

Boundaries at Work

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 July 2026

Preacher: Dylan Marais

[0:00] And Sunday evening, and you know that Monday is coming. I wonder how you feel about Monday coming compared to how you're feeling now.

! Maybe you're feeling, oh, Monday, ugh, back to the grindstone, work, ugh. Hopefully you didn't feel like that this morning when you came to church.

Maybe you've got to put up with a horrible, demanding boss. Irritating colleagues, a pile of work that makes everything seem pointless and leaves you feeling drained of all joy and life.

Maybe you feel stressed that you're not at work over the weekend. Maybe you feel, yay, I can't wait to get back to work. I can make more money.

Weekend is such a waste of time. Maybe you feel, I can't wait to get to work to get away from the problems at home.

[1:05] Maybe work is a refuge. Because at least at work, computers don't backchat. And there's that cute secretary who's always happy to see you and brings your cup of coffee with a smile.

Maybe you're retired. And you face Monday with a sort of a twang of nostalgia. Now that you're not working, you wonder what the purpose of it all was.

And what is your purpose now? Well, God wants us to have a healthy relationship with work. But most of us struggle to get that right balance between our work life and the other parts of our life.

And we're either trying to escape it or we're trying to use work to escape from the rest of our life.

And work can, I think it has become a cruel master that dominates our lives in a bad way.

But work matters deeply because it occupies so much of our lives. And the Bible gives us a better way to think of work. And today we'll see how the gospel restores healthy boundaries so that work can be a joyful, fulfilling experience that it was meant to be.

[2:19] Rather than the cruel master that it very likely has become in our lives. And so work is a wonderful servant but a terrible master. The gospel says that Jesus is Lord, not work.

Jesus is Lord. Work. Is not Lord. And because of that, work can take its rightful place in our lives that God intended in the first place.

But why is work such hard work? Why is it such a schlep? Surely God intended something better for us. And so before we look at boundaries in the workplace, we need to look at why is work so hard?

I mean, if you've spent any time in the workplace, you'll know that work is real hard work. Especially if you've done manual labor. I mean, even just digging around in your garden, you think it'll be nice and easy.

And gosh, you hit that first root. Or that those weeds get in the way. And the plants never seem to grow like you want them to.

[3:31] It's hot under the sun. It's hot under the sun. And after 10 or 15 minutes, you're done. But even office jobs are not easy. And they come with their own frustrations. Technology rarely works like it should.

Bosses demand more than you can deliver. And there's always that one colleague that gets on everyone's nerves. One of my favorite videos from back in the day is a guy who's in an office environment.

And he's on his work computer. And he's got to send stuff to the printer. And the printer's not working again. And this guy, obviously it hasn't been working the whole time. And he has had it. And he rips out his computer screen. Those old CRT screens. It's like those old TV boxes. And he walks over to the printer. And he slams the printer open.

Slams the screen down on the printer and tries to copy it. Everyone in the office is like, whoa, that's not a good thing. I mean, we're living in the 21st century.

[4:31] Surely by now we could have found this proper work-life balance between technology that can help us and work that is a dredge. Why is work so hard? Well, the Bible gives us the answer.

It tells us that work shouldn't be difficult. Work shouldn't be difficult. And the reason for that is God himself is a God that works.

And man is meant to be a partner with God in the work of creation. Now, our reading was from Genesis 3. That's where we learn that work is really hard.

That's where it becomes a curse. But in Genesis 1, verse 27, 28, it says that we are made in God's image and that he blesses us in order to fill the earth and subdue it.

And then in Genesis 2, in verse 15, we get given our job role. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it.

[5:26] And so we were created to work. Work is part of our identity. It's built into our identity.

We're created to partner with God to continue the work of creation and actually in some sense to fulfill the work of creation.

God starts it and then he says, right, okay, now I'm handing it over to you. I want you guys to continue. But he doesn't hand it over completely. He's still the boss.

He's an authority. We've got to do it the way he would want it to and under his authority. But we were created to fulfill the work of creation. And we saw previously in our series on boundaries what God does in creation to make life flourish, the whole purpose of creation.

Well, God brings order in creation. There's chaos. There's disorder. He brings order. He shapes it. He molds it. He gives it direction and rules and laws and boundaries. And by doing that, creation becomes a place where life can be sustained.

And we essentially are to continue that work of creation by taking chaos, creating boundaries, and making it a blessing for others. We're to bring order to chaos so that life can flourish, not just for ourselves but for others.

