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**Why Dell and Jesus Should Be Friends - Podcast 2**

*PLEASE NOTE: These are direct transcripts of spoken sermons.*

How many of you have been on vacation this week? What are all the rest of you doing? Work, right? You’ve been working all week. Now, for some of you, you may feel like your work is a joy, and for others of you, you may feel like your work is a joke. In fact, so many people think their work is a joke, that the hottest TV show is “The Office.” {back in 2007}

{beginning of The Office video clip}

Every so often Jim dies of boredom. I think today it was the expense reports that did him in. Our deal is that it's up to me to revive him.

"You see Dwight's coffee mug over there. When he's not here I try to throw stuff into it." Let's do this. Try paperclips. Or this phone message for Dwight.

On these new expense reports do really need to go back to last quarter? Yes, we do, It's a bad system.

What does 2005 season mean? What is this?

It's a paper football scoreboard. Kevin and I play paper football when Michael is out or when we're bored.

Wait, this goes back two years.

We're bored a lot.

Yes! Score!

We call it hate ball.

Why?

Because Angela hates it so much.

Sometimes we play who can put the most M&M's in their mouth.

You should ask Toby to teach you Dunderball.

So that's what that sound is

You got a game?

Yes, it's called work hard so that my kids can go to college.

Let the games begin. {Humming Olympics music}

{sounds of them playing games}

{end of The Office video clip}

You never have that kind of a day at work do you? As funny as that is, it’s pretty sad. The reality is that as Christ followers we’re called to a different approach to work. If you’ll open your bibles to Colossians chapter 3 verses 23 and 24, that’s the key passage that we’ve been looking at in our work life series. And we’ve entitled the series “Work Life, Discovering God at Work” because we believe that God is working in our world. Not just on Sunday mornings, not just in our families but beyond that in our work life and in every day that God sends us out to live our work life out, God is at work and we need to discover what he’s doing there and the part that we play in that. Now keep in mind that when we talk about work life, we’re not simply talking about people that work in a cubicle. We’ve defined “work life” as your endeavor, what you do. And so if you’re a student, your studies are your work life. How you do in school, how you approach your school work, that’s your work life. Maybe you’re a stay at home spouse or you’ve got responsibility to raising children. If you do that, that’s your work life. So how you approach that is very important. Whether you’re working in sales, whether you’re working in marketing, whether you’re working in research, development, digging ditches, building buildings, or flying planes, {*as a job seeker it would your* *current job search and then future employment or current job/employer*}, *whatever it is that you’re doing*, that’s your work life, okay? And we’re discovering God at work.

Now, our theme verse, Colossians chapter 3, verses 23 and 24 says this, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ that you are serving.” And as we looked at this passage last week, we came to understand that we’re not only working for a paycheck, we’re working for eternal reward. We’re not simply working for an earthly boss; we’re working for Jesus Christ Himself. And so how we approach our work, and what our work life looks like is really a reflection of our attitude and our faith. As we think about that, keep in mind that we started this year off with a whole theme that we would become a community of believers that would focus on touching our community by the way we live our lives. Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount that we’re supposed to let our lives shine before men in such a way that they might see our good works, see our behavior, see our performance, and glorify our Father in Heaven. There is no place greater to demonstrate your connection to Christ than in the work that you do on a day to day basis. There’s no place greater to display Christ’s creativity, Christ’s energy, Christ’s power, Christ’s attitude, Christ’s connections in you, than with the people and in the place that you invest the majority of your time: your work life. Your studies, your nursing, your teaching, your childcare, your engineering, your managing, {your job search}, that’s the place to display Christ. Now when we look at this verse and it tells us to work at our work with all of our hearts as working for the Lord, what does that look like?

