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CAPTIVATED SIGNPOSTS

Ephesians 4:8-10 *This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

The imperial conquerors of the great ancient empires like Assyria, Persia, Greece and Rome made it quite clear who had won the battle. They would parade the captured soldiers in a chained procession so that everybody could see the scale of the victory. Then, in order to show the newly subdued city or country that his rule would be of great benefit to them, the victor would give away a part of the booty to the townsfolk, as well as to his own soldiers.

These verses that pick up on [Psalm 68:18](#) show the powerful majesty of God in saving us. He has captivated us with His love, and we have been only too glad to exchange the chains of sin's bondage for the joy of being bound to Christ. Not only does the Lord use His saved people to be recognised by the world and the church, as people who are willingly linked to Him by love - He also gives them to the church as special gifts to be used in His campaign of saving more people in the world.

The Lord Jesus Christ (who is now ascended in heaven) had first descended to earth to die on the cross ... so that the whole universe might recognise that He is the Lord of all. And people around you (in your part of the universe) should come to know how wonderful Jesus is - because of you. He has given you, as a special gift to your family, church, Christian Fellowship, prayer group ... and to your colleagues and workmates. It may seem a bit far fetched that the God of eternity would come to earth so that you might receive His love and then be a broadcast service from heaven - but it is so! So dust off the shabby confidence and recognise that you are not supposed to be the answer to everything, but you are a living signpost to point others to the One who is.

Prayer: *Father God. I do not deserve any of the kindness You have shown to me. And I do not feel worthy to be a part of Your gift to the world. But if You say I am, then help me to overcome my self-obsession and inverted pride. Help me to be glad to be Your gift, and may I glorify you as I live and work and speak and pray, in my workplace. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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LIVING GIFTS

Ephesians 4:11-13 *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

God is no mean investor. In order for His church to grow and multiply - to achieve everything He has planned, He invests heavily in people. Every business manager knows that without the right people in the critical places, failure is inevitable. So God takes some of the people He has saved and gives them the core competences upon which the rest of the church will be constructed.

Apostles are the church planters; prophets speak out God's strategic instructions to the other Christians; evangelists explain the gospel and persuade unbelievers to repent and receive Christ; pastors guide, direct and guard the Christians so that they will be a credit to the Lord; and teachers explain how God wants people to relate with Him and each other. All these functions are essential in the team leadership that God designed for the church. Their objective is to enable the church to grow organically in a coordinated way, so that immaturity gives way to an integrated core of mature people - who, collectively, speak and act like Jesus would.

And, of course it makes a lot of sense. We are where we are, because God has used some or all of those people in our lives at some time or another. But immature Christians think that they can manage ok by themselves: not much need for church, no daily Bible reading, occasional prayer and decision-making by 'best guess'. It is as foolish as thinking that you can grow a business without external advisors (accountants, lawyers, bankers), or that you work to best practice in Health and Safety, VAT and Human Relations without going on courses. Wherever you find people who have these spiritual gifts, honour them and let them minister to you, and encourage others at work to benefit also.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for those whose words and example have led me to You and encouraged me to live well for You. Help me to encourage others at home and work to learn from people like them, who share Your wisdom in churches, books, audio messages and the internet. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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DISASTER WITHOUT THE WORD AT WORK!

Ephesians 4:14 *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - *in English, and Spanish*

The idea of babies being thrown to boiling seas in a gale seems a rather strong illustration. The implication is that the storm winds are created by so-called 'spiritual' teachers who are double-minded (cf [James 1:6](#)), unable to discern what is true and so are toying with every idea available. Others are deliberately and cunningly manipulative. Far from providing godly guidance and truth, that people can use to navigate safely through life, their own confusion stirs their listeners into a whirlpool of instability and insecurity.

Without the ministry of biblically gifted core leaders, Christians will not know what to believe. That will lead to a lack of assurance of salvation which will sap their confidence in this life, and give little real hope of the next: they will become a prey to all kinds of temptation. Some may be spiritually 'mugged' by those whose so-called 'ministry' gives them a platform for their own agenda, without any Divine authority. Without the clarity of Bible truth, even the most sincere and well meaning Christian can be led astray, or simply wander off.

