

The Power of Working Well with Others

By Bobby Schuller

Well let me just tell you that every once in awhile when you preach a sermon, you're truly preaching to a mirror. A lot of my life was a life of powering up, of discovering that I didn't have to be pushed around, that I could, by using a bigger voice, by being stronger, by doing some of these things, I could feel like a tougher guy. I could achieve what I wanted. I could push back evil. And so much of my life was overcoming evil with power. Today, and so I just want to tell you that this is something even today I struggle with as a disciple of Jesus Christ. And we're going to talk about today, it's not overcoming evil with power, but overcoming evil with good, which of course is more power than the power the world teaches us about.

And before we get into that, I just want to remind you, today is the last sermon in a series on Avodah. We ask the question how can we find joy again in our work? How can we make it where the work that we do, the labor that we put our hands to is life-giving. How can we make it where Monday through Friday isn't some horrible bad experience so we're just working to some reward on the weekend, but that where we actually enjoy Monday, where we look forward to going into work.

And I believe that all of us can have that kind of experience in our work where we can have a joyful, life-giving wonderful experience, no matter what we're doing. Do you believe that, too?

So today I want to talk about this fantasy that many of us have. Many of us, we dream about what if I was at a work place that was like.. you know when I look at Google and they have like a slide going down, and they're in Palo Alto, and it just looks awesome to work there. So often we think what if I could find a place where I work and people are my friends, and I enjoy going, and I never want to leave, and I just want to encourage you that no matter where you are, you can get to something like that.

I think the reason that many of us desire this in our workplace is because the greatest human need is to bond. We have to bond with others, not just your spouse and your kids, although that's the most important; you need to bond with friends. You have to have people that you hang out with. People that you know will be there for you when you're going through a hard time. People you know that love you and think about you.

See very often, when we go to work, we think well I can't have that here. I can see how that's hard when you're a manager or a boss or whatever. But you can. You can have friends. I think this is one reason why the show The Office was such a success. Anybody seen that show? It ended in 2013, but its maybe one of the most successful sitcoms ever. I

think it ran eight seasons, and it is hilarious, and pretty clean, actually. It's funny because this office is a copy of a British version, which was done by Ricky Gervais. The British version is a lot dirtier, a lot shorter, and a lot darker. So the first one really is almost a satire of just how horrible work is in general, how worthless it is, how sad it is to go there.

And so the original show was just kind of a satire, and this one sort of starts that way, but then it takes this arc of like where it becomes less like this dark version, and more like Cheers, where these characters who are all very flawed and imperfect everyday people truly become good friends. It's such a simple premise. But the fact that it's maybe the most successful show, for sure one of the most successful shows in American television history, shows that it's something that maybe a lot of us want. What if I could go to work and have friends? What if I could go to work and enjoy it, and love it?

Well today I want you to know that you can, and not only that you can, but that you might want to think about the idea that maybe that's God's calling on your life to be the first to do this. Very often I think well I'm not the boss, I can't do that. Or maybe if you're the boss, you think well I'm their boss, how can I be their friends? Well we're going to talk about that today. And we're going to talk about how you can be a peacemaker, a joy bringer, a servant leader, how an environment that's competitive, that's dog eat dog, where people want title and position and money, that even though you can achieve those things as well, at first,

you're a disciple of Christ and there's a way to love your competitors. We say love your enemies, but a lot of us don't have enemies. We have competitors, though, and that's God's call for you today. I want to challenge you in that way.

You ever been yourself overcome by good? Have you ever been kind of in a bad place? You're not feeling good emotionally, maybe you're really angry, or maybe you're depressed, or maybe you're just doing something that's flat out wrong, and someone's response; the normal response to that when you're caught is authority, power, discipline, and that's not always bad. But sometimes you run into a teacher, or a crazy uncle, or it's something like that who confronts your evil with good. That's an awesome experience. I bet it would be really fun to sit down and hear those stories, especially as kids when we had that grandma or that person who confronted our evil with good.

