

For the Lord, Not for Men

COLOSSIANS 3:22-25 (WEB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

The work nobody sees you do this week is actually being done in front of the only Boss who never misses it and never plays favorites, so the hidden, thankless stuff isn't wasted, it's stored up.

Opening Lines

In most ancient writing about running a household, slaves weren't spoken to at all. They were talked about, like furniture. Watch what Paul does here: he turns and looks the enslaved man in the eye and gives him the longest speech in the whole passage. That's a quiet earthquake, and it changes what your Tuesday afternoon means.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to feel that their unseen work — the report finished right, the counter wiped that no one inspects — is seen by Christ and stored up as inheritance. Move it from 'grind nobody notices' to 'worship the Master notices.'
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the historical deep-dive on Roman slavery categories if time runs short; keep just enough to land 'Paul speaks straight to the powerless.' The word study on *douleuō* can also be trimmed to one sentence.
- Where the moment lives: It lives in the moment someone names one place they ease off when no one's watching, then hears that the risen Christ was watching the whole time and calls it worth an inheritance.
- Your prep: Do the exercise yourself first — name your own 'when nobody's looking' place before you ask them to. And decide beforehand how you'll handle the slavery question honestly without derailing.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Classroom opening — historical contrast (5). Read 3:22-25 aloud, naming the reference and waiting in silence until every person has landed on it (3). Historical frame: Paul speaks straight to slaves, the quiet earthquake (7). Word study on *klēronomia* with the open-hand image (7). Questions 1, 2, 4 with full un-managed pauses (18). Land the big idea and out-loud commitments (5). Transformation happens in the *klēronomia* moment and question 2. Cut first: trim the Roman slavery detail to one sentence.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening — everyone silently picks their unnoticed task (5). Read the passage, wait for all to land (3). Short historical frame (6). Work questions 1 through 5, staying wherever honesty breaks open (30). klēronomia word study woven in around question 4 (6). Out-loud commitments around the circle (7). Close praying over their actual named tasks (3). Transformation lives in the confession at questions 2 and 5. Cut first: question 1 if the group is already opening up.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening — your blunt admission about your own job (4). Read the four verses together (2). One sentence on Paul speaking to slaves (3). Straight to question 2 (where do you ease off) and question 3 (what changes tomorrow), trading real answers (13). Drop the klēronomia line: inheritance, not wages, given because you belong (4). Each name one take-home action (3). Pray briefly over what was named (1). Transformation lives in the mutual honesty of question 2. Cut first: the historical sentence.

Silence

Silence is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately, and this is your fourth rep of it (weeks 2, 7, and 12). By now you can hold a five-second pause without panic. Level 4 asks something harder: after you ask your hardest question, do not scan the room, do not raise your eyebrows, do not lean forward hunting for a volunteer. Look down at your own notes and let the silence sit completely un-managed for a full ten seconds. No facial coaching, no 'anybody?' The un-managed pause tells the room you actually expect them to do the work, not just to rescue you from awkwardness. Tie it to tonight's craft note too: when you name the reference in verse 22, pause in the same way — silent, unhurried — until the last person, phone or print or app, has landed on it before you say another word.

Why This Passage Matters

Most people in your room do the bulk of their real work where nobody claps. Emails answered at 11pm, the parent up with a sick kid, the guy who does the job right when the boss steps out. And a low, corrosive lie runs under all of it: this doesn't count, nobody sees, why bother giving my best. Paul walks straight into that lie and speaks to the people the whole ancient world had decided didn't count — enslaved men and women — and tells them their hidden labor is seen by the risen Christ and stored up as an inheritance no earthly master could ever grant. That is not a pep talk about hustling harder. It's a completely different address for your work. Your real employer is Jesus, and He shows no partiality, which means the person at the bottom of the org chart and the person at the top are graded by the same honest eye. When your room hears this rightly, the exhausted single mom and the frustrated warehouse worker both look up. You get to be the one who tells people the Master sees what everyone else overlooks. That's a privilege.

