

## **YOUR WORK MATTERS: A Call to Excellence & Integrity**

**Genesis 39:1-23 and 41:38-41**

*Your Work Matters Series*

Pastor Mark Kremer

We've been talking about work and it's where we live sixty to sixty-five per cent of our time. It's a significant part of where we invest our lives and we need to think rightly—biblically—the way God wants us to think about work. So in week one we looked at *Why work?* What's the big deal about work? We found from Genesis 1 that God created us to work; He made us in His image; He's a worker and He's given us significant work to do. It's a partnership with God that we get to be a part of every single day when we get up. And we talked about how do we find *our calling*; what are we going to do when we grow up? You know: How do we figure out what God wants us particularly to do—to take our talents, our passions, our story and meet the real needs of the world in the market place—out in the world, in the home, in every environment? How do we find our particular place? We talked about that. Last week we talked about *the need for balance*. How do we balance all of the demands that we have in life? How do we balance work and rest and relationships and re-creation?

And today we come to probably one of the more challenging parts of our work life. And that is: *How do we live as a Christ-follower in the work place?* Is it even possible to live consistently, obediently, as a follower of Christ in the marketplace—in our jobs, in our work environments? You know the talk from the guys here from India—some of the outstanding men here. To be associated with these guys from India is just one of the greatest privileges that I have had a chance and Jeff has had the chance to work much more closely with them. This idea of developing models—models that could work and be multiplied and reproduced—is such a powerful model because all of us model our life after someone, after something.

We are all very familiar this morning with all of the bad models that are out there related to work. Unfortunately these names are in the news every single day—day after day another scandal, another problem, another person who has failed morally, another problem where there's dishonesty. These names we know like the names of our own family. We hear them day after day after day. These are just a few from the last couple of years. This isn't even a long period of time, but names like Spitzer, Ensign, Blagojevich, Enron, Climate-gate, AIG, ACORN: these are the failures that are coming to our attention day after day after day. These are the models to many people of what it means to be in the workplace. There's scandal; there's dishonesty; there's poor workmanship. And it's easy for us to sort of become angry and frustrated and cynical and say, "You know, why are these people like this? What's happening to our culture?" And the question is: "Are we any different? If we were in the same kinds of positions, would we live differently? Or, given the power and the wealth and the opportunity, would we do the same thing? Would we make the same choices that many of these folks and leaders of these organizations have made? How would we know this morning; how would we test ourselves to know whether or not we would be just like those people, given the opportunity?"

I think it is quite simple really. The test of whether or not that could be us is: "Are we today in our workplace compromising in little things?" Little things! It's when we decide to look at a fellow

student's paper to get an answer or when we tell a small lie to make our chances of making that sale become a reality or we steal a little bit of time from our employer for personal reasons. Nobody will ever know. Maybe we ask an employee to do something that's just a little illegal or unsafe. Maybe we fix a report to make it look just a little better than it really was. All of those little compromises lead exactly to the place where the names that I read find themselves today—front page news!

And there is a crisis! I know it's an over-used word but there is a crisis of integrity and excellence in our culture today. You and I experience it in many different levels as we go around through life. I remember a few years ago Donna and I were on a trip and we went to a very busy gas station off of an interstate in another state. I had to go in to pay and, when I went in, there was kind of a crowd around the counter there and the person who was supposed to be waiting on the customers was on the phone. You could tell over the course of a couple of minutes, because he wasn't getting off the phone, he was talking to his girlfriend and he was just completely ignoring the people who were there waiting to pay for their gas. He was not paying any attention to them whatsoever and the crowd was getting restless. People were saying, "Hey, come on," and he's kind of being rude back to them, when all of a sudden a man who had been standing there watching the scene, waiting to pay himself, says, "Please start waiting on these customers right now!" And he said, "Well who are you and what are you thinking?" So the man pulled out his wallet and he pulled out his business card and he handed it to the man and I think he was the executive vice president of this particular petroleum company! At that point he told the young man, "You're fired!"...and I think the phone dropped about as far as his jaw dropped and he repeated, "No, really, you're fired!"...and he got behind the counter and started waiting on us and everybody applauded. You know it's like, "Yea, finally there is some justice; somebody is going to do the right thing!" How many of us have experienced that—where there's just less than a best effort?

So what's a model? Who is a model that we could model our life after when it comes to the workplace? Open your Bibles this morning to Genesis, Chapter 39. I think before us this morning we have the opportunity to see a model of a work that is pleasing to God and excellent—someone who could be a role model for you and for me in our work life. You know there are a lot of bad models of workers in the Bible too. You have Ahab, Sampson, and Lot and even David failed morally. There are also some good models and Joseph here is one of the finest. If you want to have someone that you could pattern your life after in your work, I would say Joseph would be a very good place to start.