Most of us spend more time in the workplace than anywhere else. That is where we make friendships that either build or destroy us. It is the place where we can be better known than in church, and yet where we can feel more isolated - so that fears can easily grip us, and truth can run in second place to error. But in many ways it is the ideal environment to apply Bible truth to life. That is why church leadership needs to keep a keen eye on the world of work, as well as on its own devotional life. The office prayer group or Bible study can have far more impact than you might imagine. Do you have such a group? If one exists, can you support it more and use the Bible to help and heal, to make wise decisions and godly relationships? If not, why not start one? Without truth in the centre, disaster awaits!

Prayer: *Father God. I need to know Your wisdom each day at work, so that I can live for you rather than fighting against Your way. I know that your love will make for relationships with integrity, and Your truth will give clarity to decisions. Help me to encourage other Christians around me to work at applying Your truth, and learn how to rest in Your grace. Thank you for all the resources (in books, the media and the internet) from spiritually gifted church leaders to help me and my colleagues to honour Jesus. For His glory's sake. Amen.*

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JOINED UP WORKING

Ephesians 4:15-16 *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - *in English, and Spanish*

Dishonest scheming or double-minded instability produce confusion and lead to disaster. It happens in every sphere of life and every style of workplace. However that is strongly contrasted by God's purpose for the church. The motivation God implants is love, and the agent of productivity is truth. Unlike the spin of politics or clever sales talk, the church is designed to grow as people relate with integrity.

Christ's plan is for His people to work together, like the parts of a body; with ligaments of truth (ligaments do not stretch), and muscles powered by love, to make the body function. The purpose is that every part shall play its part in coordinated action controlled by the Head, that is Christ. Growing happens with movement in the young body, and as we serve together, others will want to find our Jesus.

Fellowship with integrity is seen in a shared desire to serve the Lord Jesus. It all starts with true words - the actions follow. Firstly we share what is true in the context of a deep love that seeks to build our companions. Then movement and growth start which snowballs into a far greater and more glorifying result than we might imagine, with our limited individual resources. If all the believers in the same office, factory, school, supermarket or hospital could meet and serve like that ... the impact could be extraordinary. But for those who only know one or two other Christians, don't forget that you already have a quorum! [Matt 18:19-20](#) says that the Lord is present and ready with His truth and power even when a duo or trio meet to pray,

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for Your powerful love which binds true believers and Your powerful truth which helps them to grow and move together. Help me to know how best to link with other Christians at work so that we may grow and move together to serve Your purpose. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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MIRROR BEHAVIOUR

Ephesians 4:17-19 *So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

One of the problems of being with people for long periods of time is that you start to grow like them. As owners can end up looking like their dogs, so students take on the characteristics of their tutors. Employees too are unwitting shadows of their bosses or other workmates. In this passage, the Gentiles are those who have no understanding of God's truth or how to relate to His Lordship. Therefore they are at risk of taking on the characteristics of their spiritual master, Satan (cf [John 8:44-47](#)). Such people, however nice they may appear, cannot see the light of Christ; they are ignorant of truth and live lives separate from God.

Hard heartedness is not just a bullish business nose: it is the automatic resistance of sinful human nature to the authority and rule of God in their lives. It is a spiritual callus which protects their conscience from feeling the pain of wrong living, and so there is little to restrain ungodly indulgence in any sort of impurity. This refers to sexual impurity of course, but also to anything that makes us unclean in the sight of God: dishonest finance, lies of convenience, 'sickness' due to laziness or a late night, arrogance to clients and jealousy of another's promotion. The problem does not just stay there; the spiritual callus is so insensitive to truth that the unsatisfied soul has a hunger to go on being even more impure.

The apostle Paul says that Christians should be radically different. He says that he has the Lord's authority to insist on it! That way of life which is all around us, and wants to mould us into the same shape, must be resisted at all costs. JB Phillips translation of Romans 12:2 says, "*Do not let the world squeeze you into its mould, but instead let yourself be transformed by the renewing of your mind*". This is biggest daily challenge at work. It is fundamental to all we may seek to do in living or speaking for Christ - if we loose this battle we are at risk of loosing all the others. The key is a choice to think about the things that will please God and deny ourselves the luxury of flirting with the devil.

