



Daily Devotions

Day 1 — Today's Theme: Explore the Passage

Read Ephesians 6:5–9.

Before we try to apply what this passage says to our own lives, we have to understand what first-century slavery was like. It was not like slavery in American history. It was complex and massive in scope. American slavery was primarily racial and lifelong. In Paul's day it was not racial, and it was not always lifelong. It is estimated one-third of the people in a city like Ephesus would have been slaves.¹ Paul brings up the relationships between slaves and masters in the same section as relationships between husbands and wives and children and parents. This makes sense because many slaves were basically “domestic servants” who served as actual members of households. It was common in the first century and would have been awkward for Paul to ignore. Many first-century slaves would take their master's name and gain the same social status when they were freed.² Slaves in the first century were more a socioeconomic class than a racial class of imprisoned forced labor. Though slavery in the first century was riddled with inequalities and injustices that needed to be overcome, in some homes, slaves enjoyed considerable freedoms, rights, and responsibilities. In some cases, they would have looked more like contract employees. They sometimes worked as tutors, nannies, cooks, or gardeners. In other words, the reason most Christians could tolerate the institution of slavery in the first century was because in many cases it was tolerable. Unlike the brutal race-based slavery in later history, first-century slavery did not necessarily strip humans of their dignity or reduce them to mere pieces of disposable property.³

¹ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 160–61.

² Charles R. Swindoll, *Galatians, Ephesians, Volume 8* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2015), 292–94.

³ Swindoll, *Galatians, Ephesians*, 293.

Open It

1. What is your least favorite chore to do around the house?

Get It

2. What do you think about when this passage talks about slaves and masters?
3. How should servants treat their masters? (5-8)
4. How should masters treat their servants? (9)
5. Why are masters and servants both expected to treat each other this way? (9)
6. What kind of relationship should these slaves and masters have with each other?

Read Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:6–7.

God has set some pretty high expectations for how Christians should treat their “masters.” Check out some of these standards:

Obey with Fear and Trembling

This doesn't mean that you're scared to death or horrified of your boss or your teacher or whoever your “master” is. Instead, what it means is that you respect them and honor them as the people that God has put in your life who have authority over you.

10. What makes it easy for you to respect those in authority over you? What makes it hard to respect them?

11. What does it mean to respect those in authority over you?

Obey without Eye-Service

When I was a little kid I used to fake naps by pretending to be asleep when my parents would walk by my room. I liked to think I had them fooled, but I'm pretty sure they had my number. Do you ever find yourself doing something like that when the “boss isn't looking”? Maybe you work way harder when the boss is around than when they aren't. Maybe you just slack off when your teacher isn't paying attention. Maybe you just try really hard so you can impress your teachers or your boss?

12. How does it dishonor God if you work harder only when your boss, teacher, or coach is watching?

13. How do you think this relates to the quality of your work?

Obey with Good Will

Growing up, I used to get so frustrated when I was playing video games or playing outside and I heard my mom yell my name because I knew that she had some job for me to do, and it was going to disrupt whatever I was doing. When Paul says that we should render service with good will, he's talking about the attitude we have toward doing our work. It's not Christlike to grumble and complain about the work and tasks that we have before us. Instead, we should strive to embrace our work joyfully and wholeheartedly, as if we were working for God, not for man.

14. Are there any ways that your attitude needs to change toward your schoolwork? How about toward your job if you have one?

15. Would you do your school work any differently if God were your teacher and you were doing it for Him?