One that always comes to my mind is when I started seminary. When I began at Fuller, I knew everything. Man, I was a 25-year-old that knew everything. And when the pastors at the church said, we're Reformed. You have to get an education. I said I've got an education because I got the Bible. And I remember going into seminary looking at all of these professors, and all of these students, and just being like they don't have anything to teach me. It's terrible. I've grown since then.

But really, I'm actually embarrassed to say all this, but I remember when one of my first systematic theology classes was taught by a really

well known writer and thinker named Ray Anderson, very influential, studied under a famous theologian named T.F. Torrance. I think he went to St. Andrews? I'm looking at Tim. Is that right? I don't know. But anyway, maybe Cambridge, but he was just a brilliant guy and I was in his last class. He was now in his 80's. Everybody wants to take his class. I sort of stumbled into it randomly. And I didn't know anything about this guy, I didn't care. I knew everything.

And so I'm sitting there and it's a first class of systematic theology, and he's there teaching on something, and I start looking around. I'm like are they hearing what he's saying? Are they hear.. what is he say.. what? And finally in the middle of class, I full on stand up and I'm like you're wrong! Like just like.. I'm like you.. and this is.. I go you are wrong. You can't say this. It's not true. It's not what the Bible says. And I'm going on and on and on like I'm, I don't know, someone credible, and I'm not.

And what was great is Ray just sort of sat there on his stool and listened, and then he would ask a question. And then I would answer but not with so much verbosity. Is that a word? Because I wasn't quite sure. And then he'd ask another question, and then I shrank a little more. And what I realized though is in my bravado, is that I was a sucker. That this was what Ray did all the time. That all he did was bait stuck up students like me. He was always the opposite of whatever you were. So if you were

Calvinist, he was Armenian; if you were Baptist, he Pentecostal; whatever.

So he would do this to students to try and get them into this mode. And he was so just kind and gracious to me, and didn't embarrass me, even though I felt embarrassed because I realized I didn't have all the answers to all the questions that as a pastor someday people would ask me.

How often, by the way, do pastors lash out at congregants when they don't have the answer to a really good question? If only they'd had a professor like Ray Anderson, who didn't lash out back at them, but calmly, collectively, with joy in his heart, love and compassion and mercy, took their students out to Coco's, and that's what Ray did. He took me out to Coco's afterward and bought me some pie and calmed me down. That's a true story! Became a good friend and endorsed one of my books.

Isn't it amazing when we have these memories of mothers and fathers in our lives, spiritual mothers and fathers who when we're angry, when we're obstinate, when we're powering up and their experience, their wisdom and love, they are peacemakers and joy bringers and servant leaders and teachers. And that's who you are and I'm so proud of you. I'm actually so proud of this church because Hannah and I have been involved with a lot of churches, we really have. And I can tell you not all of them were nice. Not all of them were good. And in all of our

experiences, I would say this is one of the most joyful, peaceful, life-giving, Jesus loving calm, relaxed churches I've ever been to, and its one reason I love Shepherd's Grove so much, and Irvine Pres is same way: such loving, calm people. So that's who you are.

And so my call to you today is that when we have those types of experiences in a Sunday morning, or at a gathering at someone's home, or if you're in a Rooted group or a small group and you just leave with a full tank, when maybe you went there feeling angry at somebody, or feeling angry at life, or feeling depressed or whatever, and you left with a full tank, I want to encourage you that the person that did that for you, you can do that for others, and you do do that for others. You can be a loving, non-anxious, full of joy, encourager and that's who you are. I'm so proud of you. And I'm so proud of this church.

So our call then, this is my challenge to this church is, what if instead of trying to find a work place that's already joyful and great, or just hoping that our old boss gets fired and we get a new one that's a better leader, that you decide to be the leader. Not the leader, but a leader. That you decide to influence, that you decide to overcome evil with good. That you love your enemies, you love your competitors, that you have a patient heart, and that you always act with forgiveness and mercy, rather than judgment and anger and vengeance as we often do in our workplaces. That's who you are and so what if we could bring a lot of that church spirit that's good in a place like this and bring that spirit

into our workplace, where we just love people that maybe are a little hard to love.