Well our team got together, and we started thinking through scripture. What would scripture say about our work? We came up with the four E’s. The four E’s really define what work life is. The first one is: **Excellent.** The second is: **Ethical**. The third is **Engaged** and the fourth is **Evangelistic**. We believe that these are the characteristics that each of us should carry with us into our activity called work. Excellent is what we’re going to be talking about today, and over the next couple of weeks we are going to address each one of these. Ethical, that’s how I behave at work. Engaged, that refers to the connections I make to the people around me. How do I treat people? How do I connect with people? How do I serve people? How do I care for people? And finally, Evangelistic. How do I pass along the message of Jesus Christ in a meaningful way to the people that I’m around? Now if you were to see a Christian person, a Christ follower, approach their work each and every day with *excellence,* with *ethics,* with a *connection* or an engagement with people that is positive. Then when opportunity provides, appointing them to a higher purpose that’s evangelistic, to the purpose of connecting them with God. What would that do for the world that we live in? Here’s my premise when it comes to the Christian work ethic: if Christians, or Christ followers, lived out the principles of work in the bible, **if they lived those out, they would be a *blessing* to every employer.** **If the Christian or the Christ follower would live out the principles of the bible about work in their work life. Every employer would consider hiring Christians *a benefit and a blessing* to their company or their enterprise.** And that’s where I get the title for my message. I mean think about it, Jesus and Michael Dell should be best friends. Because, if Dell corporation was getting *this kind* of attitude and approach out of all of their employees that name the name in Jesus Christ and belong to Christ. Then you’d find HR trying to figure out, “how do we put a question on here that doesn’t violate anyone’s civil rights but gets to the heart of where this person is at spiritually? Because Christ followers are the best employees. They’re the most excellent, they’re the most ethical, they’re the most engaged and I don’t know about this evangelism here but if there’s something that drives them to higher than a paycheck, that drives them that’s higher than a pat on the back from the boss, that drives them that’s higher than simply having a place to show up every week. If there’s something greater, a transcendent cause, a transcendent God, then man, these people are the best people in the *world*.” Christians should not have an attitude or a reputation at work *any less* than the highest that there is.

So, how does that work? What does that look like? We want to take the first one today, and that’s the whole issue of **excellence**, that’s where we want to begin. And we'll work through the other three in the coming weeks. And so what does it mean to be an excellent employee? That’s what we want to look at today. When we come to the word “excellence” let me start by defining what excellence is *not*. If we were to ask everybody in the room to give a definition of excellence we would get a whole bunch of different definitions and I want to make sure that you understand from this passage, what I believe that God says the word “excellent” really means.

So let me start with the disclaimers, or what excellence is not. First of all, excellence is not perfection. ***Excellence is not perfection*.** There are some people that equate excellence with getting something perfect. That’s not our definition, that’s not the word that we’re using. Boy this really came home to me about 3 weeks ago. I was out with a bunch of buddies, we were riding dirt bikes in a field, and I happened to connect with a barbed wire fence and a tree. And so, I sliced my neck all open, cut my arm up real bad, was bleeding real bad (that’s another story) but in the process of that, they threw me in my truck and we headed to my doctor to get sewed up. So 24 stitches later he had my neck and my arm sewed up, and then he decided that he needed to check if I had any head injuries. Head injuries caused by the tree not prior to my accident, he was not looking for signs of intelligent life: that had already been established. So, he took a few x-rays and then decided he wanted to do a CT scan so he took me down to the hospital. So we drove down to the hospital, he took me in his truck and walked me in and took pictures of my head but there was nothing wrong with me. We got in the truck and we were driving back, and when we were driving back I started asking him, “You know, you’re a pretty cautious guy, you’re detail oriented, you’re taking care of me, and you’re making sure that nothing got rattled loose. Do you ever worry about your patients?” And he said, “You know Tim, when I was first practicing medicine, I did used to worry, I mean I would lay in bed at night thinking to myself, *did I go over every chart? Did I check every detail? Did we do every test?* And I would just lay in bed at night and think through, over and over and over again, to try and make sure that I had perfectly diagnosed and perfectly analyzed what was going on with this patient because I didn’t want to make a mistake. Now after a number of years of practicing medicine I feel like I’ve gotten better at it, I know what to look for, and very seldom do I find myself lying awake in bed at night worrying that I missed something.” And as we were having that conversation, the thought went through my head: *I would much rather have a doctor working on me who had a good night sleep the night before than a doctor who laid awake at night worrying that they had not been perfect in their diagnosis and treatment of a patient.* Sometimes, getting everything perfect can actually be the enemy of excellence.

