

"LOVING THE LABOR OF WORK" COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1

This Week's Core Competency

Stewardship – I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God. 1 Timothy 6:17-19 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

The Stewardship creed reads, "I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God." Unfortunately, too often when discussing the practical implications of this Core Competency, we focus on what we *own* rather than who we *are*. True, we are stewards of what we possess and have a responsibility to use the money and belongings God has entrusted to us in ways pleasing to him. But we are also stewards of our *giftedness*, which includes more than the spiritual gifts God has given us. It includes every facet of our being that sets us apart from others to make us who we are as unique persons. Put differently, it's our divine design.

One author defines *giftedness* this way:

"Giftedness is the unique way you were designed to function. It's the inborn core strengths and natural motivation you instinctively use to do

Giftedness is the unique way you were designed to function.

– Bill Hendricks

things that are satisfying and productive. Not just what you can do, but what you were born to do, enjoy doing, and do very well.

"While other factors such as IQ, personality, environment, and upbringing certainly play a role in shaping your life, giftedness expresses your essential personhood—what makes you you and sets you apart from everyone else.

"Whatever your giftedness is, it's the key to your personal and professional success and satisfaction. After all, you were born with motivated ability to do certain things particularly well. For example, do you enjoy playing an instrument? Giftedness is the core motivation that causes you to enjoy it. So it is throughout your life. Whenever you engage in activities that summon your giftedness, you feel satisfied and happy" (Bill Hendricks, "What is Giftedness," www.thegiftednesscenter.com/individuals/; see also *The Power of Uniqueness: Why You Can't Be Anything You Want to Be* by the same author and Arthur F. Miller, Jr.).

In another place he calls giftedness a *phenomenon* in effect from birth:

"There's a phenomenon about human beings that operates whether we are aware of it or not (and most of us aren't). We don't have to know anything about giftedness to take advantage of it. It's a phenomenon. And it's a phenomenon that points directly to the truth that God designs human beings from the womb. There are many truths of Scripture that we have to take by faith because we can't see or experience them here and now. But the truth that God designs people from the womb is different, because if that's true, then that design ought to start showing up *from the womb*.

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"That's exactly what we see in the phenomenon of giftedness. From the womb, each of us begins behaving or functioning in a thoroughly unique, one-of-a-kind way. It's not that people don't share behaviors in common. But the key to understanding any given individual is to identify what distinguishes him/her from everyone else. Giftedness does that. Giftedness is a unique pattern of functioning that the person returns to over and over in his/her life. S/he does so because God designed him/her to function that way, hence it feels the most natural and instinctive to function that way. To do life any other way would feel unnatural" (Hendricks, "Introducing Discover Your Design," 4-5). So giftedness isn't only the rare ability of a few individuals; it's also the unique design of every individual.

Not only are we stewards of what we own, we are also stewards of who we are. We are stewards of our unique giftedness and have a responsibility to make the most of our potential, i.e., to use the way we are divinely "wired" to the praise of God's glory. We're talking now about more than what we do in church; we're talking about what we do in life. In a nutshell, artists make lousy accountants. Not only do they hate their work, they do it poorly. So get a grip on your giftedness. The better you know yourself, the more likely you will be a good steward of who you are both in and out of church. If you're interested in learning more about giftedness, in addition to *The Power of Uniqueness* by Bill Hendricks you might read *Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential* by Gordon T. Smith.

For Discussion

Diane is a creative single who loves to make things and loves to serve on the worship team at her church. She describes herself as a "people person." She recently started a new job at a CareNow office and is currently being trained to file insurance claims. She likes her supervisor but hates dealing with insurance companies. It's frustrating and tedious. Some friends tell her to quit and look for something else, others tell her to stay put because jobs are hard to find. "No job is perfect," they say. "It pays the bills. What more do you want?" What do you think?

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Colossians 3:22-4:1

22Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.