Prayer: *Almighty God. I know that I will live according to how I think and what I desire. Help me to learn to hold Your Word in my mind, and to discuss everything with you in prayer, so that I will not accept the thinking of those around me as being right or normal - and so follow the crowd instead of following Jesus. In His Name. Amen.*

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DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Ephesians 4:20-21 *You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

Jesus is simply so different! He is the complete opposite of the corruption and sleaze of the world, the broken promises and sharp trading. He is righteous and pure, faithful and true. That is why it is not possible to get to know Jesus through the wisdom of the world which, at best, is a pale reflection of Christian ethics, but without the power to keep on doing what is right. Yesterday's reading ([Ephesians 4:17-19](#)) showed the world's way to be in darkness, ignorance, hard-heartedness, with an overdose of misdirected sensuality. The Jesus' way is light, truth, tender-heartedness and self control.

This radical change is experienced by those who come to know the real Jesus. But not to the mystics (who imagine who Jesus might be), nor to the philosophers (who construct a Jesus out of what they would like him to be); but the Jesus of the Bible. It was this straightforward teaching that the Apostle Paul specialised in as he showed how the Old Testament was fulfilled in Christ, in a way that was completely consistent with His life (and death and resurrection) story. True Christian belief is founded only on what the Bible says about Jesus. Despite the vivid imagination of highly paid modern authors, there is no other reliable evidence except in the Bible.

That is why so many religious discussions go round in circles, if Bible truth is not central. Innumerable testimony stories lose their cutting edge when separated from an unveiling of the real Jesus in Scripture. The Christian challenge to the world is not to admire or reduplicate a believer's experience, but to find out the character of Jesus from the Bible. Workplace Christian groups will do well to encourage their presently-unbelieving colleagues to discuss what the Bible actually says. Explaining the truth about Jesus is the key to salvation, wisdom, discipleship, a holy lifestyle and peace with God. It all starts with a decision to do it when the Lord opens the opportunity.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I need Your help to explain, from the Bible, who Jesus Christ is. Help me to read the Bible each day with a view to sharing what it says during the day. And please give me the confidence to believe that You will help me, and when I don't know the answers to questions to admit ignorance and show a willingness to find out. In Jesus Name. Amen.*

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NO SMALL CHANGE

Ephesians 4:22-24 *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

Some mentors fix themselves in our memory. Most people remember the name of their reception class teacher. After that the kind or the cruel are impressed somewhere on our brain, but especially those people who helped our learning leap forward. We recall them, partly by their ability to convey information, but more by their character, their enthusiasm for their subject and their personal interest that we should do extremely well in the subject - because they have personally put everything into it. Paul was that kind of teacher. His life was devoted to pleasing Jesus well, and so it mattered to him that his students excelled too.

Here Paul reminded them of the essential change-process: you cannot live a new life without first renouncing the old. A problem for many Christians is that they try to integrate the two. It never works! The old nature is riddled with corruption and is so easily recontaminated. Given half a chance it will be back to its old ways - which is why it needs to be discarded as definitely as rancid food. This choice is made in the mind, but it has to have the full agreement of the heart: you will follow the decision through only because it is the thing you really want to do.

Compared with the indelibly stained old nature, God's righteous and holy nature is a blast of fresh air. It may even be somewhat overwhelming, at first, to be given His Word and to realise that He intends to fill us with His Holy Spirit so that we can put on a new nature, just like His. Again, this has to be an active choice - fuelled by a desire to be pleasing to God in every way, and determined to do whatever is necessary to ensure that we are. The workplace is a better test-bed for this new nature than most realise. Christians who are wise will not seek worldly approval at work while attracting spiritual admiration at church. We only have one life - the Christian life. So let the office, factory, farm, school, shop or hospital see that you have renounced corruption (in its many forms) and have embraced Jesus Christ.

Prayer: *Father God. My old nature wants to drag me back to living in the darkness, but I want to live in the light with You. Please help me to want this change with all my heart, and to make the right negative and positive decisions with all my mind - so that the whole of my life, including my work-life today, may be an undiluted pleasure to You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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TRUTH - THE GOLD STANDARD CURRENCY FOR RELATIONSHIP

Ephesians 4:25 *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

Long journeys start with little steps, and big companies usually have humble beginnings. The lifestyle change that is needed for new Christians to start following Jesus may seem to be huge (and it is!) but it starts with simple decisions; one by one. In putting off our corrupted old nature, one of the first things to go is lying. Jesus said that lies are the hall-mark of Satan (cf [John 8:44](#)); most of His evil work is done by inserting untruth into our minds. If we believe the lie then we will take all sorts of actions that will defame God, damage us and others ... devilishly cunning - getting us to do his work.