Second disclaimer when we talk about excellence: I’m not talking about having a perfect score or keeping score. **When it comes to excellence, everybody has a different standard because everybody has different situations.** Suppose there is a stay-at-home mom who has an autistic child. Should her standard of managing her house be exactly the same, or should her score card be the same as the mom who is living across the street who has a child with no special needs? And if the mom who has a bigger thing to manage, because she’s got special needs to manage, if she keeps score on how well she’s doing in relationship to the attractiveness of the place, the way the money gets managed, the way the meals get taken care of, if she keeps score on that basis, she will drive herself crazy. It’s not about keeping score because each of us have different skills, abilities, and understandings of the role of our work. We’re not all going to be competing for the exact same performance every day.

Third, it’s also not about pleasing the boss. ***It’s also not about pleasing the boss.*** Now some of you are going, “whew! That takes a lot of pressure off me! My preacher said I don’t have to please you, boss! Man, I can just do whatever I want to now at work!” Now I’m assuming a level of maturing in understanding what I’m saying so listen carefully so that you don’t misconstrue it. In fact, for some extra accountability, how many of you are the boss, you manage people? Okay, y’all listen real carefully to what I say because I want to make sure we understand this right. How the boss views your performance is a *very, very, very, very, very* important indicator of how well you’re doing. It may actually be the indicator that secures your job security. Okay? So you need to know that. *But* you also need to understand that there are some bosses that can never be pleased, *that can never be pleased.* They have a standard that would be above Jesus’s standard. And you can just never live up to them. There are some situations where the boss is asking you to perform at a *lower* standard. I mean, they’re pleased with *a lot less* than what you’re capable of doing. **So the boss’s view of you is *one indicator* (and it’s an important one) but it’s not the only one. You need to look at the job requirements, you need to look at the outcomes of what you’re doing, you need to look at how what you’re doing is impacting the people around you, and you need to take into account multiple factors to evaluate your performance.** Not just, “if the boss is happy I’m doing a great job and if the boss is unhappy I’m doing a terrible job.” That’s not what I mean by excellence.

And finally, when we talk about excellence, we’re not talking about success. ***We’re not talking about success.*** ***Part of the nature of the experimentation of risk taking, of innovation, is that sometimes you’re going to be assigned to a project that is destined to fail.*** It’s just not going to work. And you can still do your best effort even when you’re working on something that’s not going to succeed. So it’s not always that what you put your hand to, turns to gold. And that’s just the nature of life. Sometimes what we try, at the minute it’s a great idea, but it doesn’t work out.

