop the ball and I'm not. I'm not doing what I'm doing or saying to please God and sometimes it is not so pleasing to others. We are all on a journey.

V. Take the Survey and See Where You Are

As part of our Whole Life Stewardship month we will be providing you an opportunity to see where you are on your spiritual walk with an online survey. You get to do your own evaluation and then Sept 21-23 when we have our Intentional Discipleship Weekend with Johnnie Draughon, you'll be better prepared to see what your next steps of faith development should be. Be looking for that information soon.

So, Paul is speaking to the church and us as individual believers. Whatever you do, whatever your work is, in your work world, or in your retirement, do it all in the name of Jesus. Be careful not to separate your faith life from your work life. That's not easy because it is so easy to get caught up in the office or work place environment letting that influence you versus your faith. There's lots of gossip, water fountain and break room conversations, there's flirting leading to affairs, rude jokes, lots of criticism and if you work hard, others who will pull you down because they believe you make them look bad. And overall poor communication, favoritism, and unfairness.

VI. Paul Addresses Slaves and Masters

Now in Paul's context in the second half of Colossians 3 he is talking about slaves and how they “should obey and to win favor and to do so with sincerity of heart and reverence to the Lord”. (vs 22) Paul's culture included slavery. Remember it is the history of the Jewish people to be enslaved by Pharaoh and their salvation story is the Exodus and being delivered from slavery. And yet slavery was still part of culture and obviously in the city of Colosse in Asia, slavery was prevalent. Paul is not condoning slavery. The church today is opposed to slavery. That is why the church, including us this past January holds what's called “Freedom Sunday”. It is estimated to be 40-70 million slaves in the world today, mostly in Asian countries. In the Americas, about 1.95 million. The little New Testament book of Philemon is about a slave owner and his slave Onesimus in the Colossian church that Paul writes to. Paul, understanding the culture, is instructing those who are slaves and part of the church to work for the Lord and not for men and do it with all your heart. And he tells masters to do what is right and fair, because you have a Master in heaven. (Col 4:1)

VII. How Colossians 3 Applies Today

So how does this speak to us today in our work? Well, those who work all have a boss. I have a bishop and a district superintendent and a Leadership Team who give me direction, evaluate my work, and hold me accountable. We have a bishop who has said to us, “I want every church in the Virginia Conference to have an intentional plan of discipleship for their members in every church”. Now, we have been heading in that direction for a number of years, encouraging every person to be in a small group Bible study. You may or may not agree with that. I have a boss that is saying she believes this needs to happen in every local church. My previous boss, Bishop Cho, told us to focus on prayer for 4 years and that’s what I tried, and others here tried to help us do. And we tried to do so with all our hearts, seeking to please God and get God’s vision for us and to grow in unity.

As employers, Paul suggests operating with fair policies, procedures and fair compensation. As leaders we are to care for people and not take advantage or abuse people, because in those leadership roles we are accountable to God.

VIII. A Word of Appreciation To Those Labors

Let’s take a moment to thank and appreciate those who labor and work. We often thank first responders and rightfully so, they sacrifice much time to help others often in crisis situations, leaving a lot of emotional stress and internal conflict. Thank you. Keep doing what you’re doing to please God.

There are also VDOT workers, plumbers, HVAC, teachers, people who work in restaurants, administrators and directors, phone and cable people, recreation people, therapists of all kinds, health care workers. Those who work in agriculture and labor to bring us our food. What do you do, what did you do? It’s not irrelevant or irreverent on Labor Day weekend. Call it out. What do you do, what did you do? Why do you do it? Some say work should be about “making a life, not a living”. I love what God called me to do, even in the toughest and hardest of weeks.

IX. We All Have Frustrations and Challenges

I’m no different from most of you. I sometimes wonder, “Why did I go into full time ministry?” I sometimes think, “How much longer do I want to do this?” Then I think about God’s calling on my life. I think about the flipside of the challenges to the good I see God doing in the world, in families, in individual lives. I hear stories of how God guided people in their work places and I realize while work is sometimes rough and tough and draining, God is with me and God is with you every step of the way. And if we approach our work world and steward it well, God will be right with us and we’ll see people we deal with as people, not objects. Paul wanted “Masters” to see their slaves as brothers and sisters in Christ—not as objects, but as people. How will you choose to see those you work with, those you work for, and those you serve? How can you be used by God in your work place or where you volunteer?

X. Moving Toward Integration

Integrate your faith and work. It’s not just about what you do, it’s about who you are and how you do it. And sure, there are tough situations, tough conversations you may have to confront and deal with. If we do it the way Christ taught us, then what you say and do will be pleasing and honoring to God. Just be sure to not let yourself and your desires and frustrations and anger get too much in the mix. Instead, let those fruits of kindness, humility, patience, gentleness, forgiveness, and love rule your heart and your work world. If we do so we will be a whole lot closer to doing what we do as working for the Lord.

I hope whatever you do this week you’ll be more aware of stewarding your work life and your school life and your retirement life in a way to please God first and foremost and then to treat everyone with respect, fairness and positive regard.

As we prepare to come to the table, let's remember the labor of love Jesus gave as he showed us how much he cared for you and me.

XI. Closing Prayer

Let us Pray:

Creating, Loving God,

Thank You for trusting us enough to give us the responsibility to be good stewards of all You have given us. Today thank You for the gifts, talents, abilities and passions to engage in our work. Thank You for all those who labor day in and day out to make our country what it is today. Be present now at This Table, Lord. Help us search our hearts, be quick and authentic in making any necessary changes so we can work and serve in a manner pleasing to You. And thank You for Jesus, who has shown us how to live and work in a more excellent way with sincerity of heart, and above all, putting on love.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.