

NO SHADOW OF DOUBT

Ephesians 5:11-12 *Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. (NIV)*

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

The Apostle has been quite straight about the sort of behaviour that is off-limits for Christians. It may jar with the tolerant age in which we live, but 'living in the light' will always be a peculiar lifestyle to those who don't love Jesus. The 'deeds of darkness' are described as being 'fruitless' - they have no ability to produce the good things that God desires of us. Spiritual bareness produces nothing. Christian fellowship is a special relationship in which we can call each other to account: and this is one of the reasons why the office CU or the works prayer meeting is so important. If one goes off track, the others (in a spirit of gentleness, cf [Gal 6:1](#)) should be there to help him or her be restored to fellowship and fruitfulness.

Gossip is not caused by a loose tongue: it is fermented in a malignant heart. The coffee room conversation that starts with, "Have you heard ...?" is the beginning of a reputation ruined or a friendship shattered. Discussion of 'after the office party' is hardly ever profitable, and best left unsaid. People will go wrong and mess up, but to perpetuate a moral superiority over them is hypocritical, and to recommend their behaviour as normal or exciting is perverse. If anything has to be said it needs to be done with a heart full of love, because love covers over a multitude of sins (cf [1 Pet 4:8](#)).

The problem with the mixed motives that so easily spoil our lives is that we can find a way to justify joining in on the edge of dark things. Yet when darkness overtakes another believer, an ugly censorious spirit rises up to blame and defame. The cure for all this is to keep a keen eye on one's own heart. Start off by deciding not to speak about wicking things, look at wrong images, go to ungodly places or to keep serious company with those who will do their best to pull you into their muddy swamp. The office party is a great place to practice this, and even though you may be ridiculed at not joining in with their darkened plans (cf [1 Pet 4:4](#)), they will eventually recognise that you were right before God (cf [1 Pet 2:12](#)) and be grateful that you were different.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Please help me to see the darkness around me for what it is, unfruitful and destructive. Help me to keep walking in the light and resist being drawn into the shadows, so that my colleagues may see the integrity that comes from Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Help me today and this month to be a good advertisement for You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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WAKE UP!

Ephesians 5:13-14 *But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (NIV)*

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

It is not uncommon for a teacher to alert a child with the need to 'wake up'. Although some pupils may be physically asleep, the meaning is a clear warning to day dreamers that a disaster is round the corner unless action is taken, and soon. This quote, about the sleeper needing to wake up, has echoes of [Isaiah 26:19](#); [51:17](#); [52:1](#); [60:1](#), but none of them have the full text quoted. So, it might be a baptismal exhortation or an early Christian hymn. Whichever, the meaning is clear: the Christian who is sleepwalking in sin needs to wake up and walk in the light.

'The light' is a Bible metaphor for the truth that comes from God through Jesus, and is contained in the Scripture. To ignore that truth, or to assume it does not apply to you, is deadly. By contrast, to wake up to truth is to come alive to the Lord. The wider we open the eyes of our hearts, the more we will see - because the light of Christ will illuminate everything. We will be able to see how stupidly unproductive is our sinful ('dead') behaviour; and we will be able to appreciate the privilege of walking in fellowship with the Lord again.

Alas, it is not uncommon for the apparently 'spiritual' Sunday-Christian to become just like the spiritually dead around them at work on Monday. All the traps that are laid for the Christians are intended to neutralise the Jesus-difference in our lives. Here are some of them: the pressure to conform, the relative absence of believers to hold us to account, the regular temptations to dishonesty and impurity, and the gossipy or blasphemous language style. Away from home and away from church, we can be tempted into thinking that nobody notices. But they do! God is disappointed and the devil is thrilled when we sleep walk into compromising our integrity, holiness and heavenly reward. So, if the cap fits - wear it; and wake up today. Ask the Lord to reveal to you a truth you need to obey; and then ask Him to help you to change direction so that you are walking towards heaven with the freedom that comes from forgiveness and the confidence that comes from God's pleasure.

Prayer: *Father God. Please show me if I am spiritually asleep, and have been unresponsive to your commands, while allowing ungodliness to creep into my lifestyle at work. Please help me to wake up to my responsibility to be Your child and servant all the time, especially at work. For Jesus' sake. Amen.*

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MIND THE STEP

Ephesians 5:15-16 *Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (NIV)*

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

Small children underestimate danger. So do naïve adults. The expression, "take care" is often an affectionate parting expression; knowing that problems may exist but not really expecting any to come too close. But in war time, when the hazards are all too obvious, "take care" can become a final farewell. Although treacherous, the battlefield experience is not just about survival, it is primarily about winning the war, and then establishing the peace. The same is true for the Christian. We are up against the forces of Satan who operates by deceiving the world with his lies: yet we are also involved in 'truthing' the deceived and winning them for Christ. It will be dangerous and there will be casualties, but locking ourselves away in an exclusive fellowship (a sort of sanctified bunker) is not our Commander's purpose.

