

## Introduction

Several years ago, a survey team charted status updates on Face Book to determine which days people love and hate the most. The most loved is Friday and the most hated Monday. The reason of course is that Friday is the last day of the work week and Monday the first.

That explains why we have the acrostic "TGIF," "**Thank God It's Friday.**" But wouldn't it be nice if it were "TGIM" as well. Wouldn't it be nice if people liked their jobs so much that they would "**Thank God It's Monday.**" That is in fact what God wants for us and the texts we read teach us how to achieve it.

## The Nature of Work

Let's start by examining the nature of work itself.

Many people consider it a curse. Ancient Greeks, for instance, believed that the gods hated mankind and condemned us to work out of spite. Many medieval Christian theologians believed something similar. They taught that work is one of the penalties of the Fall. Americans themselves never held such views until the 1960's. Revolutionaries of that era rejected every aspect of the establishment, including the work ethic that helped build it. One of the most celebrated of those, Studs Terkel, authored a book that actually praised the demise of America's work ethic. He wrote, "**This book being about work is, by its very nature, about violence – to the spirit as well as the body.**" Many people, like Terkel, believe that work is a curse.

But it isn't. It's a blessing instead. We see that in Genesis 2:15. God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and commanded them "**to cultivate it and keep it.**" That clearly implies that crops, plants, flowers, and so on had to be planted and cared for.

The point is that Adam and Eve worked before they sinned. Work was part of their utterly fulfilling and joyful life in the Garden of Eden. It was essential to their very nature physically, psychologically, and even

spiritually. They actually needed to work in other words.

And so do we. Work is a blessing from God. It's a necessary expression of our physical, psychological, and spiritual makeup. It enhances the person we are and the life we live. The truth is that our life and we would be incomplete without it.

### **Work as Toil**

But let's be honest about it. That isn't how most people experience their job – as a blessing. They experience it as a curse instead.

The Genesis account explains why they do. Adam and Eve sinned against God or “**fell**” as we say it. 3:17-19 then records one of the penalties of that fall, “**Cursed is the ground because of you . . . both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you . . . by the sweat of your face you will eat bread.**”

How many of you have gardens at home or plants or flowers that you trying to grow? You can certainly relate to these verses if you do? If you have crops, plants, or flowers, it's by the sweat of your brow. You pull up all of those thorns, thistles, and weeds and sure enough they're back again in a few weeks or so. It's exhausting, even exasperating

That illustrates one of the penalties of the Fall. Work became toil. Bible commentator Derek Kidner says it well, “**Work itself was not the legacy of the Fall; only its new character as toil.**” Two things happened after the Fall: thorns, thistles, and weeds, which existed before it, became far more encroaching after it, and Adam and Eve lost much of the power they had over nature. Work became toil as a result.

And that's exactly how most people today experience it. Paul Goodman is a well-known social commentator. In his book Growing Up Absurd, he points out that 70% of all American workers get little or no gratification out of their jobs. Also, 82% don't like being at their jobs and can't wait to be freed from what they're doing to them.

Those statistics show that most Americans dislike their jobs. Many even hate them. Remember the seven dwarfs in *Snow White*. They sang

cheerfully, **“Hi ho, hi so, it’s off to work we go.”** But as the bumper sticker says it, people today lament, **“I owe, I owe, it’s off to work I go.”** They do go to their jobs but it isn’t because they want to. It’s because they have to – to pay the bills.

And it’s “killing them.” Studies in industry show that a large number of workers suffer regular bouts of depression because of their jobs. It’s also a fact that innumerable divorces and abuse can be traced back to vocational activities that left people emotionally dead. Few things are more destructive in people’s lives than disliking or hating their jobs. It makes them depressed and/or even cruel.

So, it’s vital that we experience our jobs as work not toil, as blessing not curse. Our well-being and joy, and the well-being and joy of those around us, depend on it.

### **Changing Our Minds**

But how do we do that? The answer is “by making a change.”

The first thing that we might change is jobs. That might mean making less money and having less prestige but if we can experience another job as a blessing, it’s worth it. Think about it. Our job is what author Dorothy Sayers calls “nine tenths” of our life. It’s something that we spend almost half of our waking life doing. So which is better? Is it leaving a job we dislike and driving to a huge home in a luxury car? Or is it leaving a job we enjoy and driving to a simple home in a compact car? It’s a value judgment and the choice is ours.

We need to ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance and help if we’re experiencing our present job as a curse. If we can do it responsibly, leave it and do something else. Maybe that’s the change we need.

And maybe it isn’t. It may be that changing jobs isn’t possible or even necessary. Maybe it isn’t a change of jobs we need but a change of mind.

That’s exactly what the other passage we read, Colossians 3:22-25, is all about. This is just one of five fascinating slave passages in the

Bible. The others are Ephesians 6:5-9; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Titus 2:9-10; and 1 Peter 2:18-20. In those passages, Paul and Peter treated slaves as persons not property, which was revolutionary for the day. Anyway, those slaves obviously didn't have the option of changing jobs. But they did have the option of changing their minds. So God called them to do just that. That's what all of those passages are implicitly about. God called slaves to change the way they thought about the work they did.