[6:44] It's obviously meant to be done under God's authority, trusting in his wisdom. And so God is, in a sense, our first boss. Work only becomes a schlep, or rather became a schlep, became problematic, became difficult, when man decided not to follow God's design for work in creation, when we broke the boundaries that God has set up.

And that's recorded in Genesis 3. God sets up a tree. He says, don't eat that tree. And Adam and Eve are like, no, let's eat the tree. Because I think in terms of work, they must have thought, well, you know what?

We can maybe bypass how God has created things. Ah, this is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We're not, we've got to do this work thing of creation. We must take, we must work in the garden.

We've got to work it and take care of it. Maybe this tree of knowledge of good and evil will give us a shortcut. Maybe we can bypass how God tells us to do things. And so they take that bait. And that is the thing that creates all the chaos and the disorder.

And what it does to work is it makes it incredibly hard. So that's what we read in Genesis 3. Maybe if you're there, have a read from verse 17.

[7:59] To Adam he said, because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, you must not eat of it. The problem isn't that what is his wife? I'll just explain it. It's because God listened to someone on earth.

Adam listened to someone on earth. He wasn't listening to God. That's the purpose of that. They also listened to a snake. I mean, like, that's the problem there. Okay. Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, I'm your boss.

I told you what to do and what not to do. You did the thing I told you not to do. Here's what's going to happen. Cursed is the ground because of you. Through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken for dust you are and to dust you will return.

God gives man a life-death sentence. Work is meant to produce life. And now the very thing meant to produce life is going to do the opposite.

[9:11] It's going to kill us, which is terribly sad. Very bad. Now, sin didn't just curse the ground. Sin broke the boundaries between us and God and us and our work.

Because of sin, work loses its proper place in the world and has a number of big implications for us that we need to deal with. And so the first thing is that what sin does with work is that work replaces God.

Work replaces God. When work becomes ultimate, it becomes our God. But the Bible says that God is your provider, not your paycheck.

So you'll be creating huge problems in your life if work is more important to you than God is. Just think about the high levels of stress and then the self-medication that goes along with that.

Typically, drinking, drugs, crazy long hours at work, bad sleep, and ultimately broken relationships at home and at work.

[10 : 19] So if that sort of typifies your life and your work experience, you've done something wrong with work. You've made it more ultimate than God. And then the other thing that when we don't listen to how God has put boundaries in place around work, we find that work replaces rest.

God is a God that works. He is also a God that rests. God rested. When work becomes ultimate, we refuse to rest.

God set boundaries around his own work. I mean, he is a God. And he stops working one day out of seven. He stops and takes a rest.

So if your relationship with work is that it's got no boundaries between work and rest, that rest gets in the way of work, you've misunderstood something about how creation works.

And of course, you're going to reap the rewards of that, which are not good rewards. You'll create untold misery for yourself and your family if you think you know better than God and don't work within the boundaries he has set for the rhythms of work and rest.

[11 : 32] The reason we rest, or one of the reasons we rest, yes, is to revitalize ourselves. I mean, just think about the fact that God has put sleep into our cycle. Eight hours sleep, they say.

You know, out of 24 hours, that's a good... Oh, is it a good third? Yeah. Huh? Yeah, yeah, you could be working. No, sleep. You need it.

And so the thing about rest and sleep is that it just reminds us that no matter how hard we work, ultimately everything we have doesn't come from what we can and can't do.

There's a trust factor built into our relationship with work because we've got to trust God that he will use our work to provide what we need. And then work replaces, I think, a purpose.

What I mean by that is instead of serving others, work becomes about serving ourselves. Work has a high purpose in making my life better for myself or even for my family.

[12 : 32] God's work in creation is for goodness and blessing and life to flourish and to do that in community.

That's why he makes Adam and Eve. He didn't make the world just for himself. He creates all these sort of raw materials to be shaped and used so that life can flourish for others.

That's why he says he puts man in the garden to work it and tend it. And then he says, but I want you to take this and go to the rest of the earth and subdue it. I want this thing that creates life to spread over the globe so that everyone can enjoy God and be blessed.

Relationships, community, living for something more than myself. That's the purpose for work.

Being a blessing to others. These are the goals. And when you lose sight of what work is intended for, if it's just aimed at you and getting the money that you can and climbing that ladder, you miss out on these goals.

[13 : 39] You narrow the scope of work and then it becomes a cruel master. It becomes easily a drudge because you're never going to get enough. You're never going to get there. And then people get in your way of getting somewhere.

When in fact, people are not meant to be getting in your way of work. Work is meant to help you to enjoy relationships with people. Work becomes a curse when it becomes our master.

