

January 7, 2012 Florida Hospital Seventh-day Adventist Church
Matthew 6:24/Luke 16:13 “This Year—Work for One Boss” by Andy McDonald

Welcome to the first Sabbath of 2012 and our opportunity to join together in corporate worship.

We are kicking off this new year of 2012 with a three week series simply called This Year. We will explore, right from the Bible, three scriptural pieces of counsel for our new year.

Here they are: This Year—Work for one boss
This Year—Take a break
This Year—Go beyond my comfort zone.

I believe that establishing these three foundational practices recommended by God will make a difference in our personal lives, and will make a difference in our homes and workplaces, and will enable us to be difference makers in our community, all to God’s glory, but please don’t let the simplicity of these three scripture based foundational practices mislead you into thinking they are easy to follow.

Today we start with This year work for one boss. Matthew 6:24 is our primary text for today. Here we have Jesus’ own direct words of teaching. This isn’t some advice from a well meaning but unformed friend. These words, if we choose to believe scripture, are the words of Jesus Christ, the eternal word of God made flesh. God incarnate in human form. That baby born of virgin in a Bethlehem stable all grown up. Here is the one who is one with his Father, the sovereign of the universe. These aren’t just some words of a well meaning teacher of truth, these words which we will mine today from scripture are God’s words to us, just one short verse that alters everything about our lives.

That's right. When we grasp what this verse is saying there is not a corner of our lives, no tiny aspect, no thought or plan about our lives that is not affected by our understanding of this verse.

So today as we come to these words, I know that most of us have heard them before, read them for ourselves, so we must do something a little unnatural. We must blink our eyes, and focus in a new way, and listen to these words and their meaning setting aside previous journeys down this same road.

Jesus came up on a mountain and sat down and his disciples gathered around and he taught them. We don't know everything he said. There must have been more, but what we have is the longest continuous sermon from Jesus. In Matthew it take up three chapters, Matthew 5,6,&7 and it has been known down through the ages as "The Sermon on the Mount."

By the time he gets to our verse for today he's already given the Beatitudes changing our understanding of who is blessed, he's taught about salt and light, the law, anger, adultery, divorce, making vow, how to treat enemies, the right way to give to the poor, how to fast, how to pray. And immediately preceding today's verse he's advised his listeners to not store up treasure on earth but to store up treasure in heaven.

Listen now to Matthew 6:24 No one (this is very inclusive text that applies to every human that ever lives) No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despises the other. YOU cannot serve both God and Mammon." Most all of the more recent translations put it this way, You cannot serve both God and money.

To the listeners on the hillside hearing this in person that day this was an even more vivid saying than it is to us. We all know you can't really be 100% committed to two bosses at one time. Each may get good service from you but if you really have two bosses they can't both get

the 100% value of your full service because there are two different fronts on which you serve.

But we think about this in work settings or any place of conflicting loyalties but when you go back to the original language the way we've translated it has already dressed it up a little. The words meanings make them closer to this, "No one can be a slave to two owners."

When the crowd heard this statement from Jesus they would have nodded their heads in agreement. They all knew that in their world a slave in the eyes of the law wasn't a person but thing, a tool. The slave had absolutely no rights of his own. His master could do with him absolutely as he liked. Just like the owner could pick up a hammer or a screw driver or a saw and use it however he liked so was his relationship to the slave—a living tool. The slave's life was in the master's hand. He was exactly the same as any other of the master's material possessions. Forced slavery is a horrible evil, a terrible exhibition of man's inhumanity towards man.

In the ancient time a slave had literally no time which was his own. Every moment of life belonged to the master.

Sometimes we may be disgruntled with our work. Maybe we have a mean boss, or there are demands that call for us to put in unpaid overtime to get our work done and keep our job. And we may even play with the words saying we are just a "slave" to the job or the boss. But as bad as we may have it at times our lives are very different from a slave.

In our world even with long hard hours, when we leave the work place we are free to pursue hobbies. We can leave our vocation and immerse ourselves in an avocation. And it may be that in that we find our joy and delight in that thing disassociated with our work. Music, art, social interactions, church, community.

But it wasn't that way for the slave. There was literally no moment of time which belonged to himself or herself. Every moment belonged to the owner and was at the owner's disposal.

So when you read today's sermon title, "This Year Work for One Boss" While that is good counsel for our careers, our work lives. While it will, in the work place, make for easier success if we have well clarified to whom we answer in our chain of command and if we have that limited to just one boss, but here Jesus is also and maybe primarily talking about our relationship to God.

If we read through Paul's letters to the early church that make up so much of the New Testament portion of our Bible, we find him calling himself a servant, same word as slave, of Jesus Christ.

The call of Christ, let's not water it down, is call to come under his Lordship. We surrender ourselves, our rights, our very lives and become servants, slaves, of God. We make God, or acknowledge God as the undisputed master of our lives.

William Barclay puts it so well: "We can never ask, 'What do I wish to do?' We must always ask, 'What does God wish me to do?' We have no time which is our own. We cannot sometimes say, 'I will do what God wishes me to do,' and at other times say, 'I will do what I like.' The Christian has no time off from being a Christian—never off duty.

I was reminded of this in a very practical way this week. On Thursday morning I was invited by the Florida Conference Ministerial Department to be with Greg and Gina, our youth pastor and his wife, for their ordination interview. It was an interesting experience and brought back some memories of my own similar process many years ago.

