



BUSINESS
THROUGH
THE LENS OF
GOD'S WORD

A HIGHER CALL BIBLE STUDY



BUSINESS THROUGH THE LENS OF GOD'S WORD

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INTRODUCTION

“Business is business.” “There is religion and there is business, and religion has no place in business.” After nearly four decades in business, I have heard this sentiment expressed too many times to count. Behind those statements is an opinion that spiritual matters and business matters must remain separate.

Business does have its own set of realities. If a company is unable to make a profit, eventually that company will no longer be in business! A person’s faith does not eliminate the need for profitability. If a sales person feels compelled by faith to love his or her customers, yet fails to close sales, they will eventually lose their job!

People who believe a person’s faith should have no role in their business, may have observed professing Christians claim one thing, but conduct their business without integrity. Perhaps they have watched Christians using their faith to manipulate others in their transactions. Maybe they noticed someone who used faith as an excuse for incompetence.

The question being posed in this Bible study: **Does the Bible have any relevance to our work?** YES. The Bible addresses the nature, purpose and value of our work. Scripture unlocks crucial insights into our motivations and our work ethic. It speaks of competition, excellence, leadership and integrity.

My prayer is that this study will inspire and equip you with a deeper understanding about God’s intentions for you, as you engage in your particular business. Once I was asked, “What does your faith have to do with your business?” My answer was straightforward: **“Everything.”**

What I have learned from God’s Word about business has given me a greater vision and motivation to pursue excellence, integrity and faith in my workplace. May it encourage and equip you in your business and profession.

Serving Him with you in the marketplace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "D. J. Allen".

LESSON ONE:

CREATED FOR WORK

INTRODUCTION:

The culture is full of ideas about work, such as:

“Work is a curse, a necessary evil.”

“You have to work now so you can enjoy life later.”

“The ultimate purpose of work is to fulfill yourself.”

“The value of your job is defined by your compensation, position and power.”

The Bible presents an entirely different understanding of work, its value to God and its contribution to society. Our first clues for discovering the true nature of work are found in God’s creation and His relationship with work.

WARM UP QUESTION:

What cultural ideas (stated above or others) have influenced you the most in your career?

READ GENESIS 2:1-20

1. The word “work” is used three times in the first three verses of Genesis 2. What is significant about the frequent use of that word, and what does it reveal about the nature of work?

2. Genesis 2:8 tells us that after God made Man He planted a garden and brought the man with him to work in it (2:15). Here we see the divine initiative and

calling to work. What implications can you draw from this? How does knowing that we are created in the image of God, who works, change the way you view your work?

3. What does Genesis 2:19-20 reveal about the role you were designed to fulfill in the world through your work?

4. The marketplace is always looking for the next role model, but considering the Creation account in Genesis, we will see that God is the ultimate role model. What can you learn by recognizing God as the ultimate role model in the marketplace, and how can this perspective shape the way you approach your responsibilities in the workplace?

5. After Adam and Eve sinned, God revealed the circumstances and the trajectory of living in a fallen world. READ GENESIS 3:17-19. From this passage, what is cursed and what is not? How do you observe the curse impacting us today?

6. READ EPHESIANS 2:8-10. This text reminds us that our salvation is a gift. And, as a gift, we can do nothing to earn it. At the same time, through the new Creation in Christ, the Creator of good works has created us to do good works. How can this truth mold in you, an authentic motivation for excellence, unaffected by outside forces?

Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!

PSALM 90:16-17

GENESIS 2:1-20

¹ Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

⁴ These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

⁵ When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up--for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground,

⁶ and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground--

⁷ then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰ A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.

¹² And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.

¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon. It

is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush.

¹⁴ And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,

¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him.

GENESIS 3:17-19

¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

LESSON TWO:

THE PITFALLS OF PRIDE AND SELF-RELIANCE

INTRODUCTION:

The marketplace is constantly sending messages that you must elevate your personal brand and make a name for yourself. You must build a bullet-proof career and do whatever it takes to create the business you want . . . on your own terms. While there are some great rewards that come as a result of achieving excellence in your field or industry, the Bible warns us of the serious dangers of pride and self-reliance. The marketplace may evaluate you on status and name recognition, but God is concerned about the ambitions of your heart and the substance of your character. Genesis 11 exposes the human tendency to utilize our God-given gifts and potential to make our own way in the world, rather than fulfilling His purposes.

WARM UP QUESTION:

How have you seen pride impact your workplace experiences?

READ GENESIS 11:1-9

1. We know from Genesis 9:1 that God instructed the human race to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth; yet the people of Babel resisted the command to fill the earth and stayed together in one place. Why?

2. Verses 3-4 indicate the people determined to attempt to accomplish something daring and significant by building the first high-rise tower. What observations can we draw from this—both positive and negative?

