

## Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

### Ephesians 6:5-9

This week's passage looks at how *"being filled with the Spirit...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ"* (Eph 5:18; 21) fleshes out in the work environment and work relationships. Thankfully, the terms "slaves" and "masters" are no longer fitting in our context. (Though, sadly, there are places in the world where slavery, of various forms, is still a reality. Let us pray God's Kingdom comes in those places.) For our purposes, we're going to shift from terms of slaves/masters to employees/employers (or bosses).

First, let us explore a proper theology of work. Some people have the misguided idea that work is a consequence of the Fall. That is not accurate. Working has always been part of God's plan for humans. Genesis 1:28 states, *"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"* Likewise, Genesis 2:15 states, *"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work in and take care of it."* So, work has always been part of the plan. But upon the Fall and subsequent curse, work certainly became more difficult. Part of the reason work became more challenging, and can still be very challenging, is that things like trust, respect, appreciation, cooperation (which naturally make work easier) are sorely lacking in sinful, selfish creatures who are primarily concerned with looking out for #1.

But, as Paul has been reminding us throughout Ephesians, we are "in Christ". When we live consistent with the present reality of the Kingdom of God in our midst, our vision and viewpoint changes. Paul's words in this passage, like the preceding passages, are predicated upon being filled with the Spirit, which allows us to trust God enough to be willing to submit to one another.

We must take note that the reality of Jesus is what Paul's instructions are based upon. From 5:21, we see our motivation is "reverence for Christ". We are to respect our employers/bosses, obeying them, working wholeheartedly for them as if Jesus was our boss (because, ultimately, Jesus is our Boss—as terms like Lord, and King, imply.) (Eph. 6:5-8)

Likewise, employers/bosses are reminded that they too are under authority...the authority of Christ. And as believers their conduct and use of authority should reflect that of Jesus. (Eph. 6:9)

All of us, I suspect, can relate to either being an employee or an employer/boss on some level. Likely, we've all wrestled with difficult bosses and/or challenging subordinates (not to mention challenging co-workers or customers). This is such an important area and opportunity for us to apply the teaching of Jesus: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Matthew 7:12) That's not a warm, fuzzy platitude. Properly understood, and properly lived out, that instruction has serious teeth to it. It's simple, yet it can be very hard. It is very hard to apply IF we aren't first very secure in the fact that God loves us dearly and is looking out for us...even if

it doesn't always feel like it. If we can't or don't trust that, we won't care about anyone else. But when we are "in Christ" and filled with His Spirit, we can consider the needs and perspectives of others. We can't do any of this on our own steam. But, thankfully, we don't have to. Just for fun, reread Eph. 1:15-23. As we mentioned at the outset of this Ephesians series, the imperatives (commands/instructions) in the second half of the book, are based on the indicatives (the facts/reality) presented in the first half of the book.

Areas of life like marriage, family, and work are the proving ground of our faith...where "the rubber meets the road". These areas both form us and test us. The way we conduct ourselves at work has the opportunity to alert people to the presence and reign of Jesus. Our goal should be to have our eyes and our heart alert to the presence and will of Jesus as we go about the very aspects of our days and life.

Personally, I have found the stories of Joseph (Genesis 39-47) and Daniel are helpful and inspiring in the sense of working in less than ideal environments (and less than ideal bosses) yet remaining faithful to God...and the impact God was able to have through them for His purposes.

- Q. Describe the best work situation you've experienced. What made it so good? Describe the worst work situation you've experienced. What made it so bad?**
- Q. Similar to above, who is the best boss you ever had? What made that person such a good boss? Who was the worst boss you ever had? What made that person such a bad boss?**
- Q. Have you ever been the supervisor over others? Describe. What did you like/dislike about that role? Honestly, how good/bad of a supervisor were you? Explain.**
- Q. How do you go about being conscious of the Lord's presence with you throughout your day (particularly your work day)?**
- Q. What are the particularly challenging aspects of your current job? What are your favorite aspects of your current job?**
- Q. Do you prefer to work alone or with others? Explain.**
- Q. Does your work (effort, activity, productivity) change when the boss is present versus when they're not? Explain.**
- Q. As an employee, describe a time when a boss welded power/authority inappropriately ("inappropriate" doesn't necessarily mean illegally, though that would apply too, but in ineffective and demeaning/belittling ways). As a boss, describe a time when you perhaps welded power/authority in a less than Christlike way.**

- Q. As you go to work, how can you keep it at the forefront of your mind that you work for the Lord (regardless of the role/position you hold)?**
- Q. How has your work place been a mission field for you?**
- Q. Would you describe your current work life as more “life giving” or “soul sucking”? Explain. How, if at all, does Paul’s words encourage you?**
- Q. Since work was part of the original design or Creation, we can safely assume that work will be part of the next life (the Resurrected life, the fully-consummated Kingdom life, the life after life after death)...how do you feel about that? How might your/our present work life be preparing you/us for that?**