You would have been very proud and pleased with Greg and Gina and their answers to the questions asked. In one of the questions there was something about finding balance. How the work of pastor can be sort

of all consuming and a little difficult to have boundaries between church life, family life, spiritual life, etc. and that it is a very full time job. And Greg responded that it does take some getting used to the realization that there is never a time when he isn't the pastor. There are times when the rolls and functions he fulfills may be in the background rather than the foreground, but he's still a pastor.

And in even a more significant way the Christian is never off duty. We can't punch out, clock out, and take a break from being a servant, a slave of Jesus Christ to be a servant or slave of another and switch back and forth.

And Jesus knew where the pull would be the strongest, He said, "You cannot serve God and Mammon."

Mammon was a Hebrew word for material possessions. It wasn't a bad word. There were Rabbinic sayings such as, "Let the mammon of your neighbor be as dear to you as your own." That meant let your neighbor's material possession be as respected and honored as your own.

But the word history of the word is fascinating. The root of the word means to entrust. In that sense mammon was that which a person entrusted to a banker or to a safe place of some kind. Mammon was the personal wealth which you entrusted to someone to keep safe for you. But over time it came to mean, not that which is entrusted, but it became that in which a person puts their trust, and according to Barclay's commentary, eventually it came to be spelled with a capital M and revered as a god. Mammon became an alternative place to put your trust other than in God.

Jesus couldn't have said it more clearly or succinctly. Literally it says, You cannot God to serve and mammon. And we dress it up.

You cannot serve God and mammon.

You cannot be a slave to God and to material possession

You cannot serve both God and money
 Jesus didn't say that we won't or shouldn't serve two master but that we cannot.

You may have heard me talk about "Opportunity Costs" before, because it is so very real.

When a couple decide to marry and they announce their engagement there's opportunity cost. To move forward with committing their lives to one another they are simultaneously saying no to every other potential mate on the planet.

To take agree to the job you hold is to simultaneously say no to all the other jobs.

Whenever we are reading a book, while we are saying yes to that book we are, like it or not saying "no" to every other book we could be reading at that time.

We like to live under the illusion that there is this comfortable spot in the middle. Like in the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. When Goldilocks enters the home of the three bears she finds three bowls of porridge, the first is too hot, the second is too cold but the third is just right. But in reality there is no happy middle.

In the book Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing it says this:
 "No one can occupy a neutral position; there is not middle class, who neither love God nor serve the enemy of righteousness."
 You are going to serve a master. It's just part of our fate as humans.

God or Self-seeking
 God or Satan

God or Money (just a representation of anywhere other than God where we put our trust, and it is most often self)

Jesus said you cannot serve God and self interest.

You can't skydive and be a passenger in the plane at the same time
 You can be planning to be a skydiver and be a passenger in the plane
 but at some point you must choose—staying in and remaining a
 passenger or getting out and diving through the sky?

You are not a diver standing on the diving board you are just a person
 standing there.

At wet and wild there's a ride called "Dastuka" at least in years gone
 by when we would take groups there it was called that. You climbed
 stairs or went up a winding ramp and finally to the top of this very tall
 tower there was a little door that opened and you stepped inside. The
 door closed, you folded your arms over your chest and at the discretion
 of the ride operator a button was pushed the floor of that little chamber
 opened and you fell straight down a shaft in a trough with water. It
 was and is impossible to partially ride Dastuka. You can't ride it and
 not ride it.

Jesus is telling us in this passage a great life giving life enriching
 freeing principle, You cannot be a slave to two masters! Half and half
 service equals whole service to self interest, to the enemy of God.

Jesus is telling us that You cannot be loyal, serve, love, worship, two
 masters.

So why choose God over self interest, over abundant material
 possessions.

Why choose God as your master instead of yourself—remember you
 can't do both. Jesus couldn't be more clear—ONE master is all you
 can handle—TWO master's two bosses isn't an option.

Jesus continues his sermon on the mountainside. Listen to Eugene
 Peterson's interpretation, paraphrase of what Jesus said he tells us why.
25 "If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that
 you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the

clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance than the clothes you hang on your body. **26** Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds. **27** "Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? **28** All this time and money wasted on fashion - do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, **29** but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. **30** "If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers - most of which are never even seen - don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? **31** What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. **32** People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. **33** Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met.

Some of you are under the illusion that money's not your master. But if you think your money is yours it just may be more of your master than you think. Everything is Gods and he has entrusted some of his wealth into your hands—it is not yours you are just the manager so let it serve you don't you serve it.

If you have confidence in the future because of your savings, investments, portfolio, if you consider your future safe because of material possessions, there are likely some master issues.

When you see a need or a cause or mission and you find it really difficult to let go of some of your material possessions, your money better check on how many masters you are trying to serve.

Finally trying to stand between two masters, or trying to jump back and forth and please both, trying to be satisfy both hot and cold makes us end up lukewarm and the message in Revelation to the church at Laodicea becomes our condemnation—“I know your deeds, you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say I’m rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. (trying to serve two masters) But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”

You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon,
You cannot serve God and self-interest.

So this year—Work for one boss! Hot or cold! Just one boss and I recommend the God who can supply all you need according to his riches in Christ. Let God be your one boss this year.