

In the first story of this session, we met Megan, the fashion designer for Ralph Lauren in New York City who grew up on a farm in Oregon. Take a moment to consider the journey God has taken you on to date, from your childhood to the position you currently hold.

Are you surprised at where you are now? How have you seen God working in your life to get you this far?

Megan said, *“I think the greatest way to worship God in your workplace is by loving those who He’s placed around you.”* Love is supposed to be a Christian’s trademark. Jesus said that Christians should be identifiable by the way we love others (John 13:34–35). Here Jesus is talking about sacrificial love, like the way He loves us, not romantic love.

How can we sacrificially love the people with whom we work? What does that look like? Can you give an example?

The thought of sacrificially loving your co-workers might sound somewhat strange. But you might be the only Christian that person comes in contact with on a regular basis. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have the Holy Spirit living within us. There should be something different about us; people should be drawn to us.

Megan mentioned a time when a co-worker asked her why she was happy all the time. Megan said, *“There was this long pause, and I had this moment—I could give her a watered down answer or I could really use this as an opportunity to tell her why I’m happy.”* Megan shared with her friend the hope and purpose she finds in Jesus.

Has something similar happened to you? Do you find it difficult to share your faith with people in your workplace? Why or why not?

Someone read **1 Peter 3:15**.

What does it mean to be prepared to give an answer for our hope? Does that mean memorizing some kind of gospel presentation? Or is this about your personal faith journey? Or both?

What does this verse say about *how* we are to talk to others about our faith?

In this session, JR Vassar said, *“People often see their job as a distraction from true ministry.”*

Why do you think people feel this way?

JR also said, *“God does not divide our lives into secular and sacred spheres; we are engaged in sacred activity while we are on the job.”*

Why are we tempted to divide our lives into things that are sacred and things that are secular? Is *everything* in life really sacred? Why or why not? (We often think of something being secular if it has no religious value or significance. But everything we think and do impacts our relationship with God.)

Read Colossians 3:22–4:1.

When Paul uses the term “slave”, he is not talking about 18th–19th century slavery, but slavery as defined in the first century. A slave, in that context, was someone who worked for and was paid by another person who had authority over them. This passage is often applied to the modern workplace—to the attitude and performance of supervisors and employees.

Do you think being a Christian should affect work performance? If so, in what ways?

Paul encourages us to perform our work with sincerity and reverence, to work with passion and excellence for the Lord. Read **verse 23** again. **What does this verse say is more important, our job title or our job performance?**

Notice that how we perform our job on earth has eternal, heavenly implications. JR noted that work was part of God's pre-fall plan for humanity. In a perfect world, we worked. This passage suggests that we'll also work in heaven.

You could say that how we perform in our earthly job is actually an extended interview for the job we'll have in heaven. **How should that change the way we view our current work?**

Read Exodus 31:1–11.

JR said something incredibly significant. He said that just like Bezalel was filled with the Holy Spirit in order to give him supernatural power to perform his trade with excellence, we too must be radically dependant on the Holy Spirit in our occupations.

When we think about being supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit, we usually think in terms of gifts of the spirit to be used at church, discernment when we read the Bible, or help in growing in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

Why do you think we often overlook asking for divine enablement in our jobs?

Can you give an example of a time when you were able to accomplish something at work that you know was only because of the help of the Holy Spirit?

JR also noted that the Holy Spirit's supernatural power in our lives would allow us to be priests in the marketplace, to be a presence of hope to those hurting around us.

Read 1 Peter 2:4–5.

Notice that Peter begins this section by reminding the reader that they were "chosen by God and precious to him" (v 4).

In the context of work, why is it important that we focus on the grace and love of God that He has extended to us through His Son? How should that impact the way we treat other and the way others see us?

Peter writes that we are to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices to God. Fortunately, because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, we no longer need to offer animal sacrifices (Hebrews 10:11–18). But we are to offer spiritual sacrifices, including ourselves (Romans 12:1), our praise and worship (Hebrews 13:15), and our good deeds (Hebrews 13:16; Philippians 4:18).

Part of the obligations of priest in the Old Testament included interceding for the people and pronouncing God's blessing on them (Deuteronomy 10:8; 21:5).

As New Testament “priests,” do you think we should pray for the people at our workplace? What should we pray about for them?

Read 1 Peter 2:9–12.

One of our priestly responsibilities is to “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (v 9). JR said that if we are going to advance the mission of Jesus, we need to take the *message* and *mercy* of Jesus into our vocations. Think of the hope that we have as Christians. While others fear death and are uncertain about what happens later, we not only know that Christ has conquered death, but that we also will live forever with Him in a place where there is no sin and no suffering. We'll live in perfect fellowship with God and with other believers. We know the end of the story, and we do live happily ever after. This hope should infuse our every day—even when we face trials. And this hope should be contagious.

