

Henry Ow

1 Peter 2:18-25

HCC Sermon

Difficult Bosses at Work

INTRODUCTION

1. Image: Let me share with you some memos from the world's worst boss.
2. Need: Difficult bosses suck the joy out of work.
3. Subject: What do we do when we work for a difficult boss?
4. Text: 1 Peter 2:18-25.
5. Preview: We'll talk about God's command and three reasons to follow God's command.

BODY

- I. Continue to do your work well even when your boss is difficult (2:18)
 - A. Peter commands household slaves to obey their difficult masters
 1. Peter addresses specifically household slaves because he explains in this section how a house should operate.
 2. Passages that describe the relationship between master and slave provide us principles on how we as workers should act in the workplace.
 3. Peter notes that a household slave could have two types of masters.
 - B. To do your work well is to do work God's way.
 1. The phrase: "with all respect" can be rendered "with reverent fear of God" (NIV).
 2. Working to please God doesn't mean that you will please your difficult boss.
- II. God cares about the work you do (2:19-20)
 - A. God watches the work you do (2:19) ["Consciousness of God"]
 - B. God does not reward shady work (2:20a)
 - C. God rewards good work though it means you suffer for it (2:20b)
 - a. The reward is an imperishable inheritance.
 - b. I think we underestimate the power of recognition.
- III. God invites you to trust him (2:21-24)
 - A. Peter cites the example of Christ trusting God when he suffered to save us from sin.
 1. The word for example describes how children would trace the letter of the alphabet to learn how to write (2:21a)

2. Peter notes that Jesus did not retaliate when he suffered (2:22)
3. Jesus's silent suffering resulted in our salvation (2:24)
- B. Believers can trust God for two reasons.
 1. God will judge your difficult boss either now or later (2:23).
 - a. Your difficult boss is removed from his position.
 - b. Your difficult boss will face God one day.
 2. God can use your suffering to produce good.
 - a. It produces gospel conversation with co-workers.
 - b. It produces regular prayer and dependence on God.
 - c. It produces godliness by killing your people pleasing tendencies.
- IV. God saved you to be his worker (2:25)
 - A. Peter uses the image of a wandering sheep and shepherd to depict our salvation.
 1. Peter adopts the shepherd and sheep language from Ezek 34.
 2. God as the chief shepherd sought us out so that we can live under his care.
 - B. We work for our ultimate boss, God, before working for our boss. [Use of the word overseer. We will have to give an account to God for our work.]

CONCLUSION

1. Summary: Continue to do your work well even when your boss is difficult. Three reasons. God cares about the work you do. God invites you to trust him. God saved you to be his worker.
2. Closing Image: Let me conclude with a description of early Christians.

MANUSCRIPT

To prepare for this morning's sermon I came across a New York Times article from 2017 titled: "Memos from the 'World's Worst Boss'". **Let me share with you an excerpt from the article.**

Do you think your boss is tough or unfair? Try working for the world's worst boss – Mike Davis, aka Tiger Mike. Davis started as a chauffeur and rose to become a Houston oil and gas magnate. But he earned even more notoriety as "the world's worst boss" and "the world's grumpiest boss." Throughout his career he routinely issued grumpy memos to his employees.

For instance, on January 11th, 1978, he sent the following terse memo to all his employees: "Idle conversation and gossip in this office among employees will result in immediate termination. DO YOUR JOBS AND KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT!"

A month later he banned office birthday parties with the following memo: "There will be no more birthday celebrations, birthday cakes, levity, or celebrations of any kind within the office. This is a business office. If you have to celebrate, do it after office hours on your own time."

In another memo, he explained why he could swear but his employees couldn't: "I swear, but since I am the owner of this company, that is my privilege, and this privilege is not to be interpreted as the same for any employee. That differentiates me from you, and I want to keep it that way. There will be absolutely no swearing, by any employee, male or female, in this office, ever."

I imagine working for Tiger Mike would have been miserable. But some of you may work for someone like Tiger Mike. A grumpy boss. An insensitive boss. A difficult boss. Difficult bosses micromanage your work. They bring up ideas at meetings but stumble on the execution. They take credit for your work.

Difficult bosses suck the joy out of work. It makes work a drag. When your alarm goes off in the morning, you want to hit snooze. Or you might pray for inclement weather so that you don't see your boss that day. When your phone buzzes and you see their number, you want to hit send to voicemail. The thought of your boss makes it hard to sleep. They cause you to overwork. Even as I speak on the topic, you envision your boss, and it invokes low level angst.

What do we do when we work for a difficult boss? What action can we take when your boss acts unreasonably? How do we respond when our bosses makes life miserable?

