

The Journey to Biblical Manhood

Challenge 6: Work

Session 2: How Hard Should You Be Working?

Unedited Transcript

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Well, good morning, men. So we're in this series, the Journey of Biblical Manhood. Please turn in your Bibles with me to Colossians chapter three verse 23 and let's get started with a shout out. Last week we had some men from Columbia. Today we have some men from Canada. It's a group called Take Flight, 40 men who meet for the study with us on Saturdays and they are a group of military men with a goal to reach the 4 Wing military and civilian members to help each other become better servants of God. Their leader is Dustin Colwell. They're in Cold Lake, Alberta, Canada and that is the busiest air force base apparently in Canada. I Googled it this morning and it is the home of the Royal Canadian Air Force Fighter pilots. Lots of top gun training, things like that take place there.

I have a, guys, I have a very warm spot for the Royal Canadian Air Force. My best friend for 32 years, we met once a week for lunch, was Ken Moore and he was one of 17 members who flew the Lancaster in World War II with the RCAF assigned to the British Air Force. He was a member here and a Bible study leader here for 25 years. He was the only one of 17 pilots who survived and so he was a proud member of RCAF and a fighter pilot himself. With that said and that little memorial tribute to Ken Moore, I wonder if you'd join me in giving Take Flight a very rousing and warm Man in the Mirror Welcome. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, guys. We are glad to have you with us.

Yeah, it's the Journey to Biblical Manhood. We're in the sixth challenge, which is on work, six of 12 challenges. We're on the second session, the faith and life objectives we looked at last week, you can look at them again on your cards. This morning we're going to be talking about the subject how hard should you be working. It's interesting because every week I end up talking to a few men about work, so I was just looking back and sometimes men have good experiences and sometimes they have bad experiences. I had three men this week, one by phone, one by email, and one in a personal conversation over lunch, who are just basically overwhelmed with their work and don't exactly know which way to go, what to do. One man, his response is he's so angry. He's angry at the world, but he's especially angry at the company that he's working for because he feels that he's being mistreated and overworked. The second man is, he drives a truck, he works for an airport, and so he's just feeling the pressure, the constant pressure to perform, to do more and more and more. Then the third man is the CEO of a company and so he's just feeling overwhelmed with the work that he's doing and how much he has on his plate.

I had a question for you. How many of you feel absolutely, unequivocally confident that you know how hard you should be working? It's an interesting question. How hard should you be working? One of the

problems here is that work, as it turns out, even though we spend half of our waking hours working, it is one of the topics that is messaged about very little in Christendom. Not much attention is given to helping men develop a theology of work and not a personal theology of work, but God's theology of work. You know, what does God think about work? We're going to look at this today and hopefully you will come away with a much better idea about your approach should be.

Now, I'll begin by just telling you it took me four tries. Personally, it took me four tries and about 20 years to get this right, so good luck. We're going to look at two approaches to work. We're going to be reading from Colossians chapter three verse 23. You should be there and so let's take a look at what the scripture says. "Whatever you do," and this whatever you do here, this is the Greek word that means to make, to do, to accomplish, to perform, to produce, to work, so it's definitely in this area of personal production. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart," or work at it wholeheartedly. "As working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord you are serving."

First of all, let's just ask: Why did the Holy Spirit decide to preserve this particular text? Well, one of the reasons probably at the time was, and to be honest, I'm pulling this from my seminary training a long time ago, I didn't actually go back and update, but there was this concept floating around of an imminent return of Christ and so there was some tendency and the part some Christians just sort of lay off, lay back, and not really pour themselves into their work. I think contemporarily the reason that the Holy Spirit has preserved this text for us today is because there is so much emphasis on really overworking people and not paying people enough money, all of these different things.

You know, I did a little historical work on this this week and so you should know that 100 years ago, 150 years ago, the normal work week was about 100 hours. It was only about 150 years ago that there was a movement afoot to limit the average workday to eight hours. The interesting thing is is that it took 40, 50 years for this eight-hour workday to actually make it into our culture. It's hard to tell for sure. It looks like the person who's getting the credit for the 40-hour work week, eight-hour workday, five day work week is Henry Ford because he noticed that his employees looked fatigued and he thought that they would be better off personally and be able to do better work if they were able to rest and to not have to work every day. It's very interesting. What we take for absolute granted is actually quite an anomaly. Now, the pressure you see in the culture is not to work 40-hour work weeks. It's to try to eke out 50 or 60 hours of work. Then of course a lot of people say, "Well, I work 80 hours." Now the research is beginning to show that people don't really know how long they work and they want to make it sound like they're working more than they really are. Most people are not really working as many hours as they think they are.