Well that's what Jesus is teaching about in Mark chapter 10, which Hannah read earlier. This is a passage about what it means to be truly great. The world has its answer, and then Jesus has an answer. First of all, in Jesus' day, He was living in maybe the greatest empire in human history, famous, the Roman Empire, and you can see here a picture of the Roman senate. This was where all the power came from. This is where people were vying for authority, where Cesar was Cesar only because he had an army. It was in Rome actually, that they would say things like you're not truly wealthy unless you have a standing army. And so it was really just dog eat dog and raw power. This was a world in which the Jews, who are now a part of it, were sort of under the thumb of this Roman Empire. When Jesus talks about the kingdom of God, they are hearing one thing, even though he's saying another. This is a problem preachers have, by the way. Very often preachers will say something and congregants will say – I'm so glad you talked about, you know, and then it's the opposite of whatever the preacher was talking about. And this has happened.

I had a girl that cut my hair once, she visited church, and I was talking about something that had absolutely nothing to do with what she said, and someone read from a passage or it was in a song 'love is not

rude,' and she's like I just love when you said love is not rude. And I was thinking I didn't even say that. Hannah did when she read the.. anyway.

And this is what's happening with Jesus preaching. He's talking about the kingdom of God and they're thinking something like Rome, something like Babylon, something like Persia, somewhere where this guy Jesus, this rabbi is going to establish a theocracy, an actual government, and he keeps saying plainly, this is not what I'm talking about. And yet here they are vying for power, for position, for title, and of course all those things will mean money.

So here it comes down Mark chapter 10. It happens again. "Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee." They were called sons of thunder, by the way. They were very like bold and powerful guys. "They came to Him and said 'teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask.'" Already big ego, you see? Like they're coming to the guy in charge. "What do you want for me to do,' He asked. They replied, 'let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.'" And He says, "You don't know.." and Jesus.. the Bible says in Greek that Jesus literally went (SIGHS) this kind of thing? He says "You don't even know what you're asking. Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with a baptism I am going to be baptized with?" He's talking about the cross, by the way.

And of course without even thinking, these twenty something bravado sons of thunder said, "We can." We can do it. And Jesus said to

them, “well you will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with a baptism I am baptized with,” referring again to not only real baptism, but also crucifixion. He says “but to sit at my right hand or my left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they’ve been prepared.”

Okay and then it says “When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.” You know why? Because they wanted those titles, they wanted those positions, they wanted those raises, they wanted that power, and now you’ve got all 12 disciples squabbling over who’s going to have the title, who’s going to have the position, who’s going to have the power when Jesus overthrows Cesar.

Jesus called them together and said.. can we just pause here for a minute, just for a minute. Did you know Jesus I think never refers to Himself as Christ? He’s referred to as Christ, the disciples call Him Christ, He affirms that. He also, I don’t believe ever calls Himself the son of God, although again, He’s called that and He affirms those. Jesus almost always calls Himself the same thing. You know what it is? The son of man. The son of man.

Now when we hear that, we hear He’s a human being and that is what He’s saying, but He’s also referencing this very famous passage in Daniel chapter 7. Now the story of Daniel is a wonderful one. I mentioned him, I think last week, where I said there are not a lot of perfect characters in the Bible but Daniel’s pretty darn close. What you see

throughout the whole Old Testament is this promise that the son of Adam, or the son of man, is going to strike down the serpent, the son of Eve, right? He's going to strike down the serpent. And story after story of the Old Testament are stories of mostly men taking power and lording it over others, defining what is good and evil in their own heart, and then becoming like beasts themselves. So you have this sort of theme of beastliness about men as they're pursuing more power, more wealth, more control.