3. What does this text teach us about collaboration?

4. Proverbs 22:1 instructs us that a good name is worth more than great wealth and power; yet people in Babel were seeking to make a name for themselves. What is the difference? How can we navigate the tension between these two?

5. Despite the people's disobedience, God accomplished His original purpose for humanity. How have you seen God accomplish His purposes despite your resistance to Him?

READ DEUTERONOMY 8:11-18.

6. This passage reminds us that God is the one who enables and empowers us to create wealth. Why do we tend to forget this powerful truth? How can we stay connected to this principle in good times and bad times?

*“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the
humble is wisdom.”*

PROVERBS 11:2

GENESIS 11:1-9

¹ Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.

² And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

³ And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.

⁴ Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

⁵ And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built.

⁶ And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.

⁷ Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”

⁸ So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.

⁹ Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.”

DEUTERONOMY 8:11-18

¹¹ “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today,

¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them,

¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all

that you have is multiplied,

¹⁴ then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,

¹⁵ who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock,

¹⁶ who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end.

¹⁷ Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’

¹⁸ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

LESSON THREE:

UNDERSTANDING WORK AND REST

INTRODUCTION:

One of the fundamental questions every professional has to grapple with is, “How do you know when you’ve worked hard enough and long enough? How do you know when you’ve done your best?” There is a perception in the marketplace that being busy gives you legitimacy as a real player; yet Exodus 31 sets out an expectation of working with excellence using our God-given skills and giftedness, while maintaining a rhythm of God-prescribed rest.

WARM UP QUESTION:

How do you define “rest”, and what have you found to be the benefits of rest in your professional life? In your personal experience, what has been the result of neglecting rest?

READ EXODUS 31:1-17

1. In this passage we are introduced to Israel’s first architect, who was assigned to design and construct the Tabernacle (or tent of meeting) and the Ark of the Covenant. What are your observations about Bezalel’s qualifications to lead this project?

2. Bezalel was the first man in the Bible described as being filled with the Spirit of God. What do you think that means? What are the implications for us?

3. Immediately after relaying detailed instructions to Moses about the work that was going to be required to complete this project, God went to dramatic lengths to emphasize the importance of keeping the Sabbath (31:12-17). Why?

4. READ EXODUS 34:21. What is significant about the last phrase . . . “even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest”?

5. READ PSALM 127:1-2. The phrase “in vain” is used three times in these two verses. What are the implications when you apply this passage to building your business?

6. What is the most helpful advice you have ever received regarding building consistent rest into your schedule?

*“So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy,
because on it God rested from all his work that he had
done in creation.”*

GENESIS 2:3

EXODUS 31:1-17

¹ Then the LORD said to Moses,
² “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah,
³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—
⁴ to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze,
⁵ to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts.
⁶ Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you:
⁷ the tent of meeting, the ark of the covenant law with the atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the tent—
⁸ the table and its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of incense,
⁹ the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its stand—
¹⁰ and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests,
¹¹ and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. They are to make them just as I commanded you.”
¹² Then the LORD said to Moses,
¹³ “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.
¹⁴ “ ‘Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it is to be put to death; those who do any work on that day must be cut off from their people.
¹⁵ For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day is to be put to death.

¹⁶ The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.

¹⁷ It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.’ ”

EXODUS 34

²¹ “Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.

PSALM 127

¹ Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.

² In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves.

LESSON FOUR:

COMPETITION, INITIATIVE & EXCELLENCE

INTRODUCTION:

The Bible passages in this lesson cut to the heart of our motivations in business and work. Competition is a marketplace reality and often creates negative challenges and consequences; yet God can use competition in a redemptive way when we are looking for His greater purposes. Initiative and discipline are essential qualities that set us on a course toward excellence, but there is something deeper at work when we are paying attention and making God-connections in our daily affairs and business activities.

WARM UP QUESTION:

What tends to stir up your competitive juices? How does competition affect your motivation for doing your best?

READ ECCLESIASTES 4:4-8

1. What does this passage say to us about competition?

2. Read 1 Corinthians 9:25-27. While Paul uses an athletic metaphor to describe the rigors and single-minded focus required for a church planter pursuing the advancement of the gospel, what principle can we draw from this passage about the value of competition in the marketplace?

3. What are some positive and negative effects of competition?

4. How do you know when you cross the line from healthy competition that moves you toward superior performance, significant improvement, or a sense of mission to destructive competition that is callous, calculating and heartless?

READ PROVERBS 6:6-11.

5. What is the most intriguing lesson that you can draw from the ant described in this passage?

READ COLOSSIANS 3:22-24.

6. What is your main takeaway from this passage and how can you apply it to your work-life today?

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.”

2 PETER 1:3

ECCLESIASTES 4

⁴ I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is the result of rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

⁵ The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.

⁶ One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind.

⁷ Then I looked again at vanity under the sun.