This instruction to 'be careful' begins Paul's summing-up of his teaching about how to live as a Christian in a spiritual war-zone. The dangers he has referred to are not primary demonic encounters (although [Eph 4:27](#) is clear that the devil is looking to gain a foothold in Christian lives); danger lies in the darkness of a world without God and in the lies that seduce the believer into the shadows. He wants us to be wise and not naïvely trapped, but also to seize the opportunities for the Kingdom of God. Indeed, those, who look keenly for an opening to declare the gospel and want to glorify the Lord, will find that they will be less easily drawn into the evil around them.

Our commission is clear - to live as the children and ambassadors of the king (cf [2 Cor 5:20](#)). Therefore we should not live with an agenda of seeking personal pleasure or self-promotion. It should be no surprise that this commission is to be lived out in our waking hours, which are mostly in our work time! In some organisations it is said that you need to 'tread carefully'. These verses, in the Greek, start by saying, "Look carefully how you walk ...". Let us remember that God's interests are at stake as we do our work today: what we say should reflect the policy of heaven, and what we do should act out the love of God. Anything less and it is His image that slips with our colleagues - as well as our own.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I know that I should live as Your ambassador, so thank You for this reminder. Now please help me to be alert to the spiritual dangers that will subvert my heart and neutralise my witness at work today. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

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A CLEAR HEAD

Ephesians 5:17-18 *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. (NIV)*

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

New Year is celebrated around the world. In many places, homes as well as clubs, cities and beaches, all seem to be alive with excitement. Much of this is fuelled by alcohol and the party atmosphere accelerated by fireworks at midnight. But apart from the incessant movement of the clock, nothing has changed. Nothing, except a reduced ability to work for the next few days and a sense that things ought to be better in the New Year; but they probably won't be. So much expense and party energy burnt off into the night, and yet the cold light of the next few days brings the realism that nothing has changed.

That is one definition of foolishness, the expenditure of time, money and energy for no lasting purpose or even the pleasure of clear memories. That is the inevitable result of not understanding the Lord's will (which always has an eternal purpose in view). To live within a framework of passing pleasure and pointless activity is to ignore the God who wants to include us in His plans for the world and heaven to come. It is to ignore that we have been bought at great cost, and therefore have an obligation to serve our Master.

His remedy is to fill repentant sinners with His Holy Spirit, so that they may understand that they have been saved for a purpose. That purpose does not include systematic personality damage as they live for sensual thrill, but rather to please our Saviour and store up treasure in heaven. As has often been noted, the end of this verse really says, "Go on being filled with the Spirit"! Is that what you want? A perpetual thirst for the person of God in your life will be rewarded by Him - filling your understanding with truth, your heart with passion to do what is right and motivating your body to serve Him wholeheartedly. It is more of the Lord that we need this year, so that we can take our proper place in His heavenly business.

Prayer: *Dear Lord God, I need your presence with me and in me - more than anyone or anything else this year. Help me to be hungry for you every day and please fill me with your Holy Spirit today and every day - so that I can work with you, understanding your purpose for my life. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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EXPRESSING CONFIDENCE

Ephesians 5:19-20 *Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)*

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

The opposite to the foolishness that Paul has just written about (cf [Eph 5:15-18](#)) is the wisdom of honouring the Lord. Of, course, we need the help of the Holy Spirit to do so, but if we are filled with the Spirit (cf [Eph 5:18](#)) then we should be wanting to overflow with verbal praise of all the good things the Lord has done for us. The first place to do that is with another Christian, in the family, at church or at work. Have you ever considered how much of your conversation time with other believers is focussed on the Lord and all His goodness?

The Bible provides us with so many examples of praise; we could do well by using some in our conversation. They might be the focus of a Bible devotional when meeting a fellow Christian at work for a few minutes to pray. Christian songs based on Bible truth can also be very helpful, in the car or to (quietly!) fill the mind when doing repetitive work. Many people find that a song can keep truth close to their heart during the day. Some workplace Christian Fellowships find that singing is difficult; so it is good to stock up heart with praise prompts through recorded music and Christian radio.

One we start to get praise coming out of our mouths, we cannot stay in whining or moaning mode for long - your colleagues will certainly appreciate the change! So will God!! Whatever the difficulties at work, our God is still supreme and as we praise Him for that fact, we can also ask in faith that He will make a path through whatever sea of confusion we face. A heart that is singing God's praise knows that there is nothing He has not allowed for our good, and so we can give thanks that God is at work in it all. It is a great way to start a new year, new week, new day, new job, new prayer.