He does the same with us. In his classic book Paradise Lost, John Milton shared a profound insight, which is this, "**The mind is its own place.**" He went on to say that some people "**can make a hell (out) of heaven.**" Milton's point was that attitude not circumstances is decisive. Attitude, more than circumstances, determines the experiences we have. To a person with a right attitude, hell can seem like heaven. To a person with a wrong attitude, heaven can seem like hell.

So, if we can't or won't change our job, the best thing that we can do is change our mind about it. That means start having the right attitude, as those slaves did, about the work we do. Changing our attitude will very likely change our experience. It will very likely make our hell a heaven, our curse a blessing.

### How to View Our Work

Now, Paul tells us what the right attitude about our job is. It's one that believes and constantly keeps in mind two things.

The first is that we're working for the "**Lord.**" The "**Lord**" refers to Jesus here. Notice what Paul writes. Verse 22 – Obey your masters because you fear Jesus. Verse 23 – Do your work, whatever it is, heartily for Jesus. And verse 24 – It is Jesus that we serve.

All of us have had people ask us, "**For whom do you work?**" What did we say when they did? I knew a familiar friend of Jesus who worked at B&C Machine in Barberton. When someone asked him, "**For whom do you work?**" he always answered, "**Jesus and B&C Machine.**" He wasn't trying to be a smart aleck or to witness in saying that. He truly believed

that Jesus, not B&C Machine, was His ultimate employer and boss.

That's how he thought about his job and so should we about ours. When I carried mail for the post office, I was carrying mail for Jesus. When I loaded furnaces at Chrysler Amplex, I was loading furnaces for Jesus. When I clerked at the common pleas court, I was clerking for Jesus. The very first thing that we need to believe and keep in mind is that we're working for Jesus.

The second thing is that Jesus will pay us. Let me ask you a question that you can answer to yourself. It's nobody's business but your own. How much do you make? Maybe you're salaried and make \$30,000 a year or \$130,000 a year. Or maybe you're hourly and make \$8.00 an hour or \$250 an hour. But the truth is that those of us who are working for Jesus are making a whole lot more than that.

The opening line in verse 24 explains why I say that, "**knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.**" Do you get the gist of this? Since Jesus is our ultimate employer and boss, He will pay us. Our ultimate payday isn't every Friday once a week, twice a month, or whenever we're paid. It is at the Second Coming of our employer and boss, Jesus. He will do two things on that day. First, He will judge how we did all of our jobs. And second, He will pay us, accordingly, for eternity. We'll experience eternal gain or loss depending on how heartily or lethargically we did them.

The implication of that is staggering. I know a secular attorney who makes \$250 an hour and doesn't work for Jesus. I know a Christian janitor who makes \$12 an hour and does work of Jesus. The janitor is making more than the attorney is – indescribably more in fact. His payment is eternal gain.

So that's the Bible's point of view about our jobs and we should embrace it. First, we're working for Jesus. And second, Jesus will pay us. Believe that and keep it constantly in mind. How we experience our job profoundly changes when we do. It doesn't curse us. It blesses us instead.

## Work Heartily

And because it does, we're able to consistently do what Paul commands. Verse 22 - work "**with sincerity of heart,**" which refers to a will that bears up under God's scrutiny. And verse 23 – work "**heartily,**" which refers to a will that is focused. That prepositional phrase and adverb teach us to do our job with all our might. That doesn't mean we allow it to become our life. That's a tragic mistake that destroys our family and soul. It does mean that we do it as best as we can - with sweat, competence, and the power of God. And beyond that, we routinely sacrifice our own comfort and desires for it. Think of it in terms of manner and motive. Our manner of work is as Jesus wills – with focus. Our motive of work is to please Jesus.

An extraordinary painting illustrates what I mean. It shows an old shoemaker sitting at his workbench, his hands folded, and his head bowed in prayer. As he prays, a beam of light that comes from the ceiling is shining down on him, which represents the presence of God. And ascending up that beam of light to God is a stream of shoes.

The painting's message is clear. The shoemaker did his job for God. Constantly aware of the divine presence around him as he worked, he carefully crafted each shoe he made as a sacred gift to God.

A similar painting could be drawn of you. If you're a cook at Burger King, it would be Whoppers ascending to God. If you're a janitor, it would be clean toilets. If you're an insurance agent, it would be life insurance policies. If you're a mother, it would be diapers. If you're a mechanic, it would be carburetors. If you're an attorney, it would be motions or briefs. If you're a farmer, it would be crops, and so on.

## Conclusion

That isn't just nice talk. It's the truth. So, be constantly aware of Jesus' presence at your job, whatever it is. Then do what you do or make what you make with sincerity of heart, heartily, as a sacred gift to Him. It will be "**TGIM**" for you if you do.