So that's in Genesis 3. And everyone who's worked has tasted this in their life, these problems. So we inherit sort of unhealthy and broken boundaries between us and work and us and creation and us and God.

So how do we restore healthy boundaries? Well, to get there, we need Jesus. Jesus is the one who ultimately does the work that God wanted.

And what he does is he resets our relationship with God and therefore resets our relationship with work as well. And so let's look at resetting work boundaries.

[14 : 47] Resetting work boundaries. Jesus redeems the curse of work because he perfectly reflects what God wants both from the worker and the boss. And I'll explain that in a few minutes.

You regain a better work-life balance not by changing your job but by changing your master. And so that's what we read about in Colossians 3.

I'll have it up on the screen there. This is the verse I wanted to focus on. Paul writes, This is revolutionary.

And it was written to slaves. Now, in the modern world, we don't have slaves anymore. But if we have to take the Bible language between slave and master, we don't even speak about slave and master anymore.

It's such old language. Even master we don't like to use. But if we take that language of slave and master and turn it into worker and boss, you're not far away from understanding how it can apply to our lives today.

[16 : 10] Whatever you do, you can now work at it with all your heart because you're working for the Lord, not human masters. And this is what happens when you work for the Lord.

You know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you're serving. And so Paul says that as we work, we've got, sure we've got an immediate boss if you're a worker.

If you're a boss, you've got workers under you. But Paul is going to remind even the bosses that they've got another boss that they've got to think about. And Paul says that workers have a much higher and a much different master than the one standing in front of them.

Christians have a Lord who rules in heaven, who is their true master. Now this verse just talks about Jesus as the Lord Christ. You go, okay, well, what kind of a master is he?

What kind of a boss is he? Well, turn then to Colossians chapter 1. And it tells you just what kind of master and Lord Jesus is.

[17 : 21] Colossians 1, I'm just going to read from verse 15. It talks about Jesus as the Son of God.

And it says this, the Son, from verse 15, The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through Him and for Him.

He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy.

That's the kind of Lord, that is the Lord, that you've got as your master, as your boss, if you're a Christian.

Jesus is the ultimate boss of heaven and earth. Wouldn't you like to have someone like that as your boss? Oh, they would immediately get your allegiance, easily get your obedience, working and a promising reward.

[18 : 40] Yes, I'm going to work for you. There's someone you can trust. It would be cool to have a boss like that. Well, if you're a Christian, you do have that.

And it puts your boss, who's standing in front of you, a bit into perspective. Now, that doesn't mean you disregard him. But Paul in Colossians 3 says, Well, slaves, in other words, workers, when you've got a master or a boss that's not treating you well, don't have to react out of anger, hate and spite.

Remind yourself you've got a higher boss that you're working for. But he will then say, Remember bosses, you've also got a boss that you've got to be accountable to.

But there's something else about Jesus that is unique, that makes it worth having him as our Lord and Master. And that's because he's not just our boss, but he's also our slave.

Jesus is our slave. That's not something we often think about. But Jesus himself said, In the Gospels, he said, Well, the Son of Man has not come to be served, but to serve.

[19 : 56] The word there, to serve, is to be a slave. And to give his life as a ransom for many. Here in Colossians chapter 1, I'm just back in Colossians 1 again, just that end few verses of that section.

Look at what this mighty Lord of heaven and earth has come to do. Verse 19, God, chapter 1, verse 19 of Colossians, God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth, all things in heaven.

How did he do that? By bossing people around? By telling them what to do? No. By making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

And so that this high king of heaven humbles himself to serve you so that you can have peace with God and reclaim your place as a productive worker in God's creation.

So here's something that I kind of wrestled with and I hadn't really thought about this, that Jesus is the best example of both worker and boss, of slave and master.

[21:10] He's the perfect master and the perfect slave. As a master, Jesus is the perfect boss. You read the gospel accounts. Jesus never abuses anyone.

He doesn't strike out in frustration. He doesn't shout at anyone. He doesn't take out his frustrations on those under his authority. Jesus saw his role as a leader, as one who develops and grows people to maturity.

He was very patient with his disciples when they didn't get things straight away. Back in our readings from Colossians 3 and Colossians 4.

Colossians 4 verse 1 says, Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair because you know that you also have a master in heaven.

In modern language, bosses, provide your workers with what is right and fair because you know you've got a boss in heaven that you've got to give account to.