To answer this question, we'll turn to a letter written by the apostle Peter to the church dispersed throughout Asia. He taught the church how to live as sojourners in the world as they experienced ridicule and shame from their unbelieving neighbors. Turn with me to 1 Peter, chapter 2. 1 Peter, chapter 2. Thank for Chris for reading this morning's passage. 1 Peter, chapter 2.

This morning's message will have four parts. We'll talk first about Gods command to those who work for difficult bosses. Next, we'll talk about three reasons for God's command. **A command followed by three reasons.**

Let's look first at the command. **Continue to do your work well even when your boss is difficult.** Carry on in doing your assignments. Complete your tasks. Your boss may micromanage. He or she may lack any interpersonal skills. They take credit for your work. Continue to do what they direct you to. Keep on assignment. **Continue to do your work well even when your boss is difficult.**

We see this in this morning's text. It's the opening line. **Peter commands household slaves to obey their difficult masters.** He instructs Christian slaves to follow their instructions. Carry out their orders even when they make your life miserable.

Look with me at verse 18. *Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.*

Peter addresses specifically household slaves because he explains in this section how a house should operate. The Romans believed that well-functioning society began in the home. Peter explains how Christians should behave as citizens, slaves, wives, and husbands. The ESV uses the word servants. But I think another translation provides an alternate rendering (LEB). Domestic slave. In the 1st century, the Roman empire employed the use of slaves in different industries. Mining. Fieldwork. Blacksmithing. Household slaves helped their masters manage the affairs in the home.

Passages that describe the relationship between master and slave provide us principles on how we as workers should act in the workplace. Pastor Jason talked about how slavery in the first century differed from race based African slavery a few weeks ago. I won't review all the differences. But I do want to remind you that slavery in the first century

resembled indentured servitude. Most were able to accrue sufficient wages to eventually purchase their freedom after 10 years of serving as a slave.

Our careers resemble a form of indentured servitude. If you participate in a rotation program at this company, then you cannot quit after you finish the program. you owe the company two years of service. Since the company paid for your MBA program, you owe the company a minimum of two years of service. Some of us are stuck at a job because we must pay off student loans. This company is sponsoring your visa application, so you can't leave. Most of us sign contracts that commit ourselves to a company until we decide to quit.

Peter notes that a household slave could have two types of masters. Good ones. Miserable ones. He uses these adjectives in verse 18. *Good. Gentle. Unjust.* The word unjust is a translation from a Greek word that also means crooked. For those who are familiar with the term: scoliosis describing a crooked back. The root word is found here. Peter focuses on masters bent out of shape.

Peter doesn't need to command Christians to obey good and gentle masters. That's easy. But a crooked and unjust master doesn't exempt believers from obeying them. Just because your master isn't a fool, it doesn't permit you to ignore his commands or slack off. You still need to do your duty.

Let's spend some time thinking about the work you owe your boss. You owe him good work. You need to do your work well. What does it mean to do your work well?

To do your work well is to do work God's way. To perform well you need to perform according to God's instructions. Let me explain where I get that from the text.

The phrase: "with all respect" can also be rendered "with reverent fear of God".

This means you do your work in such a way that it pleases God. Do your work for your boss if it doesn't require you to disobey God. If he assigns you an extra project that requires you to work longer, then you do it. If she signs you up for a double shift at a hospital because another doctor is unavailable, then you down an extra cup of coffee to prepare for another shift. If he denies your vacation request, then you reschedule your vacation. If your boss requires you to return to the office for work, then you show up at the office on Monday. As long as the instruction doesn't require you to sin, then do it.

But if your boss requires you to do something that displease God, then you have permission to say: "No". In the first century, some masters may require to their slaves to serve them sexually. The slave has permission to refuse. If your boss tells to lie on an estimate, you have permission to respond: "No". If your boss instructs you to mischarge, then you can report him to the ethics office. If your boss instructs you to cover up a flaw in your product, then you have permission to say: "No". If your boss asks you to do anything that violates your company's code of conduct, then you have freedom to report them to the HR department.

Working to please God doesn't mean that you will please your difficult boss.

When slaves in the first century refused to serve their masters sexually, their masters beat them. Some even experienced rape. If you provide an honest estimate of your work to a

customer, then your boss might chew you out for losing the contract. If you report your boss for asking you to mischarge to the ethics office, then people might call you a snitch. If you disclose a flaw in your produce to your customer, then he may make life hard for you in the office.