Chapter 39, Verse 1:

**Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. (\*NASB, Genesis 39:1)**

Now just a tiny bit of history here: You remember that Joseph was the favored son of his father Jacob. Jacob had many boys and the other boys were quite jealous of Joseph because of his favored status. And Joseph made no bones about letting his brothers know he was the favorite—which made them all the more angry at him. And then on top of that, Joseph had these kinds of strange dreams as a young man in his teenage years. In his dreams he saw himself as being sort of the head of the family—as sort of the leader of all the rest of his brothers and his dad, bowing down to him. He didn't really know what the dreams meant at the time but they came twice and he actually, foolishly, shared them with his brothers which made them hate him all the more. Ultimately they really decided they would like to do away with him—just kill him and get him out of the way.

Fortunately for Joseph, Reuben, his brother, came to his defense and said, “No, we aren’t going to kill him; that would crush our father and it’s not the right thing to do.” So they put him in a pit and Reuben intended to—in the middle of the night—take Joseph out of the pit and return him back home to Dad. But instead the other brothers, while Reuben was away, find this caravan of traders coming by and they decide they are going to sell Joseph as a slave to these traders. And that’s exactly where we find Joseph here in Chapter 39. He has now been purchased. He didn’t go online and apply for a job at Potiphar’s house. He’s a slave; he got put there and I think that’s very important because sometimes we can justify and rationalize how we do our work and the integrity with which we do our work by saying, “Well you know this isn’t the job I really wanted; I didn’t really want this job. This isn’t my ultimate career; I just sort of give a half-hearted effort here because, when I really get to the job I want, I’m going to give it my all. Well, just so you know, this entire story is how Joseph lives his life as a slave—not by his choice—in Potiphar’s house...just a servant in Potiphar’s house. Well let’s see what happens with Joseph.

Verse 2:

**And the Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. Now his master saw that the Lord was with him and how the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and Potiphar made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. (Vs. 2-4)**

What distinguished Joseph as a worker? Three times it’s mentioned here in these verses...**the Lord was with him; ...the Lord was with Joseph; ...the Lord caused whatever Joseph did to prosper...** and succeed. It was the presence of God in Joseph’s life that distinguished him and set him apart from all of the other servants in Potiphar’s house—so much so that Potiphar said, *“This man is absolutely trustworthy and he is skillful and I will set him over my entire household. I will put my entire household and all that I own and all that I possess under his care, because he is trustworthy and excellent in what he does.”*

Now I believe those are the two primary distinguishing marks of the presence of God in our life. The first is that we would have *the character of God in our life*. Because of God’s presence we would look and act like Jesus and we would have an integrity about us—a consistency about our life, a holiness, a righteousness—about the way we do things that would mark us as being the people of God. I think that’s exactly what Joseph had. He was full of integrity—an integrity that cannot come from any other place than God Himself—and it revealed that God was present in Joseph’s life.

I think the second distinguishing mark about someone who has God in their life is the fact that *what they do, they do with skill—with excellence*—because God is a God of excellence; God is a God of skill. The Psalms praise God for the worthiness and the perfection of all that He does. Everything God does is good; it’s perfect and it’s excellent. And so doesn’t it make sense that people who possess God—who have God living in their lives—that they too will be marked by excellence, by doing their work with skill and increasing in skill, that more and more and more this skill that we exhibit in our work would be a reflection of the God of skill who lives within us? And I think that’s exactly what Joseph did. Joseph demonstrated these two qualities of character and excellence and they set him apart and marked him as someone who could be trusted, somebody who could be put in charge of things, somebody who was skillful in his work—and that’s exactly what Potiphar did.

I think that's what God wants for you and me: to recognize that because we know Christ and He lives within us—that each and every one of us have the Spirit of God living within us—we can be markedly different, even in the workplace, than those who do not know Christ, that we ought to be a reflection of God in how we do our work and the quality of the work that we do—just as Joseph did. Well you notice in Verse 5 that not only did God cause what Joseph did to prosper, but notice what happened because of Joseph's obedience to God.

Verse 5:

**It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house, and over all that he owned, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the Lord's blessing was upon all that Potiphar owned, in the house and in the field. So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. (Vs. 5-6a)**

Now I'm just guessing that that was a very rare thing in this particular time and culture. I'm guessing that there weren't very many slaves that one could entrust with all that they possessed...**in the house and in the field**...I mean the things that are close and the things that are out in the business part of the household, to a slave! But Joseph was different and God not only blessed Joseph because of the kind of person he was but, through Joseph, Potiphar's house was blessed. His owner was blessed. The entire household prospered because of the presence of God in Joseph's life that flowed out from Joseph and blessed everything that he touched and every person that he touched.