Catch the Fire First

Before you teach a word of this, do the exercise on yourself. Sit down this week and honestly name the one place you ease off when no one's watching — the corner of your own life or ministry you cut because there's no applause and no accountability for it. Maybe it's how you prep when the crowd is small. Maybe it's a bill you've quietly delayed. Write it down. Then sit with the sentence 'for you serve the Lord Christ' over that specific thing, and let it reframe the labor. If you haven't felt the shift yourself, you'll teach this as a lecture on working harder instead of as good news about who's watching. Do the rep first, then walk in.

Bring Your Own Story

- A time you did a job well that literally no one noticed or thanked you for — and what kept you going, or what soured.
- A moment you caught yourself easing off because the boss stepped out, and what that showed you about who you were really working for.
- A person the world overlooked — a janitor, a caregiver, someone at the bottom — whose hidden faithfulness you only saw by accident.
- SAMPLE (polished vs. real) — Polished: 'God taught me that all work is worship.' Real: 'I re-cleaned a hotel room nobody would ever check, at midnight, furious, and somewhere in the middle of it I stopped being furious and I still can't fully explain why.'
- Guardrail: keep it raw and unresolved — one specific afternoon, not a tidy sermon with a bow on it.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "In most ancient writing about running a household, slaves weren't spoken to at all — they were talked about, like tools that happened to talk. Watch what Paul does: he turns and gives the enslaved man the longest speech in the whole passage. That's a quiet earthquake. Now watch what he tells him his hidden work actually means."

Historical contrast creates surprise and lowers defenses before the challenge lands.

SMALL GROUP: "Think of one task you do that literally nobody notices — no thank you, no check, no applause. Hold it in your mind. Don't say it yet. Paul is about to hand a room full of servants a completely different reason to do exactly that kind of work, and I want you to test it against your real thing."

A shared, concrete experience gets everyone in the passage before anyone's exposed.

COFFEE: "Can I be honest? There's a part of my job I do worse when nobody's watching, and I've made peace with it. This passage won't let me. Let me read you four sentences Paul writes to slaves, of all people, and tell me if they land on you the way they landed on me."

A blunt honest admission from you gives permission for a real conversation.

Teaching the Word

The word to teach is klēronomia — 'inheritance,' in verse 24, 'you will receive the reward of the inheritance.' Here's why it's a bomb. Klēronomia isn't wages. It's not what you're owed for hours worked. It's the portion an heir receives simply because he belongs to the family. And Paul says this to a slave — a person who under Roman law owned nothing and could inherit nothing, ever. Try this physically: hold out your open, empty hand and say, 'this is what Roman law gave a slave — nothing to pass on, nothing coming to him.' Then close your fingers around that empty hand and say, 'and Christ puts an inheritance in it, not as pay, but because He's made him a son.' The lowest person in the household is told he's an heir. That's not a raise. That's adoption. Which lands the whole passage on one line, and then you stop and let it sit: 'Nothing you do for Christ is ever done into the dark.'

Discussion Questions

1. Reading this cold, with no backstory — what's strange or uncomfortable about Paul telling slaves to obey their masters?

Coaching note: This is your newcomer-friendly question; it rewards fresh eyes over Bible trivia and the honest discomfort is the doorway in. Don't rush to defend Paul. Let the strangeness breathe, then bring in that he speaks TO them directly, which the whole ancient world did not do.

If it stalls: Does it bother you that Paul doesn't just tell the masters to free the slaves? Yes or no — and why?

2. Paul says 'not just when they are looking.' Where in your own life do you ease off when you know nobody's watching?

Coaching note: Ask it, then go silent and look at your own notes — full ten-second un-managed pause. If it stays quiet, name your own answer first (you did the exercise this week). Vulnerability from you unlocks the room.

If it stalls: Simpler: is there one task at work or home you do worse when the boss or your spouse walks out of the room? Just name the task.

3. What actually changes if you believe your real boss is Christ, not the manager — for one specific task tomorrow?

Coaching note: Push for the specific task, not the principle. 'All work is worship' is a slogan; the report, the counter, the invoice is the lesson. Don't let them stay abstract.

If it stalls: Pick one thing you'll do tomorrow. If you pictured Jesus standing behind you doing it, what would you do differently?

4. Paul tells a slave who legally owns nothing that he has an inheritance coming. Why does that word 'inheritance' — not 'wages' — matter so much here?

Coaching note: This is the theological heart. Steer them toward: inheritance is a family thing, given because you belong, not earned. The slave the world called property is told he's a son. Sit in the shock of that reversal.