4:1Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Cf., Ephesians 6:5-9

5Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. 6Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. 7Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, 8because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

9And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Underline "slaves" in v. 22.
- * Circle "obey" in v. 22.
- * Box "not only . . . but" indicating *contrast* in v. 22.
- * Box "as" indicating *comparison* in v. 23.
- * Box "since" indicating *reason* in v. 24.
- * Circle "inheritance" in v. 24.
- * Underline "masters" and "Master" in 4:1.
- * Circle "right and fair" in v. 1.
- * Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 1.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Paul tells slaves to obey their *earthly* masters. Why not simply masters?
2. None of us are slaves. Should we stop reading? Explain.
3. Explain the *contrast* in v. 22.
4. What does "with all your heart" mean in verse 23?
5. Explain the *comparison* in verse 23.
6. Paul mentions the Lord in verses 22, 23, and 24. Explain his relationship to our work.
7. Verse 24 ends with a command (see note), "Serve the Lord Christ." What does that mean in this context?
8. Verse 25 contains a *warning*. Relate it to what Paul has been telling slaves.
9. Masters are to treat their slaves fairly and justly. Explain why.
10. **Discussion:** Some have argued that Paul's "rules" for slaves and masters are irrelevant today given slavery is an unacceptable thing of the past. What do you think?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Slavery was a "given" in Paul's world. According to one author, "as many as 85-90 percent of the inhabitants of Rome and peninsula Italy were slaves or of slave origin in the first and second centuries. Facts and figures about slavery in the provinces are sketchy by comparison with those in Italy, but the existing evidence suggests a comparable percentage" (A. A. Ruppercht, "Slave, Slavery," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 881). The numbers imply that there must have been both slaves and masters in at least some of Paul's churches since the early households that comprised many of them consisted not only of a principal extended family but also of slaves and friends, tenants, partners or clients who would have been involved that household's commercial or agricultural enterprise. This was certainly true of the church in Colosse since we know that Onesimus, the runaway slave, and Philemon, his wronged master, were both members of the church that met in Philemon's home there (Plm 1, 2; cf. Col 4:9).

Even though Aristotle called slaves "human tools," they did have certain rights. They could worship as members of the extended family of their owner. They could marry—although their unions were termed *contubernium* rather than *matrimonium*, which meant their children became the property of their owners. They could accumulate money to use later to purchase their freedom or start a business once they were manumitted. Some worked for daily wages, two-thirds of which were paid to their owners. Not all were unskilled workers. Some slaves were artisans, workers in crafts, architects, physicians, administrators, philosophers, grammarians, writers and teachers. Once they became freed persons, many of them entered into business partnerships with their former owners. "Cicero says that a slave could expect freedom in seven years, but in any case, under Roman law, persons in slavery could expect to be set free at least by the time they reached age thirty" (881). All things considered, slavery was a social contract, the virtue or vice of which Paul did not comment on, similar in a way to an employment contract in that it obligated one party to work for another party and defined the terms of that obligation.

Contrary to the notion that Paul's instructions have no contemporary significance in our culture (David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Colossians, Philemon*, 268), their significance to workers and their employers is in the words of one commentator,

"likely justified" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 308), and here's why. While the apostle is talking to slaves and masters, he is not talking to them about slavery, the basis of their service/work relationship, but about the slave's labor and the master's compensation, the terms of that relationship. And because Paul's instructions describe what is right and fair on the part of both parties, they are applicable to various service/work relationships today. That said we must keep in mind the obvious differences that exist between slaves and employees, on one hand, and masters and employers, on the other, as we apply what he had to say. For one thing, they are seldom part of the same household today as they were then.

In a nutshell, Paul told slaves three things. "Obey your earthly masters in everything" (v. 22). And while by "everything" Paul may have meant, *absolutely* "everything," his following words contain hints to the contrary. After all, these are earthly masters who "also have a Master in heaven" (4:1), and all of his further comments pertain to the service/work relationship. Elaborating further, he cautioned that their obedient service was to be sincere, not just for show when the master was looking. "Here the point, equally applicable at all levels of human labour, is that the Christian at work must be a whole person, totally given to the task in hand, not merely doing the minimum required to avoid rebuke, with a show of effort when one is being observed" (N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 149).