All of these things are part of the confusion, part of the conundrum. What we want to do is today here look at two approaches to working. We see that the approaches, whatever you do, work as though you are working for the Lord, not for men. We learned a couple things here today and one is that the approach that most people use, the approach, my first approach, it's the success model. That's the first approach to work the most people adopt. It's the one that's most taught. I remember as a young man, high school dropout wanting to be somebody, wanting to make a million dollars. I remember announcing to my parents around the dinner table. I can remember the day. I was like in the 10th grade. I announced to my parents, "I'm going to be a millionaire." Then a year-and-a-half later, I quit high school and so I thought that dream was kind of like over. Then I got back on track after the army, got a college education, and so forth. I adopted this philosophy. It was my first real philosophy of life. Money will solve my problems and success will make me happy. That's the success model. That turned out to be

a huge error. I'll give you the longer story another time, but that led me to my second error. I became a Christian because success didn't satisfy me. It actually made me miserable.

My second philosophy or my second approach, my second error, was that I could have the best of both worlds. I could have the best of what Christ has to offer and I could also have the success model too. Then when I figured out that that idea wasn't the right one and I abandoned that, then I adopted my third error. Because of my guilt and my shame, my third error was is that I needed to deserve this grace. Then I began to pour my ... I actually ended up working harder than I had ever worked before because I was trying to atone for my sins because I didn't understand that I could just receive forgiveness and restoration and redemption, that I actually had to do something to deserve it. Now, I knew that I was but I figured that I had to prove that God hadn't made a mistake. I poured myself back into, if you've watched this, the Christian success model. This whole success model thing over here is one way of approaching it. Then you have the second approach that's commended here by the scriptures. Let's take a look at how this works out, this idea of whatever you do, do it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Let's take a look at what that looks like in action. This is the second model. Let's call this the faithful model. The success model and then the faithful model.

Turn to Matthew chapter, oh, it's right here, 25. Matthew chapter 25 verse 14 and this is the Big Idea for the day. **God calls us to be faithful, not successful.** Now, let's look at this in action in this parable. A rich man decides he's going to go away on a journey. A parable is a made up story. This is not something that, as far as we know, really happened, but Jesus is making up an analogy or a parable or a story to help us understand a spiritual truth, a very important spiritual truth, and that is the faithful model. This wealthy man goes away and he calls in three of his men, three of his servants, and he gives them each an amount of money. In today's dollars, about \$60,000 to one, about \$24,000 to another, about \$12,000 to the third. He said, "Look, I'm going to go away on a trip and I want you to take this money and I want you to put it to work."

He comes back after a very long time and he found this. The first servant had gone to work right away and had been able to double that money. The second servant had gone to work and very quickly had been able to double the money. The third servant, though, had taken the money and he thought that the master was a very exacting person and so he was afraid of the master and so he took the money and he buried it in the ground or maybe let's just say put it under the mattress. Looking at the text beginning in verse 19, "After a long time, the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents," the 60,000 bucks, "brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'You entrusted me with five talents. See I've gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and *successful* servant.'"

It's interesting. God is not interested in how successful we are as much as he's interested in how faithful we are. Now, don't misunderstand what I just said. I did not say that God is not interested in whether or not we are successful, but God is more interested in the success of our character than he is in the success of our circumstances. God is never going to sacrifice our character in order to improve our circumstances. He's always going to give priority to developing our character and the approach that he has chosen is that he will call us to be faithful as opposed to being successful and this is how thing would work out in our lives.

Reading on, "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been successful with a few things.'" No. "You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness." Then the man with two said the same thing. Then in verse 23

replied and said the same thing, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things. I'll put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your master's happiness."

I think it's worth noting here that Jesus gave the exact same response to the man who had taken 60 and turned it into 120, he said the exact same thing to the man who had taken 24 and turned it into 48. In other words, it's not the size of the success that counts. It's the size of the faithfulness. If you are only a one talent person and you can only do what you can do with one talent, basically earn interest on it, you can't even double it, but you were faithful at doing it, then God will give you the reward. But if he gives you five talents and you're unfaithful with them, then you're not going to get the same reward. It's like the widow's mite. She put in two pennies. She put in more than all the other people combined because she gave all that she had. It's a type of faithfulness there. Then the man who, you know, did the other. He didn't do so well. We won't talk about him right now. Nobody wants to be him.

That's what it looks like in action. That's what faithful looks like in action. It's taking whatever God has entrusted to you and it says earlier in this parable, it says that he distributed these talents to them based on their abilities. One of the men that I mentioned who was so angry at God and his employer and everybody else this week, the reason that he is so angry, he just has never, and I've been working with him for 20 years, he just has never been able to accept that God didn't give him the same number of talents that he might have given you. He's a man who wants to have a five talent portfolio with a one talent's ability level. What he doesn't understand is that God loves him. God cares so much about him. God is protecting him from him.

