

How many of you commute to work every day?

I came across a very interesting commuter story in a magazine awhile ago. The author was describing an exasperating commute into Washington D.C. He wrote, “I observed a traffic flagman actually dancing as he performed his job. Seemingly oblivious to the July sun, blaring car horns, and angry gestures from impatient commuters, the man swung his orange flags in wide graceful arcs and called out friendly greetings to passing motorists. Astounded by the genuine joy this man exhibited in what most would consider a dead-end job, I rolled down my window and asked him how he could be so enthusiastic, considering the heat and hostility that surrounded him. “I’m happy because I’m not working for the man,” he shouted back. “I’m a flagman for Jesus.”¹

Do you feel that way about your job? Are you working for the LORD?

Way back in about 60 A.D. the apostle Paul wrote a letter to a church in the town of Colossae in the country we now know as Turkey. Paul’s letter had much to say about living a holy life, which will help us as we try to figure out how to serve Christ at work. The over-arching principle of the passage we read earlier is Colossians 3:17 - “*Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*”

Whether we are slave or master, employer or employee, secretary or CEO or customer service rep or nurse or laborer or lawyer or mechanic - everything we do should be as a representative of Jesus and to bring glory to his name.

I was so surprised Thursday evening to see on KDKA News the good story about “Mattress Mack”, the owner of the Gallery Furniture chain in Texas. Mr. Jim McIngvale opened his large stores to Houstonians made homeless by Hurricane Harvey.

I was even more surprised the next morning to see Tony Norman’s editorial in the Post-Gazette about the same man. Mr. McIngvale has provided beds, dry linens, on-site showers, food, clothing, and volunteers for a400 flood victims. Tony Norman described him as “Houston’s Supreme example of the Good Samaritan.” He wrote, “Mr. McIngvale has spent his life helping people. He credits his Catholic School upbringing with his willingness to help.”²

“Mattress Mack” is working for Jesus.

The Apostle Paul lists some of the characteristics that the Holy Spirit is growing in our lives to enable us to live for Jesus: “Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another ... forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you. And above all these put on love.” This is how we are to treat the people we encounter every day at work.

¹ Discipleship Journal, Jan-Feb 2000

² Tony Norman editorial, “*Mattress Mack, the Best Good Samaritan.*” Post-Gazette, Friday, September 1, 2017, p. A2.

For example:

In an article in *Campus Life* a **young student nurse** wrote about her experience when she decided to treat a patient differently from how everyone else treated her. Eileen had a brain aneurysm which left her with no conscious control over her body. The doctors said she could feel nothing and was unconscious. Yet this young nurse decided to treat her kindly, talking to Eileen while she cared for her. One day the nurse said, “I was in a cruddy mood this morning, Eileen, because today was supposed to be my day off. But now that I’m here, I am glad. I wouldn’t have wanted to miss seeing you on Thanksgiving. Do you know that today is Thanksgiving?”

The staff had said that Eileen was unable to feel pain and was unaware of anything around her. Yet the student nurse noticed that Eileen was looking at her and crying, and trembling all over.³

The student nurse chose to express Christian compassion and kindness while “just doing her job,” and it changed both their lives, and the entire hospital wing, for the better.

In this letter to the Colossian Church, Paul instructed Christians to be patient and humble, not considering ourselves better than anyone else. We are called to be gentle toward those who have provoked us, rather than being resentful or angry. We are to overlook the idiosyncrasies and annoying things that others do, the same way we appreciate it when others overlook our quirks. God calls us to forgive as we have been forgiven.

In another illustration, a **policeman** wrote an article in *Discipleship Journal* about living his faith on the job. At one time he had a supervisor who was very antagonistic toward his Christian faith. The supervisor reminded him every day that it was against department policy to share one’s faith while on duty, which he obeyed. One night the officer was called to the scene of an attempted suicide. He saw a woman trying to inhale carbon monoxide from a hose connected to the exhaust from her car. He managed to pull the woman away from the car and into the house, where he listened to her tragic story. He felt strongly compelled to share his faith, and eventually talked to her about Christ. When he left, the officer went directly to his supervisor and told him what he had done and why. The supervisor said it would cost him his badge.

