

This Truth Module addresses the workplace issue of:

Do I operate with virtues that honor God (i.e., fairness, graciousness, and compassion)?



The Competition Game



“I want to crush my competition for Jesus,” the speaker told the crowd. The audience laughed, especially because the speaker was better known for his compassion than his passion. Still, more than a few people in the audience exchanged quizzical glances at the oddity of the remark.

Later in the day, during a workplace Bible study, the remark resurfaced. “I loved

that comment,” a sales manager noted with a hearty laugh. “Put that guy on my team any day.” A CEO in the room agreed. “In this culture, competition is king, and if you don’t have the heart of a killer, you’re going to lose.” Over the course of the next half hour, the room echoed with positive feedback on this idea that “crushing the competition for Jesus” was a good thing.

What do you think?

In Depth

In this study our objective is to become molders of our workplace cultures and mentors to those God places around us. Making such a change demands that we see our careers as places to serve instead of places to succeed.

Where might such a journey begin? Especially in a global economy that emphasizes competition as a fundamental ingredient to success, we think a biblical discussion of competition is a good place to start.



What are some of the potential benefits of competition in a workplace?

SCRIPTURE PATH

Philippians 3:14

Matthew 5:5

Matthew 16:24 – 26

Matthew 5:16

I Corinthians 13:1 – 3

Leviticus 19:9

Exodus 20:8 – 10

Exodus 20:15

Exodus 20:16

Colossians 3:17

Colossians 3:23 – 24

Romans 12:3

Mark 10:35 – 45

What are some of the potential drawbacks of competition in a workplace?

How you would describe the following phrases in the context of competition:

— “Take no prisoners”

— “Crush the competition”

— “Zero-sum games”

— “Nice guys finish last”

— “Winning isn’t the most important thing, it’s the only thing”

— “It’s not whether you win or lose; its how you play the game”

— “Competition brings out the best in me”



In order to set the stage for a biblical discussion of competition, let's apply some of the lessons learned to the ground rules of this discussion:

1. **We exist to be in fellowship with God.** Our work must never be an obstacle to our relationship with God.
2. **The ethical and moral principles of God are unchanging.** We must not allow circumstances to sway us into believing it's acceptable to bend or break those ethical and moral principles.
3. **Not only does God expect us to work, but it is also one of the ways God accomplishes His purposes.** But there's another side to work: While God works through our labors, other people are watching us as we represent Him. Lapses in ethical and moral behavior do not honor God, nor do they offer a positive view of God's impact on our lives to others considering the merits of faith.
4. **The second part of the greatest commandment is to "love others."** We honor God most when the work we do serves Him and serves others as well as ourselves.

These four points must inform our conversations on competition.

Most people we talk to in the workplace tell us they think the Bible is silent on competition. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?

— Competition turned ugly when Cain got jealous of Abel and killed him.

— Competition had a negative effect on the nation of Israel in the Old Testament when foreign gods and idols competed for their attention and loyalty.



- Competition among Jesus' disciples for who would be greatest gives us a disappointing but all too realistic look at human beings.
- Competition between Jacob and Esau led to deceit and broken relationships.
- Competition between the Sadducees and Pharisees produced distractions that prevented most of them from seeing the Messiah, even as He was standing before them.

Competition serves a useful purpose in an imperfect world.

The Bible is anything but silent on the impact of competition. The overriding impression we get as we study biblical incidents of competition is that the result is usually negative.

How, then, should a Christian worker view workplace competition? React to the following observations as we seek to build a biblical perspective on competition in the workplace:

- When life is viewed as a zero-sum game, competition is unhealthy. Why? (A football coach cheers for the opponents in their division to lose games because it means his team has to win fewer games to win the title. A sales manager exults when a competitor's chief product is recalled for safety defects. A worker is delighted when the other person being considered for the promotion they want makes a serious mistake and is chided by the boss.)
- When winning is the primary objective, competition is unhealthy. Why?
- When the competition serves only those competing, competition is unhealthy. Why?
- When competition glorifies the winner, competition is unhealthy. Why?



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— When competition denigrates the loser, competition is unhealthy. Why?

Still, the real world values competition. Economic experience teaches us competition often produces goods and services which might not otherwise be produced; produces better goods and services than might otherwise be produced; produces them more economically or more efficiently than they might otherwise be produced.

Why? Competition is useful in protecting humans against the vices which beset us and in making use of our human traits to spur us into achievement and accomplishment.

— Competition forces us to be productive because somebody else will get ahead if we're lazy.

— Competition protects us from the greed which inevitably emerges when a firm or business has a monopoly.

— Competition energizes us and motivates us to press ourselves more than we might if rewards weren't available.

— Competition builds on itself; each new victory, discovery, achievement becomes a platform for the next level of growth.

— Competition promotes excellence as the thrill of being the best lures us to press harder.

In a perfect world we would be motivated to accomplish these things to please God, or to serve others, but we don't live in a perfect world. Nor are we ourselves ever perfect.