What should we do when we work for a difficult boss? Continue to do your work well even when your boss is difficult. Why? Why should we do our work well when it might result in our suffering? Our misery? An awkward workplace? Peter provides three reasons. Three explanations

First reason. **God cares about the work you do.** Your work matters to God. It is important to Him. He shows interest in your work. He finds your work significant. **God cares about the work you do.**

Look with me at verse 19. *For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.*

First, **God watches the work you do.** ESV uses the phrase: mindful of God. This phrase could also be expressed consciousness of God (NIV; NET). God pays attention to what kind of work that you do. He knows when you do good work. He knows when you do shoddy work. You cannot hide your motivation in work from him. He hears it when you complain in your mind. He realizes when you attack work with gusto.

God watches the work you do. He rewards you accordingly. **God does not reward shady work.** When you do something unwise at work, it doesn't make God happy. If you fail to do your work, God doesn't protect you from experiencing the consequences. Look again at the rhetorical question in verse 20. *For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?* Implied answer. Nothing. There is no credit. Nothing worthy of praise. If you show up late to work, then God sides with your boss when they reprimand you. If you fail to complete a project by a deadline because you slacked off, then God agrees with your boss to pass you over for a raise. **God does not reward shoddy work.**

But **God rewards good work though it means you suffer for it.** He honors good work. Look at the second half of verse 20. *But if you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.*

Note the repetition of the phrase: gracious thing in the sight of God. It occurs twice. Verse 19. Verse 20. The phrase gracious thing is one word in Greek. Charis. It typically means grace. But it can also mean favor. To suffer when doing the right thing results in God's favor. **God rewards you for doing good work though you suffer for it.**

God will reward you when you exhibit honesty in business dealing even though it results in your boss's displeasure. God will reward you when your boss fails to recognize your contribution to the team. God will reward you when you continue to produce quality work despite your boss shaming you in front of your colleagues.

What is the reward? Peter describes it as an inheritance that will not perish (1 Peter 1:3). Believers will receive something from the Lord in the future. I think it will be the

expression of God's favor upon you. He expresses a recognition of your work. God will say: "Well done. Good and faithful servant." Some of us may think: "That's it?"

I think that we underestimate the power of recognition. As a parent, I've learned how powerful it is to recognize the good work of my son. I don't even need to say: "Good job." When Hudson, my son, turns on the light. I say: "Hudson turned on the light". That comment produces a grin. This grin communicates pride that he had accomplished something. He puts on his shoes. I comment: "You put on your shoes." It produces the same effect. The recognition of my son's good work is sufficient reward for him.

First reason you do good work even when your boss is difficult. God cares about your work. Let's talk about the second reason.

God invites you to trust him. He asks you to entrust yourself to his plan. He wants you to have confidence in him. God wishes for you have faith in Him. Believe. **God invites you to trust him.**

We see this in the text when **Peter cites the example of Christ. Jesus trusted God when he suffered to save us from sin.**

Let's think together about the idea of example. Look at verse 21. *For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.* **The word for example in Greek describes how children would trace the letter of the alphabet to learn how to write.** One could say that we need to trace the life of Jesus Christ so that we might resemble him when we suffer.

Peter notes that Jesus did not retaliate when he suffered but trusted God. Look at verse 22. *He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.* These verses echo Isaiah's description of the suffering servant found in Isaiah 53.

Peter focuses on Jesus's silence. *He did not revile. He did not threaten.* This is remarkable because the accused would passionately defend themselves against an injustice in the first century. But Jesus kept silent. It displays a confidence in God's justice. He trusted God's plan. It's summed up when Jesus says at the Garden of Gethsemane: "Not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Jesus's silent suffering resulted in our salvation. Look at verse 24. *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.* Note the word tree. Why does Peter not write "the cross"? I'm sure that Peter knew that Jesus hung on a Roman cross. Peter uses the word tree to invoke an idea from the book of Deuteronomy. Those who hang on a tree are cursed (Deut 21:23). Jesus died a cursed man so that the curse might be removed from us.

Peter focus on what Jesus's death and resurrection accomplishes. Death to sin. The authority of sin over those who believe is broken. Now a believer can turn from a life of sin to a life of righteousness. You can now choose to live a life that pleases the Lord. What will you do with that choice? Will you choose to refuse to work for your difficult boss and

displease the Lord? Or will you choose to work for your difficult boss even if it means suffering for doing the right thing?

Even when believers suffer for doing good work, we can **trust God for two reasons**. First, **God will judge your difficult boss either now or later**. Look at verse 23 again. Peter describes God as one who judges justly. God may allow your difficult boss to face judgment for his mistreatment of you now.

Maybe a director sees your boss mistreat you. The director calls your boss in for a conversation. He tells your boss that unless he changes his behavior his time as a manager will be short.

Or maybe the department chair drops in unexpectedly to evaluate your professor. Your professor doesn't notice the department chair enter the classroom. He continues to berate one of your classmates for his position on a paper. The department chair notes the verbal abuse and brings it up in his evaluation.