[22:24] You also, it says, you also have a master in heaven. That little word also carries a lot of weight. You may be the boss here, but Jesus is your boss in heaven and you need to act with that in mind.

Just an illustration maybe from the past. Under the old days of apartheid, there was that typical boss-worker relationship. Boss.

And the picture I get in my mind of those olden days. Olden days. I was there, guys.

It wasn't that long ago. But you know, you've got the boss and you've got your worker and the picture I've got is of a guy shouting and telling the worker how stupid he is and what he hasn't done and just making them feel so bad but never helping them do the job properly.

But you know, many of those old bosses would go to church on a Sunday and the worker would go to church on a Sunday. Can you imagine on judgment day when that old boss must now speak to his real boss, the same boss, they've both got the same master in heaven and he's going to say to him, but why did you treat your Christian brother like that?

[23:41] So for those who are leaders, bosses, who've got people under your authority, it's worth bearing that in mind, I think.

Okay, but not everyone is a boss. Most of us are workers, slaves, or servant. That gives you a clue as to the nature of our work.

We are there to serve others, to help others. If you're a worker, how does this help with your boundaries?

Well, if you're a worker that has Christ as your master, this gives you a sure foundation for you to speak, I think, respectfully without fear to your boss and your work colleagues if you need to address an issue with them.

What it does is it doesn't make them the ultimate boss of your life. Yes, they're standing in front of you and they're grassing and they're doing their usual boss thing in a bad way.

[24:42] There's good bosses and bad bosses, obviously. I'm thinking about bad bosses. Okay, well, so many workers are like, well, I'm so scared, I can't go and address this with them.

I'm too scared of them. Well, you've got a master in heaven that rules the universe. Your boss may have authority over your job, but he doesn't have authority over your identity.

Jesus does. The same with your work colleagues. They don't define you. Jesus does. Jesus is your ultimate Lord, not your work, not your abusive boss, not your controlling colleague.

Now, you can't control their reactions or actions, but you can control your response and your reaction to what they do and say. We've looked at this in the past with boundaries and interpersonal relationships.

We spoke about de-escalation, saying that, don't speak to me in an abusive way. When it comes to doing that with your boss, the best thing to do is to take it.

[25:50] Boom! They're throwing all their stuff at you. Oh, it's terrible. The best thing to do, I think, is to take it while it's happening, process it with Jesus, and the next morning when you've calmed down, not to react out of anger, not to go and skinner and belittle them and bring the boss down.

You know, we all love to skinner about the boss and say, what a nasty person he is to everyone. Don't do that. Don't do that. God is a God of hierarchy.

You've got to respect authority, even when it's abusive. That doesn't mean you must take it. With Jesus as your boss, you go away, you process it with him, and you go back the next day, and you say to your boss, I would like to make an appointment with you.

I want to speak about how you speak to me. And then tell him what you like and don't like. Let them react. You say, thank you for listening, and you get on with your job. That takes strength, and only Jesus can help you do that.

Your boss may have authority of your job, but he doesn't have authority of your identity. Maybe you need to leave that work eventually. Maybe that's never going to come right, and it's impacting you so badly.

[27:08] That's fine. Your identity is not wrapped up in the job that you've got then and there. It's wrapped up in Jesus. You're not defined by your work. You can leave if you need to.

Obviously be wise, and plan your leaving properly. So that's having Jesus as a master.

He's the perfect boss, and so he helps both bosses and workers relate better to have reminding ourselves we've got Jesus as our master. Jesus is also, well, the perfect slave.

He's the perfect worker. He's humble. He's the king of heaven, and he humbled himself while he was here. He was obedient to his father.

He didn't retaliate when he was provoked, but he always looked beyond those who were immediately in front of him to his father in heaven.

[28:14] At one point he says, you know, you guys are only doing this because my God, my father's put you in this position of authority. You know, it doesn't stop the abuse, but it lets them know that you're actually in control of that situation, much more in control than you think.

Jesus didn't retaliate, but always looked to his father in heaven. We are to respond to workplace provocations in the same way. It doesn't mean we mustn't say no to abuse, but we mustn't retaliate in kind.

Don't run your boss down, or don't run your work colleagues down. Those little snippy remarks, those little snipey remarks, by the way, that's all going to play out on judgment day. Jesus says that every word that we speak is going to be replayed and going to be accounted for.

It's much better on judgment day when they see how badly you were abused and that you didn't abuse back, but that you trusted God. And yes, you took the steps you needed to stop the abuse.

You're going to be shown to be a person of virtue and power and integrity. But if you're snipping and sniping and trying to undermine your boss the whole time, that's going to play out on judgment day.