Prayer: *Father God. How I thank You for all You have done for me in Christ and in my circumstances. Thank you for music and song that can help me to remember important truth from Your Word. Help me to be thankful to you for everything so that I can be glad, this week, that you are in control. To the praise of Your Name. Amen.*

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TEAMWORK

Ephesians 5:21 *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (NIV)*

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

Western business practice may have travelled a long way from the days of bosses being segregated from the workers; but however flat the management model, there are some people who are on top of the pile, and others inevitably underneath. It may have nothing to do with the organisational style, and is usually more about the personalities who will not submit to others. Paradoxically, the job may actually get done better and faster with clear direction (as long as everybody is happy to accept it). Some people are natural leaders and others work best when they follow others. But at the end of the task, the thing that holds any military unit or professional practice together (and makes everybody eager for the next assignment), is harmony in relationships.

As in any football or rugby game: every marriage, family and church are intended to operate as a team. Even the celebrity striker will choose to give way to the goalie, and the fly half steps aside for prop forwards. The most zealous manager on the bench has to give the operational 'say so' to the captain on the pitch. These are highly disciplined people, but they know how to submit to each other. That is the secret of a godly marriage and sanctified church. It is not the bullying deacon or outrageous husband who sets the team for consistent success but those who are willing to place themselves and their gifting at the disposal of the others in the church or family; recognising that others have their special place too.

This verse is the curtain raiser for Paul's discussion about marriage and the church, and will be followed by instructions for child rearing and employment relationships too. Its principle of putting self in second place was first violated in the Garden of Eden by Eve and Adam, and then by Cain when he murdered Abel. But it was Jesus who demonstrated that He would submit to the Father's will (and to the needs of sinful human beings), and urged His disciples to do the same. Strangely, the place where the submissive heart is most easily seen is at work, in willing and cheerful submissive teamwork: but the place where it has to count is in the home. However, the marriage that works under the 'Jesus rules' of mutual submission, will also bring enrichment to any workplace.

Prayer: *Dear Lord Jesus. Thank You for being willing to submit Yourself to the Father's will and my deep need of salvation. Help me to learn how to submit to others around me at home and church and work, and so demonstrate the love that You have for me. For Your Name's sake, Amen.*

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CARRYING THE CAN

Ephesians 5:22-24 *Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. (NIV)*

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

Mutual submission is the 'Jesus-rule' for harmonious living - we unpacked that yesterday. Paul now examines the principle in the areas of marriage, family and work. Firstly: marriage. Although submission is now considered almost to be a form of abuse, it simply means 'to place yourself' under the authority of another. In other words, the buck has to stop somewhere, and all those who are grateful it does not stop with them, submit to that person's authority! That does not mean the person is always right, cleverer or supernaturally wise, it just means that the responsibility cannot be off loaded onto anyone else. And we know what that means in the workplace.

In God's design for marriage, the Bible says that it is the husband who has to take the final responsibility. That is not to say that the wife may not be sharper witted, a better multi-tasker, better at DIY and more competent to understand the emotional needs of the children - often all that is true. But what it does say is that there is an inescapable responsibility upon the husband (who will certainly also need all the advice that his wife offers) and in the end, he has to 'carry the can'. Properly done, this relieves the wife of the burden of ultimate liability and allows her freedom to exercise wisdom in the many areas of her life, including the home and work environments.

This principle is not arbitrary. It is all based on the way that Jesus Christ loves the church (all of us who believe in Him). His love was one of total commitment, in self-sacrificial giving of Himself to meet our needs. That is the pattern for husbands! As we submit to Christ, so we benefit from all His self-giving love ... if we refuse to submit then we lose out on so much that He would freely give to us. This is no small challenge, but the prize is huge - not least in the formation of a relationship that will stand for eternity. It is the same in marriage except that we only have to weather the storms of time. It may not sound PC but the way that Jesus Christ loved the world was totally unique in His time, and not matched since. It was an amazingly effective love too. So Christians have the very best example as they steer their way through marriage - and we have His promise that He is with us always, to help us to do it.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank you so much for your amazingly self-sacrificial love for us, and for taking the ultimate responsibility for the burden of our sins. Help me to understand how you have designed marriage so that I can encourage Christians to follow your example, by being an example myself. To Your praise and glory. Amen.*

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LOVING TO GIVE EVERYTHING

Ephesians 5:25-27 *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (NIV)*

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

There is no doubt that most husbands would like their wives to radiate loveliness. But how does that happen? The way in which Jesus Christ has treated us flawed and corrupted human beings is also God's pattern for marriage. Without Christ we would have no freedom from guilt on earth, nor any legitimate hope of heaven; nothing desirable about us at all. What Jesus has done for us is to set out His promises, in His Word, of forgiveness and restoration to relationship with Him; and He is fulfilling them as we trust in Him. As we know, the cost to him of doing so was to lay down His life.

That is how God intends that husbands should love their wives! In the same way that Christ's actions were governed by a very deep desire to see us released from all that would keep us away from being all that He intends us to be ... so Christian husbands should be motivated by a desire to see their wives fulfilled, whatever that may cost the husband. This instantly transfers marriage from the world of mutual taking to mutual giving, with the husband having the default responsibility of giving most.