However, the next morning the chief of police received a phone call from a very influential man in town who wanted to thank the police department for training their officers in religion. “My wife is a new person. Thank you for saving her life.”

The officer ended his article saying, “When I look at the letter of commendation I received for that incident, it reminds me that I am a servant in the workplace. I am a servant to the supervisor who doesn’t understand my faith, and I show him respect by obeying him and by telling him truthfully when I have not. Above all, I am a servant of Christ.”⁴

³ *Lessons From a Young Nurse*, by Rebecca Manley Pippert, p. 31 in *Stories For the Heart*, compiled by Alice Gray

⁴ *Discipleship Journal*, issue 115, Jan/Feb 2000; p. 40. By Jamie Winship. Also at www.worklife.org/labor-of-love#.WaRdPviGO1s website “WorkLife – thrive at work... every day.”

Do you get discouraged about *ever* being that sort of person? God does not expect us to change by our own effort. The Holy Spirit is at work in us, helping us to desire God's will, and then helping us to do it.⁵ Christ is at work in us, helping us to become more like him.⁶ God has begun the good work in us, and He promises to bring it to completion⁷.

We can participate and cooperate with the Holy Spirit by following **verse 16**: *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."*

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" can be accomplished by reading your Bible regularly and meditating on what you read. While you are driving, or mowing the grass, or washing dishes, think about what God is saying to you. The Old Testament especially has many stories worth studying for inspiration on how others dealt with problems on the job.

Studying the Word of God on your own is very important, but it is also extremely beneficial to get together with other Christians to discuss what you've read, to share insights, and to encourage one another to apply what you have been studying to your daily lives.

Verse 17 & verse 23 are the high-points of this passage. *"Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him... Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters."*

When we view our work as a call from God, realizing that God has placed us where we are with a specific task in mind for us, it gives new value and new purpose to what we do. You are a representative of Christ in the market place - let your light shine!

Like the traffic flagman said, "we're not working for the man – we're working for Jesus!"

The Message Bible gives a great paraphrase of Paul's instructions in verse 23: *"Don't just do your best and work hard when the boss is watching! Always be careful and industrious. Always do your best. Always do what is right, even when no one is watching."*

Tim Shutt, crew chief for NASCAR driver Mike McLaughlin, was faced with that choice in 2001. Tim was a new Christian, and his job was to prepare and maintain the race cars for his team. Joe Gibbs, the team's owner, was adamant that they not cheat. Tim knew the other teams were making illegal adjustments to their cars - who would know if he did it too? He said, "I got up under the car, I got halfway through putting the piece on, and that verse, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God"* came flashing in red in front of me, and whoa, that was it. I said, "I'm leaving this up to you, God." Shutt didn't put the piece on the car.

⁵ Philippians 2:13

⁶ Romans 8:29

⁷ Philippians 1:6

Mclaughlin won the race - Talladega, one of the biggest races of 2001. Tim said that when they won, the first thing that came to his mind was that verse: "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*" Tim applied his faith to his job, and made a difficult choice which paid off in the end.⁸

Tim Shutt put into action Colossians 3:23-24: "*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*"

That is the Word of the Lord to each of us, too. Always work with integrity. Respect the authority of those above you. Treat others with Christ-like love, dignity, and respect, no matter what their occupation is. Do your best work even when no one is watching. God has placed you where you are, to be his light and his witness in the market place. Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

God makes no guarantee that following this path will get you a promotion, or that you'll win the race, or that you'll make a million dollars. Worldly success is not our goal anyway. Imagine the joy when you've finished your life's work, and you stand before the throne of heaven, seeing the Father's loving eyes and hearing, "***Well done, my good and faithful servant.***"

"*Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him...*"

Amen.

⁸ By Victor Lee in *Christianity Today*, May-June 2002, Vol 5., No. 3