If it stalls: What's the difference between a paycheck you earned and something you inherit because you're family? Which one is Paul promising?

5. 'With God there is no partiality' — the person at the bottom and the person at the top get graded by the same honest eye. Who does that comfort, and who

does that unsettle?

Coaching note: Let both sides come out. It comforts the overlooked; it unsettles anyone using rank or reputation to skate. Don't resolve the tension too fast — hold that God sees the hidden good AND the hidden wrong.

If it stalls: Verse 25 says the one who does wrong gets repaid too. Does that make you nervous, or relieved? Just say which.

Questions You May Hear

"Is Paul endorsing slavery here? Why doesn't he just tell them to abolish it?"

He doesn't romanticize it or call it just. What he does that no one else in that world did was speak straight to enslaved believers as full members of the body — the same people who passed masters the bread at the Lord's table on Sunday. He plants the ground that quietly dissolves it: 'Christ is all, and in all,' and even a slave is called an heir.

"Was Roman slavery the same as the race-based slavery of later centuries?"

No — it looked different. People became slaves through war, debt, birth, or being abandoned as infants, and a household slave might be a doctor, tutor, accountant, or manager, often literate. That doesn't make it good, but it's a different institution than the chattel slavery we picture.

"Does 'reward of the inheritance' mean we earn heaven by working hard?"

No. The word is *klēronomia* — the portion an heir gets simply by belonging to the family, not wages earned. It's a gift given to sons, the very thing Roman law said a slave could never receive. Grace, not a paycheck.

"Does this apply to me if I'm not a slave or servant?"

The principle underneath it is as wide as life: 'whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord.' Paul's fullest reach is in 1 Corinthians 10:31 — eat, drink, or whatever you do, do it all for God. Your ordinary job is the address where this lands.

For Experienced Leaders

- When the slavery question comes — and it will — don't get defensive or spend twenty minutes on it. Answer honestly, plainly, and move: 'Paul doesn't call it just; he does something more radical, he speaks to them and calls them heirs.'
- The temptation is to turn this into 'work harder for God.' Resist it. The gospel here is that your hidden work is SEEN, not that you should grind more. Keep the emphasis on the watching eye, not the effort.
- Watch for the person in the room who's exhausted and overlooked — the caregiver, the low-status worker. This passage is aimed straight at them. Catch their eye when you say 'the One who sees the hidden work will never overlook it.'

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and have each person say out loud one specific thing they'll do this week that they've been easing off because nobody's watching — the report, the counter, the invoice, the honest change. Name it, don't summarize a feeling.

Close by praying out loud over the actual things people just named — the specific task, the delayed invoice, the split effort they confessed. Don't reach for a written prayer; saying their real words back to God, asking Him to meet them in that Tuesday-afternoon task, is the whole point.

If you run out of time: If you only get to question 2 or 3 because people are being honest about where they ease off, stay there. That's the transformation happening; don't abandon a real confession to reach the tidy theology question.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, send one line to the group: 'Did you do the thing you named — the one you usually skip when nobody's watching? Christ saw it.' No lecture, just the reminder.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/colossians/3-22-25/lesson

Handout

COLOSSIANS 3:22-25 (WEB) · DIGDEEPER.AI

During the lesson:

- One task you do that literally nobody notices or thanks you for:
- Where do you ease off when you know no one is watching? Name the specific place:
- 'You will receive the reward of the inheritance.' Inheritance, not wages — given because you belong. Write what changes if that's true of your work:
- One task tomorrow you'll do as if Christ were standing behind you watching:
- The one line to keep this week: 'Nothing you do for Christ is ever done into the dark.'
Where do you most need to hear that?

Take-home actions:

- Today, do the part of your job you're tempted to skip when the boss steps out — finish the report properly, wipe the counter no customer will inspect. Do it because Christ sees it, and that is enough.
- Name the place where you've let your effort split — telling coworkers one thing and doing another — and close the gap before you clock off.
- Handle one financial dealing with plain honesty: give the correct change, report the actual hours, or pay the invoice you've been quietly delaying, trusting God keeps a truer account than any ledger you protect.

Your unnoticed faithfulness this afternoon is seen, valued, and stored up by the Lord you actually serve.