That is not how either Christianity or marriage is presented in the media. The idea of giving until it hurts and then still giving; seems ludicrous. But when we start to get to know our Saviour, and realise the depths to which He has stooped for us, He starts to make an impression on our value system - so that we want to give and to help and to love in such a way that we are willing to give ourselves up for others. It is the gospel principle that works through our hearts in the home and will inevitably start to show in the workplace too. Willing endurance and patient kindness do not grow on trees; they are fruits of the Spirit of God who wants to make us more like Jesus. And when that happens, everybody notices!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for Your supreme sacrifice for me, to enable me to grow like you. Help me to practice Your self-giving character in my home, so that the difference will be evident everywhere. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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INDIVISIBLE UNITY

Ephesians 5:28-30 *In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no-one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church - for we are members of his body. (NIV)*

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

Individualism has been one of the cultural curses of the so-called civilised West. Of course, personal responsibility is an essential part of any relationship, especially with God, and this has encouraged both the entrepreneur and the maverick explorer (and also the pioneer missionary). But the idea that we are self sufficient to do it all on our own is false. It cannot work that way in any community or marriage.

Alas too many marriages, and Christian ones at that, have little to say about community, wholeness or organic unity. There may be mutually beneficial 'facilities sharing' but 'oneness' may not really happen. That is why we need to look at the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ considers his relationship with the Church. Astonishing as it may seem, He considers us, not just an extension of His mission, but a part of His body. We do not just 'belong' to him but we are incorporated into Him: just like a failing company that has been taken over by a global name. It is in His interests to ensure that all we need is provided for and that He does everything to encourage our devotion and love.

So it should be in marriage. The husband not only 'carries the can' but is responsible for the well-being of his wife, in the same way that he may provide for his own needs. The two are one. Likewise the Christian is indivisible from Christ. But why is this comment addressed to those in the workplace? Firstly because we are examining every verse of this letter (!); but significantly because many marriages are unwittingly ruined at work. Whatever your loyalty to your boss, you are (probably) not married to him/her. When cold economic winds blow to breathe fear of redundancy, and unpaid overtime becomes the unwritten rule - never forget those solemn vows to your spouse. At the end of your job, has your marriage grown or shrunk to fit the cracks that work has left behind?

Prayer: *Father God. Thank you for the gift of marriage. Please help all my colleagues and me to keep a right perspective on all our responsibilities, especially our marriages. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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THE COMMITMENT TO COMMITMENT

Ephesians 5:31-33 *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (NIV)*

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

Marriage without leaving home always invites problems. Sometimes it cannot be helped (finance and housing needs may give no other option) but the new marriage should not be controlled by parents (although failure to honour them is a step of independence too far). Becoming a Christian is a bit like getting married. The old lifestyle which has been covertly controlled by the world, flesh and Devil, is incompatible with the new lifestyle, in which Jesus has the right to command. He expects to be the central point of reference for everything; and that means we have to accept the radical changes that are necessary - if our lives are to be led by Him.

The integrity of a Christian marriage is always strengthened as husband and wife invest in each other. Without mutual love and respect, holy matrimony can become an unholy mess. Husbands who do not decide to love, and wives who do not choose to respect their husbands, are on a slippery slope. The same is true between Christ and His bride, the church. His commitment to us is constant and undiluted: it is our commitment to Him that may be in question. If we are more committed to other 'gods' or 'lords' than to Jesus, our Christian faith will become detached from its mooring in God's Word and shipwreck is inevitable, given time.

Likewise in marriage. The incursion of third parties or the obsession with other priorities (even our work) at the expense of our wedding vows, will spell disaster if left unchecked. So your workplace and leisure time may say more about your Christian faith than you realise. The way in which you allow them, or your colleagues, to set a framework for your marriage, may also describe how you let the worldly patterns, which you should have left behind, dictate how you relate with the Lord. It is worth conducting a serious review of both parts of Paul's argument in these verses. How committed are you to developing your marriage with integrity; and how committed are you to your relationship with Jesus? And how does the time in work or leisure encourage or distract you in both commitments?

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You for this reminder of the need to be as committed to my relationship with Jesus, as to my marriage. I need Your help in both arenas, and I pray that my time at work or in leisure will strengthen both and not weaken either. For Your Name's sake. Amen.*

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TRAINING THE APPRENTICE

Ephesians 6:1-3 *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother"-- which is the first commandment with a promise - "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (NIV)*

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

The Bible rarely speaks to children directly, but it does here. The Old Testament commandment is given a new lease of life by the Apostle. Unlike today's confused parenting in which children have increasing rights and parental authority is diminished, the Christian parent has clear biblical guidance. What a relief to know that it is God's will that children should honour and obey their parents. Much of the law given to Moses has found its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, but not this one. God knows that today's children do not have the information, the wisdom or the maturity to be able to decide their own future. They need help and guidance. But without the willingness to respect their elders, they cannot learn, except the hard way.

