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TRANSFORMED

Transformed In My Vocational Health
Colossians 3:23-24

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What an amazing journey we've been on through this Transformed series. Remember our key verse from Romans 12, *"Don't be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."* Can you think back to some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit has changed your way of thinking throughout this series? Maybe it was the realization that you don't have a spiritual life. Instead you have a life and everything in it is spiritual. Or maybe it's that your body is a gift to you and a temple of the Holy Spirit, which means that what you put in your body and what you do with your body is a spiritual issue. Or maybe it's that counter-cultural perspective that we own nothing but we are stewards of everything, and therefore what we do with what we have needs to align with God's purposes. When the Spirit changes our way of thinking about these things it literally changes the direction of our lives. We become transformed!

And this weekend we're coming to the end of the series. I want us to think together about our vocational health. Let me put that another way. I want us to think about how we do the work that God has given each of us to do. That "work" may or may not be your job. Maybe your work is to be a student. Maybe your work is to be a grandparent. Maybe your work is as a volunteer somewhere. Today we're going to explore what the Bible has to say about how we do the work that we've been given. And to get at, that let's open our Bibles and read today's scripture lesson from Colossians 3:23-24 [New Living Translation].

No matter what work God has given you to do, those are some challenging words. But before we apply them to ourselves, I want you to understand who Paul originally wrote them to. He wrote them to Christian slaves in the first century. Back in Paul's day, peasants often fell into debts that they couldn't repay, and not because they overcharged their credit cards, but because the rich often abused the poor. And so these poor debtors were often forced into becoming indentured servants – basically household slaves in order to pay off their debts. And I want you to know that context because I suspect that

what you're going to hear today is going to challenge your thinking about the work you do. Knowing that this was written to slaves can provide us with a little perspective as we consider our own work.

The world has all sorts of ideas of what it means to "succeed" in our work, including salary and status, but God's idea of success is different. I want to share with you seven biblical principles that will help you succeed God's way, and miraculously these seven principles form the acronym SUCCEED! These are going to come at you in rapid-fire succession, so sharpen your pencil and buckle up, 'cause here we go:

The "S" in succeed stands for **Start enthusiastically**. We often think that our enthusiasm at work is in response to the work we do or the environment in which we work, but enthusiasm is an internal issue, not a response to external things. And it doesn't mean to be excited...though that certainly doesn't hurt. The word "enthusiasm" comes from Greek and it literally means "in God." Before we ever go to work, before we even step into the office or engage in the work that we've been given to do, connect with God. Do a devotion. Say a prayer. Consciously place yourself into God's care. It'll change your attitude and how you work!

The "U" in succeed stands for **Understand who you really work for**. Maybe you love your boss. Maybe you hate your boss. But maybe your boss isn't who you think it is! In today's scripture reading, Paul tells us to work as if we were working for the Lord. So, how would you study, parent or do your job if Jesus sat in the corner office? Put another way, would you work differently if you knew that your boss would sacrifice his or her life for you because she loved you? That perspective will change the way you think about your work, won't it? 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, *"So whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."* In other words, your work is an act of worship!

The first "C" in succeed stands for **Concentrate on your character**. What you do is less important than how you do it. And how you do it comes from who you are. Let me say that again: What you do is less important than how you do it. And how you do it comes from who you are. Your character at work is a witness to Christ. Integrity, kindness, patience, determination, honesty... these issues of character not only inform how you do your job; they honor God and bear witness to God's character. Just think about all the people in the news in the last few years who were remarkably successful in their work according to the world's standards of success, but because they lacked character they wound up on the

front page of the paper and wound up losing it all. You want to truly succeed at your work? Concentrate on your character.

The second “C” in succeed stands for **Care about the people you work with**. Life is all about learning to love. And as we learned in the Transformed workbook, our spiritual health is measured by how well we love. It’s easy to love the people you like, but we really learn to love when we’re confronted with people we don’t like. So here’s some good news: your school, home, neighborhood or office is filled with people who are difficult to love. Isn’t that awesome! You’ve been given an opportunity to practice loving like Jesus loved. 1 Corinthians 16:14 says, *“Everything you do must be done with love”* and that means in the office, business trip, cafeteria, whatever. Now let me give you a clue – if you try and love unlovable people under your own power, real success will allude you. We need the power of prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit to shape our hearts with divine love. And our places of work need that divine love. People need our affirmation, affection and attention. That will help them to thrive, which makes us all more successful at work.

Alright. Take a breath. Let your pencil cool off for a moment. Let’s review. If we want to succeed at the work we’ve been given to do, scripture encourages us to start enthusiastically, understand who we really work for, concentrate on our character, and care about the people we work with. That’s good stuff! Let’s finish up.

The first “E” in succeed stands for **Exceed expectation**. Mediocrity will never lead to success, nor will it bear witness to Christ, who exceeded all expectations that people had for God. No matter what you do, whether you’re a truck driver, an attorney, a cook or a teacher, do more than the minimum. Don’t just get by. So many people just put in their time, do the minimum that’s required of them and cut corners, getting by on as little effort as possible. Remember who you work for. God notices what you do and how you do it. So will your earthly boss!

The second “E” in succeed stands for **Expand your skills**. Ecclesiastes 10:10 says, *“If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success.”* When I was first starting out in ministry, I noticed something about the people I most admired and wanted to emulate – they were committed to learning. They were always reading, studying, attending seminars and taking classes. From them I learned that successful people are life-long learners. And so I commit time almost every day to learning. I listen to podcasts, attend seminars, and read 40-50 books every year. I owe it to you to continually learn and grow to serve you more effectively. And I believe that being a life-long learner

honors God by being a good steward of the mind with which God blessed you. No matter what work God has given you to do, expand your skills.

And finally, the “D” in succeed stands for **Dedicate your work to God’s purposes**. When you dedicate your homework, your parenting or grandparenting, or your business to Christ, you invite Christ into your decisions. You listen for Christ’s guidance. And you seek to work in such a way that what you do reflects the goodness of Christ to others. In 2 Corinthians 2 St. Paul says, *“You are the aroma of Christ.”* Work that is dedicated to Christ’s purposes gives off the sweet scent of his love and goodness, but work that’s all about us and our purposes – well that just stinks. How would you work differently if you began every day praying, “Lord, be my work partner in all that I do, and may all that I do reflect who you are”? Not only would your work get done, but Christ’s work would get done, too.

Wow! That’s a lot of transformation to live into! We are constantly bombarded with notions of what it means to succeed in our work, but the world’s definition and God’s definition are not the same. So let me challenge you to spend a moment looking over the list you wrote this morning, God’s definition of what it means to succeed. Reflect on that list and see if the Spirit doesn’t cause one of those principles to jump out to you. Whatever that is, I challenge you to make that your three-month goal.

Maybe your work is being a grandparent, and the Spirit is nudging you to expand your skills. Then maybe your goal is to read a couple of books on effective grandparenting in the next three months.

Or maybe you’re in the workforce and the Spirit is nudging you to care about the people you work with. Maybe you’ve got some co-workers who are what we sometimes refer to as “EGR” – that’s “extra grace required.” They’re just tough to love. Then perhaps your three-month goal is to begin every day asking God to shape your heart and fill it with a love greater than your own.

Or maybe you’re a volunteer and the Spirit is nudging you to remember who you work for. Maybe you’ve been thinking that you’re serving an organization or a client, but now you’re wondering how you’d serve differently if you began every day remembering who your real boss is. Maybe your three-month goal is to memorize today’s scripture reading.

You get the idea. Take a step toward succeeding God’s way. Now let’s spend a moment reflecting on those seven principles, and then we’ll pray.