So what does it mean? Here’s my definition of excellence. ***Excellence is this: it’s an attitude that leads to consistent exceptional performance.*** *It’s an attitude that leads to consistent exceptional performance.* At the end of the day in your work, how you perform is the bottom line. That is the bottom line. But to be consistent in producing excellent performance, it starts with an attitude of excellence. What does that look like? Well I think he tells us in this passage. Look at verse 23 again. He says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.” (Colossians 3:23). Now there are two phrases in here that give us an understanding of excellence in our attitude. The first one is “*work at it”.* The concept of work means that you bring *diligent effort to the table.* And so as a student you don’t simply grab the assignment and say, “How’s the fastest way I can get this done?” You sit down and you *work*, you bring diligence and focus and effort to it. You’re investing yourself in it. It’s not something that you’re casual about, it’s not something that you’re passive about, it’s not something that you’re just trying to rifle through. *It requires effort.* Some people’s jobs require physical effort, some people’s jobs require mental effort, some people’s jobs require relational effort. And there ought to be a sense where you’re both *exhilarated and exhausted* in your work. That’s what it means to have an *attitude* of work. He goes on to say, “work on it with all your heart.” Now your heart is the emotional part that decides. And so what he’s saying here is that you need to own the outcome of your work. You need to care that it works, you need to really own the outcome of what you’re doing. You say, “Well all I do, really, is put one little application on one little widget as it comes past me on the assembly line. And that’s all I do, I just put on one little application on one little widget as it comes by me.” To work at it with all your heart it to care that that one little widget actually makes it to the end of the line, goes in to the box that lands on the consumer’s desk, and actually makes a good-looking picture. In other words, what your part is, is part of a bigger whole and it *matters to you.* And so when you put that little application on that widget it’s important that you do it right, because you understand that the ownership of this process belongs to you. The success of this outcome belongs to you, and you *care* about what happens. Now I know, you’re a teacher, you got 22 little rug rats running around in your classroom, and sometimes if you could just get through the day, that’s enough. What excellence and attitude are, is that I’m working hard today, what I’m doing with these 22 little rug rats, is laying a foundation for people that are going to go out from here and make a difference in the world. *Now I own that*. When I take this job, when I take this classroom, I own the outcomes of the lives of these kids. Now if that’s your attitude, that you’re going to diligently invest your effort, work at it, and do it in such a way that you own that outcome, work at it with all your heart because it matters to you, that what you do makes an impact, when those two things are pairing together in an attitude, what you’re going to see is that you will be consistently performing in an exceptional way. There will be a history of consistent exceptional performance day after day, week after week, project after project, year after year, you will do an excellent job in what you do. But it starts with that attitude of excellence, it starts with an attitude of excellence.

Now, as we talk about this, there are really some considerations that we need to throw into the mix that we’ve got to embrace as we move forward. Some consideration that make a huge difference in how we approach this. So let me give you the three that I think are the biggest.

The first consideration when it comes to the attitude of excellence is actually the enemy of excellence, and the enemy of excellence is laziness. **The enemy of excellence is laziness**. Laziness is the opposite attitude of excellence. The lazy attitude says, “What’s the least I can do and still look good? What’s the least I can do and still get by? What’s the least I can do and still get this paper turned in and pass? What’s the least I can do and still be able to collect my paycheck?” I want you to see a passage of scripture in Proverbs that really challenges this lazy attitude. So if you turn back to Proverbs in the Old Testament, the Wisdom of Solomon, we’re looking at Proverbs 18:9. Now when I came across this it scared me a little bit because it’s such a profound yet true statement of wisdom. In Proverbs 18:9 Solomon writes these words, he says, “The one who is slack in his work, is brother to one who destroys.” The one who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys? Now let’s get the full import of this. He’s saying that the one who is lazy on the job is kin to the guy who blows up the business, who lights the dynamite, throws it in there, and blows it up. That’s the one who destroys. Now how can the person who is lazy and slack be kin to that? Well you know what, we’ve all experienced it, haven’t we? Have you ever gone to a restaurant where the server comes up with a big wad of gum in his mouth, chomping spit all over you, paper in hand, “What do you want? Can you please hurry? I’m busy.” He brings the food out cold, and what are you thinking to yourself? “That’s the last time I will ever eat in that establishment.” Now, the lazy person who didn’t do their job well, impacted you. You choose to never use that business again. What happens to the business owner? What happens to all the other people? If enough people are impacted by that particular server, that could actually destroy the reputation and the business and the *livelihood* of the person involved. Have you ever been on one of those service calls? You know, after waiting and listening to the music for hours and hours, the person on the other end tells you you’re really stupid and you know, if you can’t figure this out on your own, oh well! And you hang up the phone and what do you say? You say, “I don’t care if that’s the cheapest product, I will never purchase anything from that company again.” So here are a whole bunch of people, that are working in manufacturing, that are putting that product together, that are trying to feed their families and put a roof over their head, and what do they do? They have to live with the fact that here’s a lazy person that didn’t do their job well, and that has an impact on them, that chips away at their livelihood. That’s what this passage is saying. And most of the time, if we have a lazy attitude we only think in terms of the people that are immediately around us, we don’t think in terms of the big picture of how it actually can destroy and chip away at the livelihood of other people. *Laziness is the attitude that damages not only our work life but the people that we work around.*  Some of us develop that retirement mentality. “I’ve got my 25 years in, I’ve got 5 more to go until I reach retirement, I’ve paid my time, I’ve worked really hard, what’s the least I can do to get by and get out of here with my pension? And so, how many M&M’s can I get in my mouth?” Not that bad, but, “what can I do to get by?” That does not reflect an attitude of excellence in your work.