In a world culture riddled with the depressed offspring of family breakdown and feral teenagers, we should ask why. The answer should be obvious: either the parents do not care or they do not believe they have the right to instruct and gently discipline their children. That is why we need to hear what God says in the Bible. When fathers and mothers start to exercise their God-given role of wise mentors, to the point where they can become friends with mutual respect, then homes will change and society will transform. The promise of longevity and blessing is no bribe; it is the real consequence of God-prescribed behaviour.

The working parent needs to keep this in mind. Working round the clock to provide money for the family does not ensure the regular provision of quality time that is the birthright of every child. The heavy overtime commitment that buys toys can never buy love. So the workplace may even be the undoing of the family instead of its provision. That is why Christian men and women need to regularly re-evaluate their commitment to work in the light of their responsibilities at home. Sacrifice of time and bonding will happen in most families (those serving abroad feel it most keenly); but when sacrifice is really an excuse to avoid the parenting responsibility ... there is a real problem. Children cannot know how to please God and therefore be secure, unless it is taught and modelled. If you are a parent, nobody else can do that job for your kids.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. I really do want the children I care about to have the best opportunity to know what is right and true. I know that they should look to me for this. Please help me to set my work into a pattern that includes them and in which they know that they are valued. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

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BLOWING THEIR TOP

Ephesians 6:4 *Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (NIV)*

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

It is one thing for children to honour their parents, but what about the other way round? This verse would have been somewhat counter-cultural in the 1st Century. Children would have been seen and not heard; they had no rights, only duties. But here we see the heart of God for children. Fathers are not to be unfeeling dragons or unhearing monsters; they have their own special duty of care to their children. Young people certainly need training and instruction, but every bit of information and skill needs to be placed into the context of relating to the Lord (and then everything else will cascade from that).

Exasperation is the final boiling-over of frustration: the point at which non-communication has reached its peak and the child cannot tolerate the injustice or cold, loveless demands any longer. This verse does not say that such emotional ventilation is right, just that fathers should consider how much a child can take; it should never get that far. Although the reaction is the child's, the provocation is from the father - and he is held accountable for the child's reaction. Of course, some parents never set any standards or expect anything, and those children also get frustrated because they lack the safety of reasonable boundaries and achievable goals set for them.

While parents may focus on school achievements as an indicator of success, this verse tells us that the most important training is about the Lord: His love, sacrifice and His desire to enter the heart of every child. The parent who believes this should also start to model the loving nurture of Christ in which the child will feel safe. No extra tennis coaching or maths tutoring can teach God's essentials of living, and without those essentials, children can become well educated but also frustrated in a relationless world. And every extra demand produces extra frustration. That is why we need to work as hard at parenting as we do at work.

Prayer: *Father God. Thank You for Your extreme graciousness with me, urging and encouraging me to learn from Your Word and giving me good examples to follow. Help me to behave like You towards the children in my care - for their blessing and for Your glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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HEARTFELT COMMITMENT

Ephesians 6:5-6 *Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. (NIV)*

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

Work-related devotionals can hardly have a more pointed passage! Unlike today's employees, slaves had no rights and way out - unless they were bought out by a kind benefactor. Christians are 'slaves of Christ' who have been bought by Him at tremendous cost, and so His ownership of them is absolute. Paul's argument does not start at the needs of the slaves but at their responsibility to serve and please their Saviour. As in every relationship, it is our rapport with Christ that will condition how we respond to others.

Respect and honour is the right of every boss in the same way that soldiers salute the insignia on the officer's uniform. Whether or not they like the commander, they salute for the sake of his commission (in the UK, the Queen's Commission). There will be some who only perform well when others are watching: they obey because they fear censure but are reluctant to do any more than they have to - because their heart is not in it. That should not be the attitude of any Christian in any working environment, even home-workers.

Those who have learned a servant heart from Jesus will gradually be noticed as the consistent, diligent, non-complaining, eager and 'go the extra mile' worker. Those who rebel against His rule will be reluctant to serve anybody wholeheartedly. So the most effective workplace ethics are not primarily grounded in corporate-bonding exercises, but in the attitude of the heart which has learned to serve Jesus for all He is worth. Then we will serve our bosses out of reverence for our Boss. That is the will of God!

Prayer: *Almighty God. Thank You for being my Lord and benefactor who has redeemed me out of slavery to sin. May I be more eager to choose to serve others in my workplace because I reverence you in my heart. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

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SLAVING AWAY - WITH JOY

Ephesians 6:7-8 *Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. (NIV)*

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

This is addressed to slaves, but it is also a great Bible principle for all. What is the difference between slavery and service? The slave is bound to do it, the servant is contracted to do it. Slavery offers no 'get out clause'. Western Christianity has for too long been the comfortable option rather than the commanded obligation. Our relationship with the Lord has never been contractual: like marriage, it is a bilateral covenant ... a solemn pledge to love and serve all our days. It is neither 'Sunday only' or 'when you please': to be a Christian is to be a bond-slave of Jesus Christ.