Some people's lying habit is so blatant that you can never trust them. Others are more subtle. But whatever has been our habit in this area, it needs to stop. While we can lie to ourselves and convince ourselves that black is white, most lying is to others. As the working environment is where we often interact with other people, it is an important test-bed of our truthfulness. This verse shows the two sides of the change: stopping the lies, and being open about the truth. Both need a mental resolution to get us going in the right direction, and an occasional personal audit to ensure that we are not slipping back. But the thoughts need to be backed by a heart conviction that it is not only the right thing to do, but we want to do it.

However, Paul suggests that the place to start to put truth at the heart of our relationships is in the church. If we belong to Christ, there is a special reason to be truthful with others in the fellowship. Church should be no place for lies, gossip or half-truths or slander ... and it is utterly shameful when it happens. So the practice of gracious truth will transform the church too! It is the only sensible way to proceed, both for Sundays and workdays. And it is the only way that is endorsed by the Lord, who will also conduct the final audit!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. You are the Truth and I should want to love truth and hate lies. Help me to confirm this desire in my heart, and to implement it as I choose my words in writing and speaking. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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THE UNEXPLODED BOMB

Ephesians 4:26-27 *"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

After lies (see [yesterday's W@W](#)), anger should be next on the Christian's hit list of 'old ways to be dealt with'. Anger is funny stuff. It is not always wrong, because we know that God is angry against sin and rebellion - that was why Jesus came to suffer the punishment of the cross (so that we might be uncoupled from God's wrath). Righteous anger is God's anger. And there are times when Christians can properly be angry against injustice. But our old corrupted nature rarely gets anger on target. The goal posts move rapidly from anger against the offence to hatred against the person ... and that causes problems.

Of course the devil wants to create as many problems as possible. And the overflow from righteous anger suits his purpose splendidly. It instantly turns a rightful concern into an unrighteous vilification, and godliness is overturned. An old surgeon was preparing young doctors for their surgical exams, and he misquoted this verse as, "Let not the sun go down upon un-drained pus". He wanted to impress the point that sepsis (particularly in the pre-antibiotic era) was potentially fatal if left unattended overnight. In the same way, (changing the metaphor), anger allowed to fester can be as dangerous as an unexploded bomb in the back garden.

Most of us like to think we are reasonable and tolerant. But the stress of pressurised business or professional life can bring out the worst in us. That is why it is well worth while to think ahead. Anger that seeps into the night is neither objective nor righteous. There may well be an issue to deal with - so deal with it. Or there may be an injustice to forgive - so do it. It may be that the injustice continues and it is not in your hands to punish or vindicate - leave that to God (cf [Romans 12:29-31](#)). The family, church and working environments give plenty of scope to put all this into practice - before bedtime!

Prayer: *Merciful Father. Thank You that Jesus has relieved me of having to face Your wrath on the final Day. Help me to know how to deal with the sinfulness in others and the injustice which that causes. Help me to know how to deal with my angry responses so that Satan will not win another battle. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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WELL HONESTLY!

Ephesians 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

After lies and anger ([see the last two W@W](#)), theft is the next issue for the chop. The implication of this verse is that theft might even appear to have a genuine motive - no employment, no money, no food or shelter; and so theft is legitimised. But God sees it differently. The solution is to find work or do something so that you can trade for a fair reward. Despite the millions choosing only white collar jobs, there is no shame in manual work ... and the Apostle commends it.

Despite his great intellect and university background, Paul chose to be a tentmaker in order to support his own missionary service. Indeed, tentmaker Paul refused the usual honorarium for his 'religious' lectures, and did not even accept gifts from the churches that he founded and served. The pattern he preached, he practiced. However hard these words fall on the ears of the unemployed, they have wisdom. If you can work, then accepting social benefits is stealing from the state. If you cannot get a job, and cannot afford to buy goods to sell (or do not understand the necessary business dynamics), you can sell a service. Cleaning houses/offices, gardening and washing cars is better than stealing.