Who knows how God organizes these things, but it is his pleasure. Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pots are for noble use and some for common use. God is doing what God is doing, he's just never been able to get satisfied. If that's you, if you've just never been able to accept the equipment that you have, the aptitudes, the abilities, the spiritual gifts, and, number four, the acquired competences that you have, if you've just never been able to accept that and be satisfied with that, the message for you this morning is that God's not calling you to be successful. He's calling you to take what he's entrusted to you, the abilities he's given you, and to be faithful. That's the big idea. He calls us to be ...

Now, you should understand this. This is something we learn here from this text. God actually calls us to a much higher standard than success. He calls us to be faithful. It's a much higher standard than mere success. All right? Let's just say this is correct, that God calls us to be faithful and not successful. What makes this faithful approach possible? Because, honestly, I mean, you look around and, hey, it would be nice to have that guy's car. It would be cool to be able to live in this other guy's house. It would be awesome to have this other job. It would be really great to have this kind of bank account. It would really be awesome if I could have that kind of investment portfolio. It would have been really cool if I had enough money to invest in that piece of property. I mean, you know. What makes the faithful approach possible over against the success model approach?

Well, back to Colossians chapter three verse 23 and 24. Let's just see what the Bible says. There are three things I think that we learn from this text that we would otherwise not know. You know, when you're looking at a Bible verse, sometimes Bible verses are telling you things that are repeated other places in the Bible. I've always thought it was more important, "Okay, what are the things that I might be able to learn from this text that I would otherwise never know?" I think the answer to this question, what makes the faithful approach possible, I think we find out something here that we would otherwise never know.

Okay, again, we've already read, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men." Then three reasons that make this faithful approach possible. "Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward." God is promising you that if you pursue the faithful model, he will give you a reward. He will give you an inheritance if you pursue this faithful model. If you pursue the success model, there is no such promise. God never makes a promise that he will make us successful. He makes a promise that he will give us a reward if we are faithful. Now, this is so interesting because versus the way of working for men, if you are working for men, the promise is if you're working for men that they're going to do everything possible, because of the fall, eventually it's going to work out that, this sounds negative, but I think this is probably the way it is, is that you're going to be underpaid. You're going to be undervalued. You're going to be underappreciated. You're going to be under-respected if you pursue the success model.

Look at already what's going on here. If you build your life around the success model, you're going to be underpaid, undervalued, underappreciated, and overwhelmed and angry. But if you pursue the faithful model, you're also going to be, well, you're actually going to end up being overcompensated. You're going to be overcompensated because anybody who has ever received an inheritance knows that they're getting something they didn't deserve. I've had two inheritances. Neither one were that large, but it was undeserved. My grandfather, he was like the big fish in the little pond. It wasn't much so it's like one of 26 grandchildren, 60 years later, it was like \$10,000 or something like that, but I did absolutely nothing to deserve that. I didn't earn it. It was just a gift. It was a reward. It was an inheritance and it was passed down just for love. I didn't have to do anything to be successful to earn that. Actually, you're going to be under-compensated if you pursue the success model, but if you pursue the faithful model, you're going to be overcompensated. Either way, you're going to get something you don't deserve. If you pursue the success model, you're going to get something you don't deserve. You're not going to get enough. If you pursue the faithful model, you're going to get something you don't deserve. You're going to be overcompensated. Either way, you're going to get something you don't deserve. What makes more sense?

That's number one is that you receive this inheritance that makes the faithful approach possible, because you're looking forward to getting a reward that's all out of proportion to the amount of effort that you're putting into it. Then it says, "As working for the Lord and not for men." You know, when your primary audience is men, I've said it already, but you're going to be disrespected. You're going to be underappreciated. You're not going to be properly valued, your labors. But when you are working for the Lord, when you're working for Jesus, then all of a sudden you're working for somebody who completely understands you. He gets you. You know, you're thinking, "My boss doesn't get me." When you're working for the Lord, he gets you. He made you. He knows everything you're thinking. He knows every word you're going to speak before it forms on the tip of your tongue. He knows every thought from afar. He knows when you sit, when you ... He knows. He gets you. When you're doing your work for the Lord, the second reason that makes faithful approach possible is that you are working for somebody who gets you. There can never be any misunderstanding. You are fully appreciated when you're using the faithful approach. You are fully appreciated, fully respected.