⁸ There was a certain man without a [b]dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task.

1 CORINTHIANS 9

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it

²⁵ Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

²⁶ Do I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.

²⁷ But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

PROVERBS 6

⁶ Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.

⁷ Without having any chief, officer, or ruler,

⁸ She prepares her bread in summer and gathers her food in harvest.

⁹ How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?

¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest,

¹¹ and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

COLOSSIANS 3

²² Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

²³ whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,

²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

LESSON FIVE:

MEASURING SUCCESS

INTRODUCTION:

Our culture idolizes success. Fame and fortune, wealth and prestige . . . and all of the trappings that come with our images of “making it” seem to be the bullseye. But how are we to measure success? How do we even know if we’ve “made it” or not? Or how much further do we have to go to “make it”? The marketplace is full of winners and losers, but in the Scriptures Jesus has revealed a different way of measuring our success. That doesn’t mean we are to set ambition aside. It means we are to channel our ambition in a way that brings glory to God.

WARM-UP QUESTION:

How do most of the people you work with measure success? How has that influenced your beliefs about the way success is defined?

READ MATTHEW 25:14-30

1. What are some of the key words or phrases that catch your attention in this passage? What are your initial observations about the master and the servants?

2. Jesus often taught using parables. A parable is a story that places one thing beside another for the purpose of teaching a truth. Some have said that parables are earthly stories with a heavenly meaning. What is Jesus trying to teach us through this story?

3. In New Testament times, a “talent” represented a unit of monetary value roughly equivalent to 20 years’ wages for a laborer. Some scholars estimate the modern day equivalency of a single talent to be equal to approximately \$600,000. How are we prone to compare these three servants differently than their master did?

4. How does the master’s treatment of the one-talent servant hit you: Fair? Harsh? Lenient? Explain.

5. One of the truths we can lift out of this passage is that God does not measure our success by what we have, but rather by what we do with what we have. How can we press this truth into our current reality?

6. What corrections or adjustments do you need to make to be sure that you are making the most of all God has given you?

7. This is a parable about stewardship, but stewardship is about more than money. What are the other resources in our businesses and lives that God has entrusted us with, that we should be paying more attention to?

“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much . . .”

LUKE 16:10

MATTHEW 25

¹⁴ “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property.

¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.

¹⁶ He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more.

¹⁷ So also he who had the two talents made two talents more.

¹⁸ But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’

²¹ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

²² And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.’

²³ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’

²⁴ He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed,

²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’

²⁶ But his master answered him, ‘You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I

scattered no seed?

²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.

²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents.

²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.

³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

LESSON SIX:

LIVING & WORKING IN A FALLEN MARKETPLACE

INTRODUCTION:

There is something in us that prompts us to imagine the possibility of a perfect set of circumstances. We long for the ideal business environment where everyone is courteous and treats us with respect. From time to time we hear of a company or business leader who is strong in their faith and operates their business on Christian values. These rare examples give us hope. Yet sometimes even those models, over time disappoint and send us into a spiral of disillusionment. Here is the reality: we are living and working in a fallen marketplace. In our scripture passages today we are presented with examples of real people who were placed in that tension of walking by faith in a broken world.

WARM-UP QUESTION:

What are the greatest challenges of being a Christian in the marketplace today? Explain.

READ GENESIS 39:1-28 AND 39:1-23

1. This passage looks back in history so we can see both the beginning and the end of Joseph's story. What can we learn about God and His ways through Joseph's story?

2. As we imagine being in Joseph's shoes, we can feel the weight of his situation. His entire world was turned upside down—from the favored son of a wealthy family to a slave in a foreign country. How do you think he felt? What stands out about the way Joseph responded to these circumstances?

3. How is it that Joseph flourished, both in Potipher's business and in prison? What do you attribute to his success?

4. Chapters 40 and 41 describe how God enabled Joseph to interpret Pharaoh's dream and provide advice and counsel to Egypt's ruler. This opened the door to being elevated to the second most powerful man in the country. What lessons can we draw from Joseph's story to help us as we seek to navigate a fallen marketplace?

READ DANIEL 6

5. From this passage, what are your observations about Daniel, King Darius, and the high officials seeking Daniel's demise?

6. Daniel was deported to Babylon as teenager. He served in various roles through the administrations of three different kings. At this point, scholars estimate that Daniel was probably between 60 to 70 years old. His leadership skills and his integrity were beyond reproach. What insights do you draw from his example?

7. Babylon is more than a place. As a city, it symbolized humanity's ambition to dethrone God and make the earth its own. The Bible often uses the term Babylon to refer to the world system. Everyday, we go to work in Babylon, caught in the crossfire between self-focused aspiration and God's purposes. Where do you draw the encouragement and wisdom needed navigate such chaos?

"I can do all things through Him who strengthen me."