What would it be like, as the people of God, if you and I lived in such a way that God's presence in us was evident day in and day out in the workplace and everything that we were a part of—the business that we were a part of, the store where we worked, the hospital where we worked, the factory where we worked—would be a better place, would be markedly different because God is there and we are acting on His behalf in the excellence of our work and in the character of the way we do that work? Don't you think that's exactly what God would want to see happen—that God would unleash His people into every single walk of life and touch that and transform those workplaces? And ultimately as workplaces are transformed and people are transformed by the presence of God there, that a community could be transformed...that a nation could be transformed...that a world could be transformed! That's God's strategy; that's God's plan; that's what we are talking about in India—unleashing people to be in places where God puts them because they have the very presence of God in their life. It'll make a difference. It will change commerce; it will change education; it will change factories; it will change advertising and marketing; it will change everything—because when God shows up with excellence and with integrity, everything changes. That's exactly what happened to Potiphar...because of the presence of Joseph.

Now I want you to know that I understand, after having spent a good chunk of my adult life in the workplace, just like you, not in a church where I think sometimes we think everything is easy and is rosy here. It's not. But just so you know—I understand the workplace is a very challenging environment. It's not easy to live differently in the workplace. Some of the workplaces where you live and work each day have a lot of compromise, just in the systems. There's a lot of dishonesty. There's a high level of temptation that many of us face to do the wrong thing. I understand how challenging and difficult it can be to live in the workplace and be like Joseph. And Joseph faced some incredible, difficult temptations as well. Notice the end of Verse 6:

**Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance.**

In other words Joseph was a stud, OK? (Laughter) He's in his twenties. He's a young man and he is good looking and he's very athletic and he's attractive.

Verse 7:

**And it came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?" And it came about as she spoke to Joseph day after day, that he did not listen to her to lie beside her, or to be with her. (Vs.7-10)**

Joseph faced an incredibly intense temptation to do the wrong thing. Day after day Potiphar's wife came to him. I mean can you imagine Joseph getting up every morning knowing, *"I know she's going to come after me today; she's coming after me today,"* and kind of thinking every corner he came around she might be there? I can imagine he is kind of sneaking around the estate trying to figure out how he can get around without having to run into her because it's temptation day after day after day. But he was steadfast in understanding two important things: That he had a trust from his master Potiphar that would be ruined and destroyed if he took that which wasn't his and that he had a God whose presence was blessing his life and, if he disobeyed and sinned against God, he would lose the blessing of God if he would do this evil against God who was giving him the very success that he was enjoying. And so he covenanted not to lie with her or to be with her. He did everything he could to avoid a situation where there would be any opportunity for this to go the wrong direction.

I would challenge us this morning to think about your work environment. Perhaps the temptation is in the sexual arena. I understand as I talk to people that that is very intense in some work environments. In fact a significant number of affairs that happen begin and happen in the workplace. You get all dressed up, looking good, to go to work. You know people are at their best. There is temptation. But perhaps for you that's not the temptation. Maybe the temptation is to lie, to cheat, to steal, to embellish the truth, to twist things. Maybe everybody does it. Maybe the industry standard in the industry you are in is to be a little less than honest. Maybe that's just the way business is done. But if you believe that you cannot live as a Christian and be like Joseph when faced with those temptations, whatever they are, then you are mistaken. You are handing over your life and influence to the enemy. God will give you what you need to resist that temptation, to be different, to be marked as a person of God in your work environment. Joseph had that ability to stand up against that temptation, but it wasn't easy.

Verse 11:

**Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. And she caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and had fled outside, she called to the men of her household, and said to them, "See, Potiphar has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and**

**I screamed. And it came about when he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled, and went outside.” So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. Then she spoke to him with these words, “The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; and it happened as I raised my voice and screamed, that he left his garment beside me and fled outside.” Now it came about when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, “This is what your slave did to me,” that his anger burned. So Joseph’s master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined; and he was there in jail. (Vs. 11-20)**

This story is a reminder that even when we do the right thing, sometimes in the short run, there is a high price to pay. We would like to think if we do the right thing that we would always be appreciated, be respected, be honored, but there are people who have bad motives, evil hearts all around, and sometimes doing the right thing will cost you. I talked to people this weekend who have had to make a choice in their work environment to do the right thing and it has cost them their jobs. They have no regrets about doing it, but there is a cost and we need to acknowledge there is a cost to doing the right thing. Sometimes we are misunderstood; sometimes there’s injustice in the workplace and we pay a price for trying to do the right thing. Sometimes we back off from doing the right thing out of fear that something might happen to us. Instead of standing for what we know is right, we just don’t want to have trouble; we don’t want to lose our job; we don’t want the consequences of maybe being completely righteous in our work environment. That will always cost more in the long run than doing the right thing.