Why is it important that we display the hope of Jesus in our lives at our place of work? How do you do that?

These verses also indicate the importance of living a life of integrity. We represent Jesus to non-believers. JR said, “*The leaven of gospel demonstration opens the light for the gospel declaration.*”

Overall, how do you think Christians are perceived in the marketplace today? What stories do you read about Christians in the news? How can we go about improving people's perceptions of what it means to be a Christian?

JR also cautions us to work to worship and to not worship our work. Today, especially in America, many people equate their occupation with their identity.

Why do you think present society places so much emphasis on what a person does for a living?

As Christians, where should we find our identity? What does each of the following verses teach us about our true identity? (Divide the following verses up among the people in your group.)

Galatians 2:20 – (We are new creations with Christ living in us.)

1 John 3:1 – (We are children of God.)

John 15:15 – (We are friends of Christ.)

Philippians 3:20 – (We are citizens of heaven.)

2 Corinthians 6:1 – (We are God's co-workers.)

Ephesians 2:10 – (We are God's workmanship.)

1 Corinthians 6:19 – (We are a holy temple of the Holy Spirit.)

Colossians 3:12 – (We are chosen and dearly loved by God.)

We are new creations. We were dead, but now by God's grace through faith in Jesus, we are alive! But somehow, introducing yourself at a party as a "new creature" or an "alien and a stranger in a foreign land" just doesn't go over very well.

What kinds of things can we do to encourage people to see that who they (and we) are is so much more than what they do? For example, when you are first introduced to someone, what other questions can you ask other than, "So, what do you do?"

JR said that instead of using work to establish our identity, we should use work to express our identity.

What do you think he meant by that?

One of the problems with equating your identity with your work is that if you fail at your job, then you feel like you must be a failure as a person. As a result, people pursue success at almost any cost. Today, it's not uncommon for people to spend 80 to 100 hours a week at work. It's even possible to put those kinds of hours in because we are "working for God's glory." As important as our jobs are, there is more to life than just our vocation. Remember, all of life—including our role with our family, our friends, and at church—is sacred. God did create work. But He also created rest.

JR challenged us to take God's command to Sabbath seriously. He said, "*We don't speak of implementation in other areas [of the ten commandments] like adultery or murder, but only in Sabbath.*" Some will argue that Jesus never reiterated the commandment of keeping the Sabbath holy, and therefore as Christians we don't need to honor this command. Others will note that the Sabbath was actually Saturday and we go to church on Sunday. But we must remember, Jesus took time out to recharge, to relax with His disciples, and to be alone and pray to His Father. The principle has not changed.

Without getting legalistic, how do we, as Christians, honor this command to rest?

One of the things JR does at Apostles Church to encourage business leaders to be intentional about bringing the mercy and message of Jesus to the marketplace is to facilitate *industry renewal sessions*. He said that these sessions—where people get together and brainstorm how to creatively and effectively influence their workplace with the message of Christ—foster amazing creativity, vision, sense of purpose, and a calling in people's lives.

Do you think this is a good idea? Should you start your own "industry renewal session"? Who should be in your group? Should we consider who is here today as a group that can brainstorm together? Are there any other people we can include?

JR concluded his message by challenging small groups within the church to be a bridge into their work community. He said that we have to let our circles of church and work collide. He gave several examples, including inviting friends from church to the happy hour at work or including co-workers in your small group from church, allowing non-Christian friends to see what an authentic, loving community of believers looks like.

What do you think of this idea? Not everyone may be involved in a small group at church, but how can we creatively mix up our relationships at work and at church?

JR began his message by challenging pastors to be brutally honest about their mission statement. JR said that while most churches say they are about the Great Commission and making disciples, in reality, it's often about gathering a crowd to hear the preacher or about providing the best goods and services possible in order to grow the size of their church. There's a difference between rhetoric and reality.

The goal of this Work as Worship series is to challenge all of us to see our careers and the time we spend at work as an opportunity to worship God and to impact His kingdom for eternity.

We all have a decision to make. Will our rhetoric match our reality?

Will we say with our lips that we desire to honor God at work, when in reality our heart's desire is to build personal wealth, improve status, and secure comfort for ourselves? Or will we choose to turn the focus away from ourselves and toward the mission God has for us? Will we live every day on mission for God, realizing that He's called us to be missionaries in our specific workplace? Will we choose to bring the gospel message of grace, love, and hope to a world that desperately needs Christ?

Will we **Work as Worship?** The decision is up to you.