"Work with all your heart" (v. 23). As far as the apostle was concerned, half-hearted effort is unacceptable. Slaves were to work as if they were working for the Lord since he was the one who would ultimately reward them for their service. The same is true of us. While a task may appear unimportant or trivial, because our work matters to the Lord, we have the opportunity to turn our labor into an act of worship.

"Serve the Lord Christ" (v. 24). The NIV translates verse 24b, "It is the Lord Christ you are serving," but it might better be translated as a command followed by the reason to obey it (v. 25), i.e., the one who does wrong will have to face the consequences. Shoddy work done for ulterior motives is inexcusable—no exceptions. But why the warning? "With these instructions, Paul may want to forestall any unrest among other slaves who might misinterpret the

leniency shown to Onesimus [the subject of Paul's letter to Philemon]. If Philemon yields to Paul's request, it may appear that running away brings a reward. With the warning of verse 25, Paul dissuades any slave from trying to take advantage of a Christian master's forbearance and willingness to forgive" (Garland, 251).

To masters, Paul said, "Provide your slaves with what is right and fair" (4:1). In other words, treat

them justly and fairly. "To talk of 'justice' and 'fairness' (properly the word means 'equality') in relation to slaves would sound extraordinary to most slave-owners of the ancient world" (Wright, 151). But from Paul's point of view, slaves were human beings, too, not merely their masters' tools. More importantly, in a Christian household they were each other's brothers.

The Message of the Passage

*If you're an employee, work for your employer as for the Lord,
and if you're an employer or manager compensate your
employees fairly and treat them justly.*

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your thoughts on the passage:**

–Write about what God wants you to know . . .

–Write about how God wants you to feel . . .

–Write about what God wants you to do . . .