And Daniel finally in this dream at the end of the book of Daniel says I had this dream that those beasts, and its referring to the nations of Babylon, the nations of Persia, probably the Acadian Assyrian empire. These beasts that had trampled everything, destroyed everything that was good, that the ancient of days from His glorious throne struck them down into the fire, referring to destroying these evil empires. And that then up to the ancient of days, there was one called the son of man. So there's the son of man, this is famous phrase, who in Daniel 7 steps on a glorious cloud and the cloud brings him up to a second throne by the Father where he will rule the nations of the earth and the nations of the earth will worship him. So when Jesus refers to Himself over and over as the son of man, He's referencing this Daniel 7 chapter where God's intent is to put over the world a god man that that will rule.

Jesus, when He refers to Himself in this way, is trying to show them that He's not like other kings and other rulers. And so here He says

it plainly. “So Jesus called them together and said, ‘you know that those who regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them’ in other words they just always leverage their power to get their way. “And their high officials exercise authority over them.” So He’s like that’s what you’re wanting to do, isn’t it. You want those positions. You want to be the one that lords it over. You want to be the one with power and the one with authority the way that the Romans do.

But He says “not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must become your servant. And whoever wants to be first, must be a slave of all.” By the way He uses the word slave in Greek. It’s Doulos. It’s the lowest position in the Roman Empire. There’s a hierarchy and at the very, very bottom is the slave, not even a human.

“And whoever wants to be first must be slave to all.” These young men, they don’t want to hear this. They want power, they want authority, they want position, they want raises, they want glory. And He says “For even the son of man” there it is. The son of man. The son of man. The one who’s to sit on the glorious throne, that all of the nations will bow down and worship, the son of man who will reign with the ancient of days, who will bring justice, mercy and goodness, who will throw the empires of the earth into the fire, and raise up the kingdom of God, this one. He says “for even the son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life away as a ransom for many.” To die for the ones that He’s serving. Can you do that? Can you drink that cup? Yes, we can,

they say. They don't know what they're talking about. They don't know the price that Jesus is asking them to pay.

All of this to say that the thing we believe as Christians, the thing that we claim to hold on to is the opposite of what the world views as power. When we talk about the Hour of Power, we're talking a power that comes through being a servant of all. We're talking about a power that comes from the Holy Spirit, a power that comes from faith, a power that comes from trusting that if I love my enemies, that'll be enough. Loving your enemies is one of the best ways to show that you trust your life to God.

So serving, Jesus tells us very plainly here is the highest call of any human being is to serve others. In fact I believe that this Avodah word teaches us that when we serve others, it becomes worship to God. What if that were true? What if in serving, as we call them EGR's – 'extra grace required' people at your workplace, what if instead of doubling down, powering up, leveraging, pouncing back at them. Instead, you served, love, listened more. Maybe checked in on them later. Maybe remembered the last time you had a rough day and felt cornered or trapped. And you do that. You do that.

And you notice that the first thing that James and John do is they want titles and position, and this is the other big deception that many in society teach today is that if you have title, if you have position, that you're a leader, and that's not true. Let me just say this plainly. I mean

it's the most obvious thing I could say in the world, but leaders are not made by titles. Leaders are made by having followers. Anyone can be a leader. If people follow you, if you are influencing people, you are leading them.

So let me convince you that wherever it is you work, you can be the change agent. You can be the one to bring the joy, to bring the peace, and to be the one who takes the jobs that nobody wants to do. That can be you and you can make a big difference if you do that. See I believe that in the church, this is where we get to practice. We get to practice with one another what it means to love people that are different than us. I said earlier this is one of the most peaceful, joyful churches I've ever been a part of, for sure, but we've got a couple crazy people, I understand that. I understand that. I'm one of them. And that's okay. And so when we're here, when we're in this environment, we get the opportunity to practice loving one another, caring for one another, serving one another, we get to, in a way, be served ourselves. We get cared for and loved on by others. But the idea is that we bring the unity of spirit, the life, the calmness, the peace into the world when we go out. We bring that sense of peace with us everywhere we go.