But God is not unjust, he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him ([Heb 6:10](#)). He rewards those who love and serve Him. Although the Bible does not elaborate on the nature of the reward, it is clear that its centre-point is God's personal expression of pleasure and delight - which is infinitely more treasurable than a knighthood or other civil or military awards. Whatever joy we may receive in serving the Lord during our lives, it is His eternal reward that matters; and He will be exceedingly generous.

Wise Christians go into every working day with the conviction that they are serving the Lord, and that they are primarily accountable to Him. Nothing of value escapes His notice, even if nobody else can see it. Even as employees, who can break our contracts (with the appropriate notice!), we are still bound to Jesus. Our covenant with Him never expires and must always be honoured. The key is in wholeheartedness. It is not so much our duty to our contract but our love and devotion to our Lord, that keeps us bright for work each day. And His reward far exceeds our salary or pay packet.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Please help me to see my tasks for each day as Your commands which I can achieve gladly with Your help. May the riches of my pay and benefits never deflect me from working wholeheartedly for Your reward; or the poverty of my pay tempt me to cut corners so that I do not do my best, because I know You are monitoring what I do and why I do it all the time, and You will abundantly reward my devotion to you. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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MANAGEMENT MODELLING

Ephesians 6:9 *And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him. (NIV)*

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

It is a popular joke that some bosses think that they are God. The truth is that they are expected to have the same wisdom that God exercises over His 'bond-slaves'. God is not cruel or bullying. He does not take advantage of the weak or abuse the willing. He does not pick favourites or decide who is on His hit-list. God may work His people hard, but He rewards them generously, He may expose them to danger but always goes with them. His training courses are always harder than we want but God never demands what He has not modelled and never stretches people beyond their ability to grow (with His help).

Every employer is more accountable to God than to the shareholders. God is the bosses' Boss. He expects fairness in the workplace, compassion to those who struggle; and the growth of every skill to the maximum of everybody's ability. God is looking to see that people are treated equally irrespective of their gender, age or ethnicity. He is as concerned about the managers' motivation as their methods; and He is able to measure the extent to which employers honour Him in their hearts.

So much management becomes a series of semi-automated processes, in which people can become a part of the factory workflow. They can then become slaves to the system in which the human touch evaporates. Wonderfully, God does not operate like that! He treats individuals with exquisite care and yet achieves all His purposes magnificently. He is the role model for every foreman, director and project leader. "Treat others as you would have them treat you", is a good rule; but the golden rule is "treat others as God treats them!" And, not surprisingly, we cannot do that without His help!

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Thank You that, as well as being my friend, you are my Master. Help me to manage those who work for me in the same way that You treat me, and help me to realise that my boss is answerable to You and not to my petty sense of justice. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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STRONG STUFF

Ephesians 6:10 *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (NIV)*

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

"Be strong ..." is easier said than done. After Paul's instruction about how to live as Christians, in the church, the marriage, the family and at work - just one glance at that list could precipitate all sorts of concerns! But what kind of strength? There may be no physical enemy to stare-out, and no physical battle to fight. This is not just the strength to win a logical argument or to keep your temper in the face of abuse. The reserves of this strength cannot be stored in experience nor practiced at the gym. The Apostle is talking about a different life-dynamic that can never be learned through assertiveness training courses.

As the next few verses will unpack, a special strength is needed for a spiritual battle with unseen enemies. They infuse Christian minds with lies of many kinds - the biggest of which may well be that if only we have enough knowledge and help, humans can surmount every problem - an old take on humanism. The reality is that we need greater wisdom, supernatural energy and Godly integrity to be able to resist the devil (and all his demonic incursions into our lives). So the strength we need has to be founded and rooted in God Himself. The bullied child feels much stronger when he invites his big brother to sort out the bully. Of course, there is no more strength in the child than before, but having placed his confidence in the power of his big brother to sort out the situation, he is no longer the intimidated weakling. Using that picture, the Lord is our big brother!