Then the third piece of this. It says, "It is the Lord Christ you are serving." When you use the success model, then who are you serving? You're serving your self-interest. When you're serving your self-interest, what does that force us to do? It forces us to try to control the circumstances to make things better. I can't tell you how I learned this little insight this week, but I did. I was watching someone who is, by nature, wants to be in control. They're a policeman. They're trying to control a situation, trying to tell people what to do, trying to control the outcome, and this thought went through my mind after

watching this. The desire ... Would you shut that thing off, Tom? After 25 years, you get a pass. Grace. Yeah.

This person, it dawned on me as I was watching this person try to just control everybody and be the policeman and direct traffic and get their way, the desire to be in control results in the absence of wisdom. I mean, the problem was is that wisdom had completely gone out the window. The desire to be in control paralyzes the brain from seeing what's really going on. It only helps you, when you're trying to be in control, you can only see the outcome that you want. That's what happens when we work for me. Oh, but then the idea here is it is the Lord Christ you're serving. When we're serving the Lord Jesus Christ, then we're thinking about what he wants. What's the question you've heard me say here many times? That's the question that a servant is asking. The servant is not asking the question, "What do I want?" That's the self-interest. The servant is asking, what is the question? "What does the master need?"

If you go into a business situation or a work situation and you're following the success model, the question you're asking is, "What do I want out of this deal?" If you go into it serving the Lord Jesus Christ, you're asking a different question. You're asking, "What does the master need?" I remember well sitting in a business meeting with three guys doing a deal and, a real estate deal, and myself and these are three of the most moral, upstanding kinds of people you could ever want to meet, but they were there for themselves. They were there to advance their own self-interest. At that point in my journey, spiritual journey, I was there in this fourth iteration from money will solve my problems, success will make me happy, I can have the best of both worlds, I need to deserve grace. I'm actually now at the faithful model so I'm asking the question, "What does the master need? What will advance? What is it that God wants me to do instead of what do I want out of this?" It was so interesting because we were working on the same deal but we were all there for very different reasons. I don't know what's become of those men, but I know that God has taken care of me in every way.

We have these three things that make the faithful approach possible. Number one, we know we're going to be overcompensated. We can be faithful because we know we're never going to be under-compensated. We're never going to be under-compensated. We're going to be overcompensated because we have an inheritance as a reward for being faithful. We can use this faithful approach, I forgot to turn the stopwatch on. Oh, I'm out of time. Okay. All right. You get it. God calls us to be faithful, not successful.

Then finally, the faithful approach is also very interesting because it makes boundaries possible. The faithful approach actually makes boundaries possible. When you use the faithful approach, you can focus on the things that you can control instead of always being absorbed by the things you can't control. How many nights, and still, I still have these days. I mean, I've had one this week where I wake up in the middle of the night because, instead of using the faithful approach, I'm using the success approach and I'm worried about the things that I have no control over anyway. So I have to bring that back to the foot of the cross because I'm human and I have to lay it down at the cross and then pick it back up. Lay it down at 12:30 AM, pick it up. Put it back down at 1:30 AM, pick it back up. 2:30, put it back down. You know, get to bed, finally get to sleep at 3:30 AM. That's human. Hey, it's okay. We're human. It's okay. We're human, but when we do the faithful approach, it makes these boundaries possible because we don't have to try to be in control. See, if you're using the success model, you never are able to actually get to sleep because you're trying to control the things you can't control.

Gosh, since I'm way over here, well, maybe one example. This week, we have I'm a general partner on a piece of property that, kind of a holdover from my previous life. For the last few months, we've had a sale working on this and the buyer is an institution and the buyer has been here, there, everywhere. It's been actually the most interesting thing for me because I'm almost out of body watching myself on this. I said, "I can't believe how calm I have been through this whole thing." It's an important sale. It's a good climate right now to be selling a piece of land and I don't think I want to wait a whole nother business cycle because we bought this property 25 years ago with the idea we'd own it for five years. I have a co-general partner and we had a chance to sell the property for more money than we can sell it now 10 years ago and he said, "Ah, let's just keep it because we'll make more money in the future." Well, now we're going to make less money.

But the point of it is is that I just don't feel any need to be in control because I'm using the faithful model as opposed to the success model. I don't feel any need to try to negotiate for another 1% or 2% on the sales price. I just believe that God is going to take care of all of us if we will be faithful. That's why the Big Idea today, and it's worth remembering, that **God calls us to be faithful, not successful**. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the word and all of these things that we learned that we would otherwise never know. Lord, it just seems so obvious here today that you're more interested in the success of our character than our circumstances and that you want us to be faithful, that's what the calling is. Help us to understand that, apply it. We ask this in Jesus's name, amen.