Of course, there is more to work's reward than feeding and amusing yourself, and the family. What we earn is to be spent, yes, but also to be given away. The Old Testament principle of tithing was designed to teach that all we have is not all for ourselves - 10% of earnings were to go back to the Lord. We give to Him as we meet the needs that He wants to satisfy in others. So stealing and giving are at opposite ends of the spectrum, with work in the middle. Strangely, more stealing happens in the workplace than many recognise. The employers goods are treated as perks, and time is taken without responsibility. Expenses may be more 'personal' than 'business', travel can be unnecessarily luxurious, and tax-avoidance can merge into tax-evasion. Perhaps it is time to audit this area of life.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. In a busy world where pragmatic decisions trail behind me unremembered, help me to be conscious of my responsibility to work and to give so that You may be glorified and others will not be in need. Help me to be hungry for honesty in every part of life. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

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MOUTH WASH

Ephesians 4:29 *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - *in English, and Spanish*

This week we have read that it is only possible to live a new life in Christ, when the habits of the old life have been repudiated. Lies, and anger and stealing have to go. Today, 'unwholesome talk' is in the firing line. Although this kind of communication can be true, and not sound angry; it does no good. This includes gossip, flattery, spreading rumours, as well as the sniping and complaining that are all too prevalent in public services or large corporations. So too is the double-entendre, the sleazy innuendo or inappropriate personal comment.

'Unwholesome' is by definition, harmful. It does not build up or edify, instead it tears down trust and reputation and goodwill. Like all Satan's plots, it appears morally neutral but is actually damaging. It is usually destructive to good relationships, and it always harms the perpetrator's moral integrity. The fact that we hear it all around us - to the point that it becomes 'normal' does not mean that it is ok (although that is what we are tempted to think). No, the Christian is called to be different, and interestingly, the world expects the believer to reject that talk-style.

New life in Christ also means a new way of speaking: not a more polished accent, but speech that comes from a heart of love for Jesus. He never used any unwholesome talk; instead, He spoke the truth in love, always. Anything different has an evil origin (cf [Matt 5:37](#)). As Jesus was keen to communicate truth that would build up people, so should we. And there is a lot of building to do. Feeding people's minds with truth, expressed from a loving heart will do wonders for the church and your mini-community at work. They may not receive the gospel immediately, but many will welcome a cheerful person who is wanting the best for others and only says what is true and does what is kind. That sort of kindness is also an essential 'appetiser' to the gospel meal you may want to serve later. But in any case, it is the right way to speak and God notices, with pleasure.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Help me to say what is true with wisdom and kindness, and to reject the way of the world which drags life down to a level that cannot build them up, or glorify You. First put a new desire into my heart for loving and truthful speech, and then teach me how to effect this change in my talk-style. In Jesus Name. Amen.*

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GIVING GRIEF

Ephesians 4:30 *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - *in English, and Spanish*

There is a, sort of, unwritten rule in most business that says: you are not supposed to be hurt or upset by anything that your boss or employees do or say. If it exists, it is a silly rule because we do get bothered by poor interpersonal relationships. So much so, that the bad feelings can easily dominate, not only our work, but also our whole outlook. That is real life, however much we cover it up. Sin destroys relationship and how we function depends on how we relate with others.

It is the same with the Holy Spirit. He has been given to every believer but, as a real person, He is grieved when we flout God's commands and ignore His guidance. God has feelings too. He loves us, hates evil, is jealous over what belongs to Him and compassionate to those who are in need. Christians accept all those gracious characteristics of God. So why do we think that we can do what we like, resent the Holy Spirit's presence, spurn His help and disregard His safety warnings - and He will somehow grin and cope with us. No! He is really sad. His grief is like ours at the break up of a long term relationship ... only worse. It is as though the angels whisper, "How could they treat Him like that!".

Such behaviour is even more shameful when we realise all that the Holy Spirit has done for us. It was He who convicted us of sin, convinced us of the truth of the gospel, brought us to new life in Christ and sealed us as belonging to God's family by coming into our hearts. He speaks God's truth to us through the Bible and is powerfully effective in all parts of our Christian life, from worship to work. All the wrong behaviour that Paul has urged us to 'put off' in this chapter (cf [Eph 4:24-29](#)), not only damages us and hurts others, it hurts the Holy Spirit too. So perhaps it might help if we think of Him being at every meeting, hearing every conversation, scanning every email and even knowing our thoughts before we speak. Because He is there 24/7 and wants to be a valued part of your working day - anything less will grieve Him and make you dysfunctional!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I have not recently thought how I must hurt Your Holy Spirit, when I disobey You and take my own advice without reference to You. Please forgive me. Help me to value Your presence with me by including You in each decision and following Your wise instructions in the Bible. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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ALL MOUTH

Ephesians 4:31-32 *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - *in English, and Spanish*

It is not the loudness of shouting that makes verbal abuse unacceptable in the workplace, but its extraordinary capacity to disable. The old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me", is rubbish. Words are divinely designed to have a powerful effect. For example: God spoke into nothing and the universe came into being. Confession mixed with faith in Christ brings forgiveness, and words of blessing are honoured by God; likewise words of cursing are not just psychologically inconvenient - they allow evil to operate.