The Lord's ability to deal with everything is infinite and absolute. He has absolute authority to command demons, wind and waves (all of them must obey). He also has infinite power to achieve anything that He chooses. So, to trust Him to exercise His power alongside you in the church, the family and at work is enormously strengthening ... instead of cowering in fear we can stand up in strength, the strength that enables us to stand firm while He sorts out the enemies. There is no other way to live the Christian life. Apart from Him we can do nothing (cf [John 15:5](#)). Without a confident trust in His ability to act in our hearts and in our circumstances, we will always be weak; our own fix-its will only see us through so far before we fall. But the person who trusts the Lord for both the solution and the power to reach it ... will find their own strength renewed, with a fresh ability to keep going until the job is done (cf [Is 40:28-31](#)), in His strength.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Please help me to trust You for everything today, whether at work or at home. Help me to be confident in Your ability to deal with the things that trouble me and not to fall into the trap of thinking that my future is totally in my own hands. For Jesus' Christ's sake. Amen.*

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Ephesians 6:11 *Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (NIV)*

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

Wise Christians are realists. The idea that we live in a wholesome world, run by the great and the good for the benefit of ordinary society - is an illusion. While the devil does not trouble his captives too much, he tries his hardest to inflict as much damage as possible on Christians. However none of his schemes has escaped God's attention. He provides every believer with personal defence that needs to be applied before the attacks come. In other words, God expects us to be in a permanent state of readiness to resist Satan's attempts to seduce our minds and ensnare our hearts.

This verse starts with a command, "Put on ...". Although some Christians assume that God does everything and we can passively float under His protection, that is not true to the Bible. God is Sovereign, but His Sovereign command is directed at us - we have the responsibility to be active; it is us (and not God) who have to decide to protect ourselves with the armour that He has already provided. That armour is complete as long as you keep facing the enemy (there is no backplate), it is authorised by God as being fit-for-purpose. It is designed to enable us to withstand whatever is thrown at us ... simply by standing still.

The devil's schemes are all based around the lies that he inserts into our minds, and the fear that he encourages as other people speak/act out their dark threats. Few evil ideas are original. Most temptations are based on getting us to believe that God is not interested/powerful, that God is not personally engaged with our circumstances, or that God will not keep His promises. We are then tempted to find our own futile solutions, which also deny God the pleasure of meeting our real needs and thus displaying His glory. Often we may be duped into activity when God wants us to stand, or into running away when God wants us to face the lies and the liars. All too frequently, the lull in-between spiritual battles takes us off guard and we fail to surround ourselves with God's armour. We even allow prayer and Bible devotions to be relegated to time when we will not be so busy: but that time comes all too late, because we step out to work (and into satanic traps) unprepared each day. That is why Word@Work is written and sent to you! We hope that it helps you to be prepared for the day ahead; a day in which you are under sinister observation: Satan is waiting for the moment you lose your direction, shame yourself and discredit your Saviour. So, please, stop and put on God's gracious protection and be ready to face whatever comes in the Name of Jesus.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Please forgive me for being so blasé about the spiritual dangers I face each day. I know that I need to be prepared to face these challenges. So please help me now to commit this day to You and to accept the responsibility of being prepared and protected with the armour that you provide. For Jesus' Christ's sake. Amen.*

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DEVIUS OPPOSITION

Ephesians 6:12 *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (NIV)*

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

Spiritual warfare is real. The Apostle Paul was used to being opposed (because of the Gospel); that was why he was writing from prison while waiting trial on false charges. But he knew that his real enemies were not the human faces that put him there, but unseen powerful beings orchestrated by Satan (cf [Eph 6:11](#)). These dark forces seek to defy the authority of God at every level, and try to disrupt the worship and ministry of the church; so that fear replaces faith. Although Satan cannot pull Christians out of God's hand, he tries hard to make us give up living for Christ, and to abandon our confidence in Him. These demonic tactics may involve people who are used to disturb our peace, but those people are not the cause of the problems. Therefore we cannot win through by human means against people: neither logical argument nor physical force can deal with this spiritual opposition.

In guerrilla warfare today, it is impossible to know where to locate the terrorists or resistance fighters. The only thing you can predict, is that you cannot predict where the next attack will come from. The same is true of the spiritual struggle that every God-hungry Christian experiences. Although we may not know the place and time of the next assault, Paul is clear that it is likely wherever human power is found. There is ample cover there for dark activity as people's egos may be manipulated so that the devil achieves his purpose. Such people should not be hated, but rather pitied and prayed for, witnessed to and loved - because you may be sure that although Satan may use people, he does not love them. That is such a contrast to the way God is: He loves and respects people, not callously using people ... but pouring His power through those who want to be His servants.