Well, as a result of that injustice, that false accusation, that lie that Potiphar’s wife told and his believing it, remarkably—without ever even checking to confirm the story of this trusted servant who had never let him down and all of a sudden without checking the facts—just believes his wife and puts him into prison. Now Joseph is even in a worse place than being a slave in Potiphar’s house. Now he is in the dungeon; now he’s in prison. Boy if that doesn’t make you bitter and angry and decide, “I’m not going to do anything here. You know last time I tried real hard to be God’s man in Potiphar’s house and look where that got me! I’m just going to sulk, be cynical, be angry, be bitter.” Is that what happens?

Verse 21:

**But the Lord was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. And the chief jailer committed to Joseph’s charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, Joseph was responsible for it. The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph’s charge because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made to prosper. (Vs. 21-23)**

Those verses sound strangely familiar don’t they? Joseph is the same person—even in this horrible, worse job, even after getting fired and having to settle for life in the prison—the same Joseph trusting God, living his life with integrity and excellence. Even in prison he is noticed and seen and put in charge of the entire prison. Can you imagine this morning, down at the Lancaster County Jail, the jail keeper says, “Hey you know there are a couple of guys here that are trustworthy. I’m just going to leave the jail to them. I think I’ll go fishing, go skiing or something.” It’s not likely to happen. But Joseph, as a man of God, distinguished himself, even in this work environment, to be trustworthy, to be excellent in what he did, so nothing even had to be supervised. Could that be said of us? If the boss was never around, could we be absolutely trusted with whatever it is we are given

to do? Because we are working for God, we are trying to do it with excellence; we are trying to do it with integrity like Joseph.

What a role model! You know, ultimately, Joseph also had a talent. Joseph's talent was the ability to interpret dreams. So along came two of the king's closest adviser servants—the cupbearer and the baker—trusted officials in the king's palace. They got on the king's bad side and they were thrown into prison and now they are in Joseph's charge and Joseph finds out these two have a dream—each about themselves—and he interprets the dreams. One—the baker—is going to have his head cut off and the other one will be restored back to his position, at the king's side, and it comes to pass. Joseph says one thing, “Just remember me when you get back to the palace because I'm here unjustly.” And of course the cupbearer absolutely forgets—totally forgets—until a couple of years later, when the king now has a dream that he cannot understand, and suddenly the cupbearer remembers Joseph—the one who could interpret dreams. Chapters 40 and 41 give us the account of Joseph interpreting those dreams and of Pharaoh coming and the calling for Joseph. Joseph comes and interprets this vision—this dream—the dream that foretold seven good years of plenty in the land of Egypt followed by seven years of drought and famine. Not only did Joseph interpret the dream, but Joseph's skill caused him to be able to lay out a plan for Pharaoh and what Pharaoh ought to do during the seven good years to be prepared for the seven bad years—an incredible plan that Joseph laid out before Pharaoh. And Pharaoh says, “I have never heard or seen anyone like this.”

Notice in Chapter 41, Verse 38:

**Then Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is a divine spirit?”** [You see Pharaoh even recognized God's presence in Joseph's life. There was something divine, supernatural about Joseph.] **So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne will I be greater than you.” And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See I have set you over all the land of Egypt.”** (Vs. 38-41)

And we find out that at thirty years old Joseph becomes co-regent with Pharaoh over all of Egypt. He puts in place an incredible plan that ultimately stores up grain and food during those good years in order to meet the needs during those years of famine. And ultimately Joseph saved a nation and he saved his own family and he's part of the redemptive story of God in saving humanity. Joseph—this man who in every work environment where he went—was consistently God's man, modeling and demonstrating the presence of God in his life, both in his character and the excellence of his work.

I hope that story inspires you this morning, inspires you to believe that God could cause you to live like Joseph in your work environment, whatever it is. It may not be the place where you ultimately dream or plan to be. You may be right where you want to be. Whether it's a low place or a high place or somewhere in between isn't really what matters. The matter is what kind of a person you are going to be there. Will you and I be a reflection of God's presence in our life, in our work environment? Do we believe that God could use us when we are living holy and righteously in our work environment and doing our work with skill and excellence? Do we believe that God could use us to transform that workplace? Do you believe that God's people together could agree and follow the model of Joseph, to live that way day after day in the marketplace, uncompromising, allowing the presence of God, the light that Jesus is? Jesus said, “I'm the light of the world and the light shines in the darkness.” How does the light of Jesus shine in the darkness? It shines through His

people. Do we believe that God shining through us in the excellence of our work and the integrity of our work could literally change a culture, change a society? There would be a tipping point where we would go—from all of the crud that we see today—to a point where there are people who are pursuing God and wanting to know God because of the witness of the way we live in the workplace.