So the catalogue of spoken violence, in these verses, is clearly put out of order for Christians, in the church or wherever. Yet the apostle's command indicates that Christians were indulging in these habits. However common they were in their society, they had to be eliminated from the believers' mouth-style. Malicious speech needed to be replaced, not just by nice talk; a whole new attitude was needed. The mouth simply reveals what is in the heart (cf [Matt 15:19](#)). So to eliminate the hateful talk needs a revolution of the heart. And the starting point is a reminder that God has not treated you like that.

We cannot put a veneer of compassion and forgiveness over a malicious heart, at least, not with any degree of integrity. Our minds need to engage with the need to put others before ourselves, as Christ did for us. Then, practice this new attitude with others in your local church. After that, you are ready to go to work! Understanding what needs to be discarded (and why), you can start to live the transformed mouth-style which will be so appreciated wherever you work. And people will notice the positive difference. When they comment about the change, you can tell them the story: some will want to join you.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You for the changes You have already helped me to make in my life. Where my mouth does not fit with Your heart, please give me the insight and determination to make the necessary changes. For Your glory's sake. Amen.*

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SINCERE IMITATION

Ephesians 5:1-2 *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

Inevitably, the people you admire, you imitate. This can be bad or good, depending on their character. Those who love God should want to be like Him (and indeed, one day we shall be! cf [1 John 3:2](#)). God is love, but despite much Christian talk about love, many saints seem to miss the mark. Love is sacrificial-giving to build up someone else, and meet their real needs. That was what Jesus did for us.

With His Spirit in us, we ought to be living His lifestyle. But often we are more influenced by those around us who seem to be pushing on in business or winning approval at work - and we can copy their style, which can be far from loving or sacrificial. That is why we need this reminder from Paul. He says that sacrificial love is like fine incense to God - attractive and desirable (by contrast with the stench of corruption that pervades the world). And it is God's opinion that matters most. We belong to Him, so what we do affects His reputation, and our reward.

There is no better start to the working day than to spend a little time alone with the Lord. Those minutes will help us to recalibrate our lives, remembering who we are in Christ, and what He demands of us. Arrange to meet another Christian for prayer and study on a regular basis, and you will be surprised how your working environment leaps from the routine monochrome into 3D colour. The interesting thing is that when God is pleased, others find pleasure in you as well (cf [Proverbs 16:7](#)). And that cannot be a bad thing in your workplace today!

Prayer: *Dear Father God. Thank you that in Jesus, I have the very best role model. Help me to desire to be like Him, and then help me to develop a Godly character - so that You will be glorified and others will be glad. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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RAISING THE BAR

Ephesians 5:3 *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

Joshua Harris' book, "Not even a hint", has been admired for its boldness in promoting sexual purity. Its tack is unusual (even among Christian books) in dismissing any thought of 'making allowance for human failings'. Of course, the secular world no longer expects absolute standards, and cheerfully separates 'private life' from the responsibilities of public office. Although the press still makes sport of personal immorality among our celebrities and politicians, there is little expectation that people will be hounded out of office unless they have also scored exceptionally badly against their performance targets.

But it is God who sets the performance targets for Christians. 100% is the acceptable pass mark and anything less is not a proper standard. Interestingly, greed is tarred with the same brush as sexual immorality. The principle is the same: greed and immorality both say that what God has provided is not enough. This strikes against the heart of God Himself. To say that His provision is not enough, casts doubt on His knowledge of our needs, or on His wisdom in giving or withholding particular benefits at a particular time, or on His ability to provide for us in power.

Wherever God's people are found (at home, in church or at work), they are designed to be holy, and to be content that if God thought that He should provide anything more or better - he would. In this sin-weary world, we are certainly not back in the Garden of Eden but Satan still launches the same attacks as he did in [Genesis ch3](#). He wants us to doubt God's Word (cf [Gen 3:1](#)), God's authority (cf [Gen 3:4](#)) and God's provision (cf [Gen 3:5](#)). It is those doubts that cause idol-like addictions to all kinds of off-limits activity. The office party does not have a bawdy image without good reason. So this Bible passage may be especially helpful as the Christmas festivities get under way.