Each day, we will be wise to take note of what Paul has written. If we do, then we will be ready for our faith to be challenged, and our character to be ridiculed, even when this comes through the most unexpected people. Instincts of self-preservation are not helpful at all, lashing out against people will achieve nothing. We are best prepared by putting on the armour that God supplies (the next few verses will give the details), and standing still as the enemy does his worst - confident that the Lord will win the day. If these verses were not available to us, we might think that every challenge was a personal insult or that we have failed because we do not meet their expectations: but we now know that neither they nor we are the cause of the aggression or seduction. It is just another attempt of God's enemy to ruin our fellowship with our Lord, to pull us off track and disable us from effective service. Of course, God knows every power game against His Kingdom, and He has provided effective protection for us - if only we will put it on.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. When the challenge of opposition comes to me, help me to understand what is happening. Help me to place my confidence in Your defence rather than thinking I have to fight the battles by myself. Also, please help me to love and pray for those who are being used in the devil's power games, as Jesus did. For His Name's sake. Amen.*

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STEADY UNDER FIRE

Ephesians 6:13 *Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. (NIV)*

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

However bright each day may seem, the day of evil will come to the Christian. It is an inevitable consequence of our close family relationship with God. You see, His great enemy, the devil, will try to get at our Father by disturbing His children or deflecting them from His service. By seducing us away from His love or paralysing us to prevent fruitful ministry, Satan contests God's authority and makes a grab at glory for himself. Evil may come in many forms: ill health, verbal hostility, physical violence, temptation, lies and death. All these and many more are designed to induce a reaction from us. And more often than not, it is our reaction that becomes the biggest danger.

Most people like to solve problems, to fix what needs mending. Christians are also prone to all kinds of activism, as though 'doing something' is good (even if it is misconceived or misplaced). We forget that spiritual warfare is not fought by brains or brawn. Often, Satan's taunts or temptations succeed in goading us into doing something, which we later regret. Most of our defeats are like judo falls where the devil uses our own energy against ourselves. So the wise Christian will stop when evil comes. Fighting is not commanded, but standing still inside God's armour is.

Old Testament Israel had to learn that only the Lord could defeat the enemy ([Exodus 14:14](#) "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."). The people had to stand still in obedience and faith. Paul says the same thing here. The forces against us are not for us to hack down, but to withstand by refusing to move. It is unbelief that precipitates moving; either back in fright, or forward in desperation. But here we are commanded to stand still and firm on the ground of God's Word, trusting that His protection is enough. That is real faith: refusing to budge even though all hell screams against you, because you know that you are safe in Jesus.

Prayer: *Dear Lord. Forgive me for thinking that I can deal with spiritual opposition by my own wisdom and strength, and forgive my foolish activism that betrays my lack of confidence in You. Help me to learn to stop and stand, and trust that you will fight for me, and for Your own glory. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

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INTEGRITY ON EXERCISE

Ephesians 6:13b-14a ... and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist ... (NIV)

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

The classic British comedy, Dads Army, shows every new threat being met by Corporal Jones volunteering to something in a panic. Many Christians think that there must be something they can contribute to God's defence plan. But 'having done everything' simply means, having put on the whole of God's protection, the full/entire/whole armour of God. Although we need wisdom, discipline, planning, and right behaviour in the normal course of every day, and such disciplines are very helpful as they may enable us to recognise spiritual attack when it comes, they have no spiritual protection built into them as such. The armour which God supplies, comes to us by revelation; but there is no fleshly incentive to put it on. And even when we go to put it on, we are inclined to be selective. However, when we have faithfully applied all that God has revealed, we are ready to withstand the attack of evil.

The first defence against is truth (for Satan is a liar). Truth is likened to a Roman military belt. It holds all the rest of the battle-wear in place, and secures loose clothing so that it will not get in the way. It allows freedom of movement combined with security: the different pieces of armour cannot shift apart to reveal a weak place for the enemy lance or arrow. The belt also holds the sword (which is the Word of God) in a position where it can be used to cut through lies, when needed. Some people think that Christians must be restricted and narrow folk - but that is so far from the truth. God intends that we shall be fully protected (as long as we keep facing the enemy and refuse to run away), but not stifled. Freedom lies in knowing the truth and working with it (cf [John 8:32](#)).

But truth is often the first casualty of any conflict, and after it has gone, there is neither integrity nor trustworthiness. Any fighting unit knows that if you cannot rely on your fellow soldier, the battle is all but lost. Truth is the essential ingredient in fellowship (not frenzied activity), and the only antidote to the devil's nerve gas of lies. But make sure you wear the real uniform. Truth is not manufactured or invented to suit the soldier's convenience. It is revealed by God: it is only 'regulation issue' when it is straight from the Bible. If we wear it properly, we (and many others) will benefit. If we reject it or wear it carelessly, we will suffer, the Lord's cause will be discredited and others will suffer.

Today is a great day to take truth from its Bible store and wear it. Do not let it get loose for a minute in the boardroom or on the shop floor, in the canteen or the project meeting. And keep it on in the informal conversations and after work - where your guard can often slip. The more you exercise truth, the more trustworthy you will become; with your fellow believers at work, and in the family and church. Like that, the banner of Jesus will move forward, and so will you!

Prayer: Dear Lord. Forgive me for ignoring Your truth; for being slow to put Your Word into action. Forgive me for bending Your truth to suit my desires, and for only using Your truth when it fits my plan. Help me to practice truth at work this week, that Christ-like integrity will shine through, You will be honoured and I will be protected. For Christ's sake. Amen.

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