I believe that's exactly the challenge that is before us and I would challenge us this morning to believe that—to believe God—that because He is in you, you can make a profound difference, that you are empowered to do the right thing all the time, every day in your work environment, that you can be like Joseph, uncompromising in your integrity and developing your skills—to be all that God created you to be—to bless that place, to bless a community, to bless the world.

And I would also challenge us this morning to do some serious assessment at where we may be compromising right now. Jesus not only said that He was the light of the world, He said that because He lives in us, that *we* are the light of the world. But He said, “No one lights a light and puts it under a bushel.” Nobody dims it. You put a light out so it can be seen, so it can shine, so people can see where to go because of that light. But every time that you or I compromise, even in the little things, the light dims just a little bit. A little bit less of Jesus is seen. A little more darkness comes into the place where we work. Every time I cut a corner, offer a halfhearted job, the light dims. Every time I market my product or service in a way that embellishes the truth, it's just not completely true. Every time I steal a little time from the company, every time I do less than my best when no one's looking, every time I call in sick when I'm not, every time I justify my action by saying at the end, “Well you know it's not illegal”, is a clue that maybe it's not right. Every time I bring a bad attitude to work, treat people poorly, the light of Christ that should be shining brightly in us gets dimmer and dimmer and dimmer and soon there's nothing but darkness in the place where you work. And not only are the people around you now unable to see the light that is right there but, covered over by your compromise, now you are in darkness too. And it becomes easier the next time to do the wrong thing. And if we are not careful, we could easily find ourselves being one of the stories that is way too common in our culture today.

*God, help us to examine our hearts to see where we need to change our ways, to be a reflection of Himself in us. And, God, help us today to take the Joseph challenge, to say that's the kind of person I want to be, to live up to, to be all that God wants us to be, to make a difference in our work environment. Father, I pray that this would become a reality for us, that we would indeed not be at all like the world in the way that we conduct ourselves or with the skill that we bring into our work, but that we would be a reflection of Your presence in us. God, make us men and women like Joseph, skilled and trustworthy, men and women who make a profound difference in our workplace and in our world. Give us the resolve this morning to live that every day by the power of Your Spirit in us, for the glory of Your Name. Amen*

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## **REVIEW**

Assess the rhythm and balance of your life, does it reflect the life God wants for you? Who has the freedom to speak into your life in regards to your rhythm and balance?

In this season of your life, how are balancing these 4 significant needs we all have?

- Work - PAID - doing good work, w/ skill to serve others, provide for yourself and worship God.  
UNPAID - working to benefit others outside of your job using your talents and passions
- Rest – time to sleep, slow down, be still and quiet
- Relationships – time for connecting with God, family and building meaningful friendships
- Re-creation – time to be refreshed and renewed with exercise, reading, praying, eating well, hobbies and other activities that re-energize you.

Are you going about your work with wisdom at a sustainable pace? Have you accepted your limitations and set healthy boundaries around your work?

## **ENGAGE**

Do you believe there is a crisis of integrity and excellence in our culture? Cite some recent examples. What is the biggest challenge you face as a Christ follower in your work environment?

Read the account of Joseph in Genesis 30-41. What stood out about Joseph regardless of the circumstances or environment in which he worked?

God's presence in Joseph's life was evident to all who knew him, including those he worked for. Is God's presence evident in your life, even at work? How?

Do you see a lack of integrity in your work environment? How have you dealt with it? Have you been tempted to compromise your integrity on the job?

By what standard or measure do you determine what is right and wrong in your work? How does being a Christ follower impact what you will or won't do in your work environment?

How does sexual temptation show up in your work environment? What is your plan of action for fighting temptation and staying morally uncompromised?

How does shoddy or poorly done work affect society today? How does it affect you and your family?

Is excellence something you strive for in your work? Why or why not? What challenges or obstacles do you face in trying to do your work with excellence? Are you developing your talents to their fullest to maximize your contribution to the world and to the Kingdom of God? How are you doing this?

As a Christ follower, will you commit yourself to courageous uncompromising integrity and excellence in your work and determine to do everything you can to make it right when you fail?

**MEMORIZE COLOSSIANS 3:23 "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."**