Prayer: *Father God. I recognise that while I can never be fully satisfied by this world, You generously and sufficiently provide for all my needs. Help me to develop a thankful heart for what You have provided, instead of a lust for the greener grass that is on the other side of the fence. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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TALK OF THE TOWN

Ephesians 5:4 *Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

Yesterday, we read that sexual immorality and greed were totally off-limits for Christians. They are both complaints against God, effectively saying that that He has not provided properly for us; that we are better off getting what we want for ourselves. Put like that, such behaviour seems rather selfish - which it is. Adding to the list of self-centredness is today's catalogue of verbal evil. 'Obscenity' really means speaking wrongly without any shame; 'foolish talk' means stupid words, and coarse joking means exactly what it says.

All this can be found in the staff-room, the coffee lounge, the bar and canteen; it can be heard at the 'corporate-social' and in team-bonding encounters. It is not just 'lads being lads' because the mouth-style is neither gender nor age specific. It cannot be defended by, "I didn't mean it", because it was intentional. And it is not confined to the shop floor because it can also be heard from the lips of artists, professionals, business executives, traders, and artisans; from those in public office and private businesses. It may be blatant or it might be sanitised or cleverly inserted into conversation. Whatever and however it is uttered, it should not be - if you are a Christian!

The only antidote to the selfish mouth starts with a revolution of thankfulness in the heart. When we shift the focus from making ourselves look big, to realising how big and kind and generous and loving God has been to us, thankfulness should start to creep in. And the more thankful we are, the less we will want to indulge in silly talk: apart from anything else, we will start to feel shame because we will remember that the Lord is listening too. So don't get sucked into the style of conversation around you - just tell people how kind the Lord has been to you ... it may start a revolution in their thinking too.

Prayer: *Dear Father God. I needed this reminder of Your true greatness and my rather puny attempts to make myself look big as I open my mouth. Help me to keep recalling the vastness of Your mercy, even forgiving my foolish talking, and the hugeness of Your grace providing me with everything I need to live in peace with you. And help me to let others know that I really am grateful to You too. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

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ALL CHANGE

Ephesians 5:5 *For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

Wrong desires, thoughts and speech are not a benign cultural difference, like a regional accent; they reveal a heart that is set against God being at the centre. They are not only an expression of self-assertion against the sufficiency of God's provision they practically defy the rule of God, and give that right away to another. The Bible name for an idea, thing or person that takes God's place is an 'idol'.

The Old Testament is full of examples of God's wrath against idols and those who worship them (cf [Ps 135:15-18](#)). In the West, most of our idols are found in the greedy lust for people or possessions - rather than in ritual worship of natural things (paganism) or false deities, or false ideas about God. But whatever the flavour of false worship, this verse tells us that those who indulge in it have no place in God's Kingdom. It is as stark as it is serious. This may not sit well with the compromising tolerance of our day, that values personal happiness more highly than letting God rule; but it is essential information if the nice pagan or sincere sinner is to be saved. If they were really as acceptable to God, there would be no need for them to be told the Gospel or urged to obey its call to repentance.

However this verse is directed first to the Christians. It was a warning for those who have believed in Christ not to be seduced back into old ways. It remains essential advice for new Christians who might have thought that they could merge their old life style with the new - they must not, nor can we. That is why we have to keep close to the Lord. It is also good to have other believers around at work, with whom you can pray regularly and who can call you to account. The work environment is now used to Eastern faiths expecting a room to be made available for prayer, so why not ask the management for somewhere where Christians can meet to pray?!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for this reminder that I cannot live a split life, and that I must discard those attitudes, thoughts, words and actions which cut across Your right to rule in my life. Help me to find other believers to hold me accountable, and to encourage them also - especially those who are new in the faith or who are struggling with old habits. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

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EMPTY WORDS

Ephesians 5:6 *Let no-one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

Words can be cheap, but then you usually get what you pay for. The value of a word is its ability to convey an idea that is reliable. The old business saying, "My word is my bond" ("dictum meum pactum" in Latin) became the motto of the London Stock exchange in 1801. It was a style of trading that relied only on the word of the trader, without any exchange of documents. However recent episodes of dishonest dealing, worldwide, have shown some brokers' words to be empty and of no value at all.