The second consideration I really believe is the engine of excellence and that is learning. **The engine of excellence is learning.**  It’s a willingness to really learn, not only my job, but special skills and characteristics about myself that will make a huge difference in me. Turn to Proverbs chapter 1 verse 5. Proverbs 1:5 is a fantastic verse and in Proverbs 1:5, Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived writes these words, he says, “May the wise listen” and what? And “add to their learning. Let the discerning get guidance.” Now wait a minute, why would the wise need to listen? Because the wise are interested in one thing: getting wiser. The discerning are interested in one thing: getting guidance. In fact, in chapter 19 verse 20, the Proverbs say, “Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end, you will be wise.” Now here’s what these passages are telling us: If we’re going to have good effective outcome in our work, part of what we have to do is learn. Learn the job, invest the time to learn the skills, invest the time to learn to knowledge capital. Spend the time getting the information, the applications that you need in order to be effective. That’s a huge part of exhibiting excellence in your work so you’re open, you’re willing to listen to people, you’re willing to learn, you’re willing to take the training if need be. You know most of us don’t graduate from college or from high school with an understanding of the job world that we’re going to go into. We’ve got to learn it. Just because you have a child, doesn’t make you an effective father or mother, those are things you’ve got to learn. So whatever your work life is, learn the skills of your job. In addition to that, there’s also learning about yourself. And that requires self-study. You’ve got to know what your strengths and weaknesses are. You’ve got to know what your blind spots are, you’ve got to know over time what you’re good at and what you’re not good at, because if you learn your job and you learn yourself, you’ve got something to offer in every situation. So what are you learning?

That brings us to our WorkLife Challenge for the week. It’s about excellence and it’s about learning. So I’m going to ask you to reach in your bulletin and pull out your work life challenge, and I want everybody to get one of these. Now, last week we challenged you with a few questions and encouraged everybody to blog their experience and we had a number of you guys sit down and blog your experience and you discovered about God at work. One of the best ones, I really, really appreciated, the person called themselves “work in progress” and it was very encouraging to me. This person identified themselves as a school administrator that oftentimes feel like there’s somebody else more gifted than them to do their job. They began to pray over this past week that they would see God at work and they shared with us on the blog spot that people came up to them, they started getting affirmations from people that were completely unexpected, that reminded them again that God had placed them where He wanted them and built something into their life to really give them encouragement. So I would encourage you to take the work life challenge, to blog it, read the blogs, find them on our website and you’ll hear a lot and learn a lot from other people. So, if you choose to accept, here’s what the challenge is: there’s two of them, pick one unless you’re type A then you can pick two.

The first one is think of a task, conversation, or anything at work that you don’t want to do, and have been putting off. Pray about it, and commit to take care of it this week. So begin today, thinking and praying about anything that you hate to do or have just been puting off, and make a commitment to do it this week, and then tell us what that was like. Tell us what God showed you and what you discovered about God in that. The second one is this: ask a coworker or another person who would be in a position to know, for feedback on how you handled something at work. That is how you handled a project, came across in a meeting, etc. Be willing to listen and apply the feedback and thank them for their input. This is about you. So basically you’re going to somebody, and you’re asking them for feedback on how you’ve done and how you’re doing. You know, student, you may ask one of your teachers, “What do you think? How am I doing? How can I improve?” You may want to ask a coworker, you may want to ask a spouse, but get somebody to give you feedback about how you’re doing in your work life so that you can grow in your excellence. So one of them relates to your work, one of them relates to yourself. So I challenge you to take the work life challenge and then let us know about it on the BlogSpot.