PHILIPPIANS 4:13

GENESIS 37

¹ Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

² These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father.

³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors.

⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

⁵ Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more.

⁶ He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed:

⁷ Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf."

⁸ His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

⁹ Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?"

¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

¹² Now his brothers went to pasture their father's flock near Shechem.

¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, "Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them." And he said to him, "Here I am."

¹⁴ So he said to him, "Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word." So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem.

¹⁵ And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, "What are you seeking?"

¹⁶ "I am seeking my brothers," he said. "Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock."

¹⁷ And the man said, "They have gone away, for I heard them say, 'Let us go to Dothan.'" So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him.

¹⁹ They said to one another, "Here comes this dreamer.

²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams."

²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, "Let us not take his life."

²² And Reuben said to them, "Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him"--that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to his father.

²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore.

²⁴ And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from

Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt.

²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?”

²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh.” And his brothers listened to him.

²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

GENESIS 39

¹ Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there.

² The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master.

³ His master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD caused all that he did to succeed in his hands.

⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had.

⁵ From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; the blessing of the LORD was on all that he had, in house and field.

⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph’s charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.

⁷ And after a time his master’s wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, “Lie with me.”

⁸ But he refused and said to his master’s wife,

“Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge.

⁹ He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

¹⁰ And as she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not listen to her, to lie beside her or to be with her.

¹¹ But one day, when he went into the house to do his work and none of the men of the house was there in the house,

¹² she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house.

¹³ And as soon as she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled out of the house,

¹⁴ she called to the men of her household and said to them, “See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to laugh at us. He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice.

¹⁵ And as soon as he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me and fled and got out of the house.”

¹⁶ Then she laid up his garment by her until his master came home,

¹⁷ and she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to laugh at me.

¹⁸ But as soon as I lifted up my voice and cried, he left his garment beside me and fled out of the house.”

¹⁹ As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled.

²⁰ And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison.

²¹ But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

²² And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it.

²³ The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed.

DANIEL 6

¹ It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom, satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; ² and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss.

³ Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

⁴ Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.

⁵ Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God."

⁶ Then these presidents and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever!

⁷ All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast

into the den of lions.

⁸ Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked."

⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

¹⁰ When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

¹¹ Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God.

¹² Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, "O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked."

¹³ Then they answered and said before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

¹⁴ Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him.

¹⁵ Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed."

¹⁶ Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you

serve continually, deliver you!”

¹⁷ And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel.

¹⁸ Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

¹⁹ Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions.

²⁰ As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?”

²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever!

²² My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.”

²³ Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

²⁴ And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions--they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: “Peace be multiplied to you.

²⁶ I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be de-

stroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end.

²⁷ He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.”

²⁸ So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

LESSON SEVEN:

USING THE PLATFORM GOD GIVES YOU

INTRODUCTION:

When we think of the apostle Paul, images of a missionary, church planter or theologian come to mind. However, he was also a businessman and tradesman working in the tent-making industry (vital to his economy). We usually think of the Church as the primary platform for spreading the gospel and building the Kingdom of God. In today's passage we see Paul freely moving about in the marketplace with intentionality and effectiveness. We also interact with men and women in our marketplace that would never darken the door of a church. Our businesses can become a platform (not a pulpit) for shining the light of Christ in the marketplace of our generation.

WARM UP QUESTION:

Can you describe an example of someone expressing their faith in a way that did more harm than good? How about an example of someone expressing their faith appropriately and effectively in their workplace?

READ ACTS 17:16-34 AND 18:1-4

1. Paul left Berea when some agitators began stirring up trouble, and traveled to Athens where he was waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him. What are your observations about Paul's time in Athens?

2. Where do you think Paul connected with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, and why was that important?

3. What lessons can we learn from 17:32-34 about the way people responded to Paul's message at Areogagus (or Mars Hill)?

4. The relationship Paul developed with Aquila and Priscilla had both a business and ministry component. How was this dynamic significant?

5. READ COLOSSIANS 4:2-6. In this passage Paul instructed believers on how they should relate to those who are not followers of Christ ("outsiders"). What helpful insights do you glean from this passage?

6. How would you explain the statement in verse 6, "let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person"? How can we apply this to our encounters and relationships in the marketplace today?

7. Describe the hesitations professionals may have about living out their faith in the workplace. What biblical truths from today's or other passages speak to this common struggle?

"But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

1 PETER 3:15

ACTS 17

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.

¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, "What does this babbler wish to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities"--because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection.

¹⁹ And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?"

²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean."

²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious.

²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,

²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the

boundaries of their dwelling place,

²⁷ that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us,

²⁸ for "'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "'For we are indeed his offspring.'

²⁹ Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

³² Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this."

³³ So Paul went out from their midst.

³⁴ But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

ACTS 18

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them,

³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.

⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every

Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

COLOSSIANS 4

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison--

⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.