And this gets me onto heresy, something I talk a lot about in this church, heresy. Just kidding, I never talk about heresy. It's so funny how.. so I don't want to go too far off on a rabbit trail here, but did you know Paul, we always get this image that the early church was just so

united and so perfect and everything was so great. And it really wasn't. I mean Paul was writing to them, talking about all sorts of stuff that was going on in the church that was crazy, and I can't even mention it in church because it's so bad.

So Paul is always working for the unity of the church, the joy of the church, the peace of the church, the body.. not a Sunday morning service, but the body of believers loving one another. And actually this word that he used heretic, it comes from haireisis. It means one who chooses. And I just don't want to get too far on this, but the heretic under Paul's view is not the person who has false doctrine, and this is something that we miss a lot. We always think oh the heretic is someone who doesn't believe in the trinity, or the heretic, right?

But a heretic under Paul's view is actually someone who causes division in the church. So very often people with a false doctrine, for example, will leverage that doctrine to cause division in the church. I'm a super apostle. So you've got all of these people causing all this division in the church, well the haireisis and all of its context that Paul uses it, is not someone who has false doctrine, it's someone who's causing division in the church.

First Corinthians 11:18-19, its division. Titus 3:10, the person who should be disciplined is the divisive person. And in Galatians 5:20, this heretic he calls, someone who is operating in the flesh. What does he mean by that? Its ego! Someone that's like I was at Fuller Seminary. I've

got it right! You've got it wrong! The heretic, and let me just say this very clearly, although many people split the church with false doctrine, you can have perfect doctrine and be a heretic, according to Paul. This is maybe one of the most important thing to Paul is love. He just talks about it over and over, that we love one another. And he warns us don't preach a gospel other than the one that I preach. He says that clearly, but still at his heart is unity in the church, joy in the church; people who love one another because if we can do that here when we gather, we can bring that kind of compassion, mercy and forgiveness to our neighbors, to our spouses, to our kids when they need it the most. And that's who you are. I'm so proud of you.

We don't need to power grab, we don't need to have big egos, we don't need to stick our chests out, we can be joy bringers, peacemakers, servant leaders. At the end of the day, the fact that you did that at your workplace is going to matter so much more than the fact that you didn't get your promotion. The most important thing is going to be that you did what was good in the eyes of the Lord. And that you loved your neighbor, even when they're hard to love. And you do that, I'm so proud of you.

So just three things I would say. Very often when we talk about this servant leader type of thing, it comes out as like try harder, just try harder. But I think you can't serve what you can't cook, you know what I mean? You've got to have it on the inside of you, truly, and not just be trying harder. So the first thing I would say is just like trust God that

loving your enemy is the smartest thing you can do. Trust God that these ways of serving others is the best life you could ever have. I think it works its way in three ways.

Number one: you should be patient. Just practice patience. Don't be in a hurry all the time. Don't always be thinking about the next place you got to go. Just be patient. Be slow, be unhurried in your life so that you can naturally be a loving presence to people who need it.

Second: be relaxed. Just chill out. Just relax. Relax. Our world is so tightly wound and anxious and jumping to conclusions and you see it in politics, you definitely see it in religion. It's getting worse. We need people like you who are just chilled out. Just relaxed. In fact that is one of the highest definitions of a leader is probably the most relaxed person in the room. In leadership training, they often call it the non anxious presence. If you have a room that's on fire, and one guy is like everybody calm down, follow me, this is where we're going, that's the leader.

And number three: just trust God. Trust in God's providence when things don't go your way. Just trust that if you really wanted something, you're really going for it with all your heart and mind, that's good but be okay if it doesn't go your way, and trust the Lord that maybe it's a grace. Maybe God's got something better for you. And if you do those things, I think you're going to be able to be aware of the person that so many people ignore at your work and be kind and loving to them. Or be kind to the person that's rude or steals your lunch or doesn't say thank you, or

steals the credit or whatever. You can just be above all that stuff, and you are, and I love you.

And thank you, guys, for making this an amazing church. You just do it every single Sunday. You just create an awesome community of loving people, and it's such a joy to be here.

So Lord we thank you. We love you, we trust you, and it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.