Finally, the third consideration is influence. I believe that ***influence is the byproduct of excellence.*** Look at one more verse, and that is in Proverbs 22:29. Solomon says again, he says, “Do you see a man skilled in his work?” Somebody that is just great at what they do. He says, “He will serve for kings, he will not serve before obscure men.” Somebody who is excellent in what they do, *by that excellence* they will gain influence with other people. David Robinson had that experience; I want you to see him tell his story.

{Beginning of video testimony} My name is David Robinson. I’ve been in Austin since 1977 and have a wealth management firm known as Resource Consulting Group where we help over 200 families manage their wealth and make the major financial decisions in their life according to their lifetime goals. The exciting things for me in our office is when I see the ways to bring my spiritual faith into the work place. It first starts with the culture. I feel like it’s my responsibility to lead with integrity, to lead with a commitment to quality of service, and the product that we provide for our clients. It’s important to provide an open, challenging, creative environment where people are not fearful of making mistakes, but that there is a commitment to excellence to learn from those mistakes that we become better at what we’re doing over time. Christ is definitely the platform for our company and the opportunities to take advantage of a door opening with clients, with vendors, with employees, are rampant. And so, that’s one of my biggest challenges is to be able to balance what we’re there to do professionally as well as opportunities that the Lord presents in relationships. One example would be an employee, who had joined me, and after 6 months was getting ready to get married. And having come from a very unfortunate dysfunctional relationship with her father, was getting ready to ask her brother to walk her down the aisle. And because of the conversations we had had in the past and knowing that nothing was more important to this young lady than her father becoming a Christian, I was able to challenge her in love and in grace, to reconsider her decision, which she did, after prayerfully considering for several weeks. And her father did walk her down the aisle and about 30 days later he received Christ. They have a wonderful relationship today and her father is in a home bible study in Idaho and so that’s a really wonderful thing to rejoice. I would say that I’ve discovered God at work by first and foremost taking him with me and trying to realize that it’s Him through me that makes the difference. It really is not about me, as Rick Warren said in his book, that if I am praying for opportunities, if I am committed to doing my work well and caring about the people I’m doing it for, then God will open those doors. So the real question is, am I prepared for those opportunities? Am I praying for those opportunities? Am I looking for them? And so, little by little, as God has blessed me by having the courage to step out in faith and see that’s its more than what I originally thought it was as a business, it is an opportunity to invest in people’s lives, to be a blessing and to help them discover more about how great God is. {End of video testimony}

I just love that story. I just love what David says. He had an opportunity to get involved at probably the most intimate level you can imagine with an employee. Now here he is as the boss, and he’s given a woman advice on her marriage, her wedding, her relationship with her father who walks her down the aisle. I mean can you imagine a trickier place to be discussing with an employee than at that level of interaction? Now how do you think he got there? He didn’t get there because she saw him doing shoddy work because he didn’t really care in his money management business how well he managed a client’s money. She observed a guy who was really good at what he does and really cared and put his heart into his work. She trusted him because he was the kind of boss who cared about people. Just think, if he would have treated all the people in his office as pack mules and didn’t care about them personally, you think she would have ever talked to him? What happens is that as we as individuals do a great job, perform with excellence, because of our attitude at work, people begin to say, “Well you know what? She’s got it together in that area of her life, maybe there are other things I can learn from her as well.” Or you know, “That student! He’s got it all together, if you watch him and you watch what he does in his academics, how hard he works and how well he performs, he’s a guy that can be trusted to give advice in other areas.” And you begin to see that there is a correlation between our *excellence and our influence* as we live out our work life. Jesus Christ is calling us as individuals to work unto the Lord, and that work is with excellence, and that’s our challenge for the week. Let’s pray.

*Father in heaven we just thank you not simply for the opportunity we have to grind it out on a daily basis, just to work for the take home pay and to take care of our business and get out of there and live for the weekend, but Father you have given us the opportunity to capture significant, meaningful, influential time through our efforts at work. May we be the kind of people that are salt and light in our everyday experience. We pray these things in Jesus’s name, amen.*