Competition, then, would appear to be a necessary component of society. Rather than eliminating competition, Christians should seek to redeem their own competitive natures by focusing on the following timeless biblical principles. In what way do these verses address competition in the points made below?



- The reward we compete for is the approval of God: Philippians 3:14
- Our attitude during any competition must be characterized by humility: Matthew 5:5. In other words, victory dances in the end zone have no place in a Christian worker's life.
- The way we compete matters more than the outcome of the competition: Matthew 16:24 – 26.
- The way we compete matters more than the outcome of the competition, part two: Matthew 5:16.
- The way we compete matters more than the outcome of the competition, part three: I Corinthians 13:1 – 3.
- Winner-take-all is never acceptable in competition, nor is crushing the competition, nor is survival of the fittest: Leviticus 19:9.
- Winning by violating God's moral or ethical principles is not acceptable: Exodus 20:9-10; Exodus 20:15; Exodus 20:16.
- The outcome of competition should be service to something bigger than ourselves: Colossians 3:17; Colossians 3:23 – 24.
- The object of competition should not be to glorify ourselves: Romans 12:3; Mark 10:35 – 45.



How does the way you do your job conform to the principles of Scripture? Are there times when you compete on the world's terms instead of God's? What steps will you take this week to alter those things you do that don't please God and don't honor Him in the eyes of others?

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- ◆ In a perfect world workers would be motivated by a desire to serve God and others, reducing or eliminating the need for competition. This is not a perfect world. Even mature followers of Jesus Christ are not perfect.
- ◆ Competition serves a useful purpose in an imperfect world.
- ◆ Christians must be governed by biblical principles in competitive situations, even if others are not.
- ◆ The way we compete must glorify God.
- ◆ Even in victory or success we must be humble.
- ◆ How we compete is more important than the outcome of the competition.

What's Breaking your Rhythm at Work?



- ▶ **We all have a Work Rhythm unique to each of us**, but In our busy work lives, our rhythm with God can be overpowered or compromised by issues common to us all. Economic instability, interpersonal conflict, temptation, pride all have a way of rendering us out of tune.

Visit www.WorkLife.org for more on Maestro WorkLife Coaching, and pinpoint your own rhythm breakers.

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▶ The Top 30 WorkLife Issues

Check out these top WorkLife Issues!

Go to WorkLife.org to learn more.

CLARITY	Do I understand why God created work in the first place?
	Do I relate to God through my work?
	Do I connect eternal significance to my actual work?
	Do I simultaneously serve God and my earthly boss, making sure I don't "turn off" my spiritual life at work?
	Do I narrow my focus each day by setting clear limits and boundaries on my ambitions, so that work doesn't take over my life?
CALLING	Are my God-given talents, passions and temperament aligned to my present job?
	Do I see my work calling as really serving society and God?
	Is my work ethic free from compulsions such as: meaningless goals, accumulating temporary success, and a desire to please everyone?
	Do I learn from detours, zig-zags, false starts, and dead ends in my job to eliminate self-destructive patterns of behavior?
BALANCE	Do I honor my earthly employer with competency and integrity in order to accomplish God's purpose?
	Do I manage stress and discouragement by practicing the principle of rest and recreation?
	Do I manage my time without being distracted by unfocused impulses or becoming a slave to my schedule?
	Am I keeping a connection with God and my family in the midst of my hectic work life?
INFLUENCE	Do I manage all my resources (i.e., time, energy, talent, money) in a way that reflects God's perspective?
	Do I avoid the pitfalls of compensation and position discontentment to maximize my impact for Christ?
	Do I earn the respect of my coworkers in a way that blends a gracious spirit, keen intellect, courageous heart, and cultural sensitivity?
	Do I look for natural opportunities to talk about God that are appropriate to my workplace?
	Do I effectively answer the tough questions coworkers ask me about God, life, and faith?
SKILLS	Do I feel prepared to present the gospel message in language that is clear, succinct, and jargon-free, yet faithful to the Scriptures?
	Can I clearly explain the benefits of a relationship with Jesus to those at work?
	Do I regularly grow my practical work skills in order to serve my employer and God?
	Am I seeking and hearing God when making work decisions?
	Do I operate with virtues that honor God (i.e. fairness, graciousness, and compassion)?
RELATIONSHIP	Do I keep promises and tell the truth at work when subtle pressure is used to encourage hype, false appearance, white lies and spin?
	Am I willing to go against the grain at work when biblical values are at stake?
	Do I effectively deal with a difficult boss, serve an unreasonable client, or cooperate with a cynical coworker?
	Do I resolve conflict involving office politics, gossip, slander, favoritism, and unfounded criticism?
	Do I effectively deal with lust at work, including everything from travel temptations to office affairs, from risqué jokes to sexual harassment?
	Do I protect and help the weakest members of my workplace and society in a "survival of the fittest" world?
	Do I seek out and connect with fellow believers at work for support, encouragement and accountability?