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 22 **slaves** "Slavery was political and economic, not racial" (Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, NAC, 316).
- v. 22 **obey** "At first sight, Paul's command that slaves obey their masters seems simply to endorse the status quo. But we need to see that what he writes here also subtly undermines it. First, it is significant that Paul chooses to address slaves at all, implying not only that they are assembled with the other Christians of the Colossian church to hear the letter being read but that they are responsible people who need to choose a certain kind of behavior. Second, Paul clearly relativizes the status of the slaves' master by repeatedly reminding both slave (vv. 22, 23, 24) and master (4:1) of the ultimate 'master' to whom both are responsible: the Lord Jesus Christ. Third, Paul never hints that he endorses the institution of slavery. He tells slaves and master how they are to conduct themselves within the institution, but it is a bad misreading of Paul to read into his teaching approval of the institution itself" (Moo, 308). A practical look into Paul's attitudes toward Christian slaves and masters can be inferred from his handling of the Onesimus situation (cf. Plm 1-25).
- v. 22 **earthly masters** Lit., "masters according to the flesh" (KJV). "Here the word ['flesh'] is being used in its neutral sense: the slaves' masters belong to the human realm" (309). The phrase refers to the sphere in which the service-relation holds true (the NET Bible, note 5 on 3:22). "The masters were only earthly masters. They were masters 'according to the flesh.' Paul subtly reminded the readers of a major theme of this section. There is an ultimate master reigning over both slave and master" (Melick, 317).
- v. 22 **not only** . . . Cf. "not with eyeservice" (KJV, RSV); cf., "not by way of eye-service," (ESV). "Eye service. It might mean 'merely such service as can be seen,' i.e., superficial work—not dusting behind the ornaments, not sweeping under the wardrobe but the context suggests rather going through the outward movements [going through the motions] of the work 'without a corresponding keenness of will behind them' (Moule). The word could also have the idea of 'when the master's eye is upon you' (J. Lewis Johnson, 'The New Man in the Old,' *Bib Sac*, 121 [April, 1964], 113). ["As men pleasers" (KJV, RSV); cf., "as people-pleasers" (ESV)]. *Anthropareskos*, men-pleaser, one who tries to please men at the sacrifice of principle (BAG)" (Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, 582).
- v. 22 **reverence for** Lit., "fearing the Lord" (RSV, the NET Bible). "These latter words 'fearing the Lord' do not refer here to God as they do in the OT (and in Rev 15:4) but to Christ . . . Christian slaves are above all else servants of Christ and they are to work first and foremost so as to please him. Not fear of an earthly master, but reverence for the Lord Christ should be their primary motive" (Peter T. O'Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 44, *Colossians, Philemon*, 227, 28).
- v. 24 **inheritance** . . . "The translation an inheritance . . . as a reward is almost certainly the right way to understand a phrase that would be literally translated from the Greek 'the reward of the inheritance' (*ten antapodosin tes kleronomias*). In this kind of construction the two nouns refer to the same thing but in different ways. The 'inheritance' that they will receive will have the nature of a reward, a fair recompense for their faithful service" (Moo, 312).
- v. 24 **are serving** Or "Serve the Lord Christ. For the one who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong . . ." (the NET Bible; cf., NEB). Translations differ as do commentators because the verb can be translated as indicative or imperative. "The verb can also be an imperative and the sentence punctuated as a command: 'Serve the Lord Christ!' This alternative best explains the 'for' (*gar*) that follows (omitted in NIV) and makes it parallel to the imperative 'work' in 3:23. It reminds slaves who the true Master is, Christ, and leads into the warning in 3:25: 'Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong'-a kind of measure for measure. The 'anyone' may refer only to slaves or to both masters and slaves. Since masters are specifically addressed in 4:1, it is more likely that it refers to slaves" (Garland, 250; cf., Moo, 313 and O'Brien, 231).
- 4:1 **right and fair** "Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly" (ESV); cf., "Masters, treat your slaves with justice and fairness" (the NET Bible). "The command to masters is startling in the context of ancient slavery laws. Paul demands that slaves be treated 'with what is right and fair' (4:1). Other humanitarians urged slave owners to be good masters and moderate in their punishment. Most pundits advised slave owners on how to get the most out of their slaves . . . Aristotle had said that it was irrelevant to talk about justice in the master/slave relationship because there can be no injustice relating to things that are one's own. Everyone took for granted that justice has nothing to do with how one treats one's belongings. Paul makes bold to dissent and defends the right of slaves, who had no legal rights: They should be accorded justice and fairness" (Garland, 251).
- v. 1 **Master in heaven** "The motivation for this just and fair treatment is basically the same as the slave's motive for obeying his master. Masters also, like their slaves, are answerable to a greater Master in heaven. This one lord and Judge will decide whether these earthly masters have done what is truly just and fair" (O'Brien, 233).
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Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Special Note to Parents: On August 25 and September 1, PantegoKids will be in a series titled *Rose Knows: Joshua*. We will be studying the life of Joshua to see how God called him to be strong and courageous as he led the Israelites into the promised land. Kids will be learning valuable lessons on how they can live courageously in a new school year.

The Prophet Isaiah declared the Lord's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways (Is. 55:8). His are higher and better. Joshua learned this lesson early on in the conquest of the promised land. As a trained military leader, Joshua was ready to take the land by force. He knew God was going before him and had promised the victory. But God's plan was different for Jericho. God was going to require Joshua and his army to have faith and trust that He would deliver the city in His own way. God's plan is always better. This school year there will be moments when you ask yourselves "What is going on? This doesn't make sense!" Joshua may have had that thought as he marched around the city again and again. But, we can trust that as we rely on Him, God will bring glory to Himself in our situation and everyone nearby will know that He is the Lord! Praying for you as you study this story of Joshua with your child this week—may you be strengthened in your faith!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Joshua 5:13-6:23

1. Who did Joshua meet on his way to Jericho?
2. What was God's plan to defeat the city of Jericho?
3. Did it happen as God said it would?

What Do You Think

1. How do you think Joshua felt when he realized he was talking to the Lord?
2. What do you think Joshua thought about God's plan?
3. What would you have thought if it had been you?

What R U Going To Do

Our memory verse today is a challenge to know God's Word so we can live according to its truth. Make a plan this year to memorize verses from God's Word. Post verses in your room so you will remember to review them often. Set a goal for how many verses you would like to memorize this year!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Faithfulness: Sticking with God no matter what makes me a winner!

Memory Verse

Joshua 1:8 Do not let this Book of Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse ____ . Family completed **Say** ____ **Think** ____ **Do** ____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians*

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.