Now your boss may not receive discipline now. He may not be removed tomorrow. What then? **Remember that your difficult boss will face God one day**. Everyone will have to give an account one day for their actions. After your boss dies, he will face God. God will enter evidence every time he mistreated you and your employees. God will lay bare every instance he failed to take responsibility for his mistakes and blamed the team. Once God reviews the evidence, he will ensure that your difficult boss will experience a consequence appropriate to his immoral behavior.

First reason we can trust God. God will judge your difficult boss either now or later.

Second reason we can trust God. **God can use your suffering to produce good.** The gospel enables us to believe that whatever suffering we face, God can bring about something positive. Let me give you some possibilities.

Your suffering for good work produces gospel conversation with co-workers.

Maybe one of your co-workers observes how you continue to patiently answer your boss's questions even though you answered them all in a previous email. She observes that every time your boss objects to your project presentation, you always have a prepared response. Your gentle and firm response prompts her curiosity. She asks you over lunch: "How do you put up with our boss? I don't think I can ever do what you do." This is an opportunity to share how God enables you to do good work when your boss is difficult.

Here's another positive thing that comes out of working for a difficult boss. **It produces regular prayer and dependence on God.** You find yourself praying more so that you continue working for your difficult boss. Your phone rings. It's your boss. Inwardly, you groan. But you say a quick prayer: "I don't know what my boss wants, but help me, Lord." You pick up the phone. Your attending physician has a reputation of using harsh language when a resident performs a poor examination. This prompts you to pray: "God, help me listen well to the patient, perform a thorough examination, and come up with an effective treatment plan. I don't want to be berated later." A difficult boss prompts you to pray more cultivate a greater dependence on God.

Second reason to continue that God wants you to continue working for a difficult boss is that God invites you to trust him. Let's move to the last point of the sermon. The third reason why we should continue working for a difficult boss.

God saved you to be his worker. He rescued you from sin so that you could represent him in the workplace. He delivered you from condemnation to labor for him. **God saved you to be his worker.**

Peter uses the image of a wandering sheep and shepherd to depict our salvation. Look at verse 25. *For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

Peter adopts the shepherd and sheep language from Ezekiel, chapter 34. Ezekiel describes the leaders of Israel as evil shepherds leading the people astray. He anticipates a day, when God as the true shepherd will gather the people of Israel as sheep to care for them. Peter applies the same language to us.

We resemble the sheep that strayed. We decided to depart from the sheepfold of God. Do things our own way. Find our own path in the world. Do what is right in our own eyes. This resulted in misery and lostness.

God as the chief shepherd sought us out so that we can live under his care. He returned us to the sheepfold. He protects us from our enemies. He provides for our needs. He mends our wounds.

Peter also uses the word overseer to describe God. The word overseer describes a person who has authority to supervise people within an organization. In the New Testament, it describes church leaders. God has entrusted authority to these church leaders to care for church members. But God wields the ultimate authority and oversees every believer. This makes him the ultimate boss. There's no one higher on the organizational chart.

This means **we work for our ultimate boss, God before working for our boss**. We need to see our work through the lens of how I conduct my work in a way that pleases God before thinking of how to deal with my difficult boss. If we understand that God ultimately calls the shots, then it enables to do good work whether or boss recognizes it or makes life difficult for us. God saved us to do work for him and represent him in the workplace.

To summarize this morning's message, we first talked about what to do when working for a difficult boss. **Continue doing good work even when your boss is difficult**. We then discussed three reasons for us to do this. First reason. **God cares about your work**. Second reason. **God invites you to trust him**. Third reason. **God saved you to be his worker**.

Let me conclude with a description of Christians suffering while doing good. This description is found in the "Epistle of Diognetus" written by Athenagoras.

The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, not practice any eccentric way of life. ... They pass their lives in

whatever township—Greek or foreign—each man's lot has determined; and conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet, and other habits. Nevertheless, the organization of their community does exhibit some features that are remarkable, and even surprising. For instance, though they are residents at home in their own countries, their behavior there is more like transients. ... Though destiny has placed them here in the flesh, they do not live after the flesh; their days are passed on earth, but their citizenship is above in the heavens. They obey the prescribed laws, but in their own private lives they transcend the laws. They show love to all men—and all men persecute them. They are misunderstood, and condemned; yet by suffering death they are quickened into life. They are poor, yet making many rich; lacking all things, yet having all things in abundance. ... They repay [curses] with blessings, and abuse with courtesy. For the good they do, they suffer stripes as evildoers.

May the Lord help us to continue to work well even when our bosses are difficult.

Let's pray.