

# WORK

## Week 7: Work in Difficult Places<sup>1</sup>

Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah all served in the courts of pagan and notoriously cruel kings. Esther reminds us that believers don't necessarily get to choose their tasks. "We never know when God may appoint us to dangerous but strategic service" (123).

### PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING IN DIFFICULT PLACES

We must always be careful to watch out for self-deception. Sometimes, we will try to justify remain in a corrupt situation not because of calling but for sinful reasons—personal comfort, career success, or financial benefit. Consider these guiding questions:

- Am I serving my King? Promoting justice? Or fitting in and making a living?
- When a conflict arises, do I stand on principle or do whatever it takes to keep my job?
- What motivates me? The opinions of others? Wealth? Love for God and neighbor?
- Do I collaborate with fellow believers to achieve godly goals?

#### Food for Thought:

When have you faced a moral conflict at work? Describe a situation and your response. What did you do right? What might you have done better?

Consider American political parties. What would an Obadiah look like? What would an Elijah look like?

Mike was the Chief Financial Officer of a media corporation dealing primarily in news, magazines, and television. One year, the company acquired a television program whose episodes regularly contained lurid content. The next year, the business bought out a small film company that produced, among other things, pornography. As CFO, Mike didn't deal directly with these aspects of the business, but he wasn't disengaged either. **What should Mike do?**

When our workplaces become morally suspect or corrupt, it puts Christians in a predicament:

- Should we immediately resign?
- Should we remain to bring salt and light into the company?
- Should we stay as long as we aren't personally sinning?

Lisa is a software engineer. She was assigned to a project seeking to make the state lottery more profitable. Lisa sees much potential for growth and opportunity for improvements, but she is also hesitant because she feels like the lottery preys on the poor. She could decline, but then it would simply be assigned to another engineer. **What should Lisa do?**

Complexity at work presents ever evolving moral dilemmas. **Can Christians only work with and for businesses they fully support?**

*"Drawing from Scripture, this [lesson] argues that believers **may** remain in compromised or even corrupt organizations, **if** they can mitigate evil there and **if** they are not required to sin. On the other hand, the godly may also stand outside morally compromised structures and denounce them" (119)*

Consider what consequences would take place if, in order to remain unstained, Christians completely removed themselves from:

- Government
- Media/Publishing
- Manufacturing
- Schools
- Medical Services
- Science/Tech

<sup>1</sup> This study is a distillation of Daniel Doriani's *Work: Its Purpose, Dignity and Transformation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2019). It is meant to be taught in conjunction with the book, not as a replacement.

## BASIC PRINCIPLES AND BOUNDARIES

Either we must all become monks and subsistence farmers living in total seclusion, or we must find a way to remain faithful in morally compromised workplaces with morally compromised people.

There are certain guidelines that should form boundaries within which we can flourish and glorify God:

- Jobs cannot **require** sin—occasionally or often (Rom. 6:11-13)
- Work should **provide** for life's necessities (1 Tim. 5:8)
- Work should **engage** with the world (1 Cor. 5:9-10)
- Christian workers should **look** to the Scriptures for examples of God's people laboring faithfully in hard places

## TO WORK OR NOT TO WORK FOR PHARAOH?

The Pharaohs of Egypt put power-hungry politicians of modern America to shame. They were autocrats, men who claimed to be god and asserted sole ownership of the entire land of Egypt. And yet, Joseph the Israelite willingly worked in the courts of pagan Pharaoh for decades.

**Read Genesis 41:46-49, 53-57; 47:23-26.**

Joseph worked faithfully for the pagan Pharaoh, prospered the Pharaoh's house and storehouses and ended up saving not only his own family but the entire world: "God meant it for good, to bring it about that many should be kept alive as they are today" (Gen. 50:20). **If Joseph could work for Pharaoh, is there anyone we may not work for?**

On the flip side, Moses, a young man who grew up in the same Egyptian courts 400 years later, *refused* to work for the Pharaoh who had been a stepfather to him. **Read Hebrews 11:24-27.**

In contradistinction to Joseph, God used Moses to work for the total destruction of Pharaoh's nation and his house. God also used Moses to save the lives of his people. **What circumstances had changed from the time of Joseph to the time of Moses?**

The contrast between Joseph and Moses show us:

- Believers may or may not work for evil masters
- Circumstances are important
- Different callings may lead two believers to opposite decisions

## TO WORK OR NOT TO WORK FOR AHAB

While Joseph and Moses both dealt with Egyptian Pharaohs, 400 years of change certainly effected their different decisions. **Can believers working for the same fallen boss or company come to different conclusions—one choosing to leave, one to stay—and both be right?**

King Ahab is in the running for the title "Worst King in History." 1 Kings tells us, "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel before him" (1 Kings 16:33). He allowed his wife Jezebel to go on a killing spree against the prophets of the Lord. **Surely no believer could work for Ahab, right?**

- **Read 1 Kings 17:1, 18:17-19.** The prophet Elijah criticized King Ahab's kingdom from outside his courts.
- **Read 1 Kings 18:1-8.** Obadiah is managing the household of the wicked, pagan, idolatrous, murderous Ahab! And yet the Scriptures say, "Now Obadiah feared the Lord greatly..."

We see that God can ask his agents to serve him in contrasting ways:

ELIJAH	OBADIAH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>served God by standing <b>outside</b> the king's court</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>served God by staying <b>within</b> the king's court</i></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i><b>denounced</b> the king's regime from the outside</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i><b>kept silent</b> and organized relief for the prophets from inside</i></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i><b>protested</b> evil</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i><b>restrained</b> evil</i></li></ul>

"Different as they were, Elijah and Obadiah respected the other's role. Obadiah called Elijah "my lord," and Elijah accepted Obadiah as Ahab's manager. Neither criticized the other; neither recruited the other. Each knew what God wanted him to do, and both knew God had *different* work for his brother" (122).

"We can work in corrupt enterprises, *if* we resist compromise, restrain evil, and promote justice" (123).

**Can you think of times Jesus acted like Elijah? Can you think of times when Jesus acted like Obadiah? What steered his decisions?**