Empty words do not present truth, only selfish convenience. They do not belong to the Kingdom of Heaven because although they may ooze confidence and the promise of a good profit, they will eventually always fail. However they are brilliant at setting up a brochure full of deception to lure the unwary. This is not just sharp business practice; it has the fire-impregnated stench of hell about it. All empty words, or 'lies' as we call them, are encouraged by Satan, they are the trade marks of his demons who use them to seduce those who deny the rule of Christ in their lives.

Needless to say, God does not deal in empty words: "I never knew you. Away from me, you evil-doers" ([Matt 7:23](#)), are full of meaning and will unleash God's wrath on those who fail to obey His 'full words'. 'Empty words are cunning substitutes that have a built-in trap to ensnare the spiritually gullible, and drag them down to the same fate as Satan himself. Clearly, the counter offensive is to obey the Word of God. This devotional may even save your integrity today, if you take note and do something about it. That is why we cannot just be Sunday Christians, we must put the Word into practice at work, or face the consequences that come to empty words.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank you for this reminder that my word must be my bond, because Your Word always is. Help me to practice integrity by obeying Your Word, so that my colleagues and competitors may come to rely on mine, and that I will not be ashamed before You, nor lead others astray. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

Ephesians 5:7 *Therefore do not be partners with them. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

The credit crunch of 2008 will long be remembered. Her Majesty The Queen, on a visit to the London School of Economics, asked a professor, "Why did nobody see it coming?" His response was sadly fascinating, "At every stage, somebody was relying on somebody else; and everybody thought they were doing the right thing". That just shows how partnerships can go horribly wrong. In business, as in every other part of life, you can only work with people you trust. But, on what grounds is that trust established? A good history of satisfactory trading, personable people who create a good impression or the least worst of the available options ... none of these can guarantee the integrity of a future partnership.

Wrong strategic alliances were the downfall of Israel in the Old Testament. They were also the banana skin for the early church believers. Paul's warning to resist the lure of pragmatic business alliances is repeated in [2 Cor 6:14-18](#) where partnership is presented as the yoking of two oxen: if they are pulling in different directions, not only will the plough go off course but the animals will suffer extreme chaffing under the ropes that bind them to the yoke. This unequal yoke can be as painful and disruptive in a marriage as it is in business.

Now, Jesus did not want us to be taken out of the world, but to be protected from the Evil One ([John 17:15](#)). So we need to be very careful who we commit ourselves to. It is personal character, rather than academic brilliance or slick trading skills, which give the clue. In this chapter, the Christian is warned away from those whose lifestyle is immoral, impure, greedy, obscene, foolish or coarse. Such people are already under God's wrath, and so, to trust yourself to them is like standing under a tree in a thunderstorm. So when choosing people is your responsibility - choose by God's standards.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank you for this practical advice to managers and team leaders, and all of us who choose who we will do business with. Help us to be wise according to your Word. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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PRACTICING THE TRUTH

Ephesians 5:8-10 *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. (NIV)*

You can read the verses around this Bible passage from the [Internet Bible](#): - in English, and Spanish

The Bible's challenge, to think and behave differently from the secular world around us, has a reason. Once we have met the Light of the World, and repented of all our dark ways, we no longer belong to the kingdom ruled by the Prince of demons. We have a different master, a different life to live and a different destiny to reach. So to imitate the behaviour of those in the kingdom from which we have escaped makes no sense at all. To indulge ourselves with the perverse things that temporarily boost their ego, is bizarre, when we have been saved from their authority.

The light that is shone by Jesus and recorded in the Bible reveals what is true, and enables us to live without stumbling about in a blind way. As we live in the light, so we develop a character full of goodness, righteousness and truth. But how will that be seen? Well, most of our waking hours are also working hours. So the workplace is the primary site for demonstrating the transformation which Jesus has made in our lives. Where better to be a witness for Christ? Most of us encounter more people who do not know Jesus, at work, than at any other time.

Many Christians are looking for guidance. Sometimes we think that there will be special signs placed in obscure places, which only clever Christians can find. In fact, 'finding out what pleases the Lord' is: the daily encounter of doing what He says, living the new life He has brought us into, and practicing the practical disciplines that we have already read about in this chapter. The Lord will then give fresh guidance to those who have shown their eagerness in doing what they have already learned. Put like that, guidance is as simple as obeying what you know and trusting that when you have done it, the Lord will show the next step.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father. Thank You for Your Word which illuminates each day. Help me to keep walking in its light, and practicing the truth You have already shown me, in the workplace as well as at home and church. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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