[29:37] And we'll say, look, we can all understand that you did that, but you're not going to get the glory and the rewards that you think you might have if you had done it better. We don't have to take the abuse.

We can speak the truth in love, like Jesus did, but you know, there are going to be repercussions.

We don't get perfect justice here on earth. That's why Jesus says, well, trust in me.

It's difficult to trust in me when there's abuse coming your way, but it helps you to respond better to it, I think. You can handle conflict in the workplace much better because you know you're working for eternal rewards.

And so, that's this amazing promise in that Colossians 3 verse. Verse 23, whatever, so Colossians 3, 23, whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.

Paul is talking to slaves here. You know, slaves used to be in those slave galleys that used to row in the ships.

[30:44] It's like row. You must row like a Christian. Row hard. You know, in the ancient world, the Christians were known as hard workers that didn't complain, that got the job done, but somehow they still managed to stand up to abuse and Christians changed the workplace in history.

It does take time now and you might get hurt in the process, but that's when you trust Jesus.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for human masters.

See past your job. Realize you're working for the guy that's in Colossians 1. He's your boss. And now, so yes, and then what?

Verse 24, Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward, if you do this, you will receive an inheritance as a reward.

How long does your paycheck last on earth? Oh my goodness. Not long. How much, how long do the rewards of Jesus as your boss last?

[32:00] They never run out, they never diminish, they last forever and they keep growing. Now we don't quite know how this works out, but the work I do, the work you do here on earth is going to somehow contribute to your existence in the future.

At the end of 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Corinthians 15, which is all about the future and the resurrection, Paul doesn't end that chapter by saying, okay, so now that you're going to die in this life and you're going to be resurrected in the next, don't worry about work, don't do anything, just leave it, it's not important.

He doesn't say that. At the end of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul doesn't say we must be passive and do nothing because all of this counts for nothing. He says the opposite.

Because of the resurrection, because of future rewards, this is what he says, it's not on the screen, I'm just going to quote it for you. It's at the end of 1 Corinthians 15, it's from verse 58, if you want to take a note. He says this, Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm, let nothing move you, always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

That's a cool thing to work for, isn't it? Treasures that last. Trusting Jesus, responding to conflict in a good way and getting on with the job and not backbiting and contributing to the chaos.

[33:36] Well, as we end, let's go back to our starting question. Take what we've seen about what God teaches us about work and ask the question again, what are you feeling about Monday coming up?

If you're putting these principles into place, Monday shouldn't fill you with dread. It should fill you with a sense of anticipation and excitement.

Work is not your master, Jesus is your master. You're partnering with him like Adam partnered with God in the garden. We're partnering with Jesus now in the work of bringing order and beauty and benefit and blessing and goodness and life to those around us.

You would have rested on the weekend properly knowing work is not your God, that you can trust him for your provision. You've got a loving heavenly father who supplies all you need.

If you're retired, you can still look forward to Monday because you've still got a boss. You've still got work to do. What that means is you've got purpose and meaning and a role to play in your family, in society and a church.

[34:54] Let me end by quoting from Piper. This is an excellent book, Don't Waste Your Life. This is what Piper says. Let me tell you what a tragedy is.

Consider the story from the Reader's Digest some years ago. A couple took early retirement from their jobs. He was 59, she was 51.

I would be close to that. It would be nice to retire at that age. Now they live in Florida where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball and collect shells.

Piper says that's a tragedy. For most of us that's the goal. Why does he say that's a tragedy?

Because if that's all they do, he says this, picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment.

Look Lord, see my shells. That would be a tragedy. He says, God has created us to live with a single passion, to joyfully display his supreme excellence in all spheres of life.

[36:00] This is classic Piper. The wasted life is a life without passion or without this passion. And he says, God calls us to pray and think and dream and plan and work not for ourselves, not to be made much of for ourselves, but to make much of him, of God, in every part of our lives.

And so, a reminder that as you're going to work on Monday, your real boss is the king of the new creation and you have an eternal reward, eternal rewards that are secure in him if you work for him. Let me pray for us. Well, Lord Jesus, you've given us this glorious vision of what work is all about. It's honoring you and trusting you and living life your way for a bigger purpose, Lord, to bless others. Help us, Lord, to take these truths and practice them out on a Monday at work or during the week in our families, Lord. We need your help to do boundaries well. Lord, we need each other to do boundaries well, so help us to check in with each other and help each other, Lord, to build better boundaries and help us to serve you.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen.