

Workplace Ministry

Acts 1:8 NASB "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses in both Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth."

What is workplace ministry?

Workplace ministry or marketplace ministry is equipping people in all spheres of work and society to understand and experience their work and life as a calling from God. It is preparing all Christians to be agents of God's Kingdom at work. Workplace ministry is applying our faith in our work life.

Vocation or work is a divine calling. Our work is our ministry or mission field.

Workplace means any setting within our sphere of influence including where we work e.g. business, government, education, medicine, finance, media, NGOs, etc.

Workplace ministry is simply returning to the early foundations of the church that focused on preparing every believer to be a minister where they are. Early Christians made the marketplace the focal point of their ministry as their occupations regularly took them there. As they conducted business, it was natural for them to present the gospel to the people they encountered. Marketplace people played a vital role in the emergence, establishment and expansion of the early church. Most of Jesus' followers remained in full-time business while simultaneously conducting ministry. To them witnessing was not an occasional activity but a lifestyle.

The best model of workplace ministry

Jesus Christ is our best model.

Jesus was born in the marketplace in the stable of an inn (Luke 3:7). The angelic worship took place in a nearby feedlot (Luke 2:13-14). His first visitors were shepherds (Luke 2:15-20).

For more than 20 years Jesus partook in the activities of the marketplace as a tradesman (Mark 6:3).

He recruited His disciples from the marketplace. Peter and Andrew were professional fishermen (Matthew 4:18). James and John were partners in a family-owned food enterprise (Matthew 4:21). Matthew was a tax collector (Matthew 9:9) and Luke a medical doctor (Colossians 4:14). Mark was the manager of a family trust (Acts 12:12-13) and Nathaniel a farmer (John 1:48). None of the 12 was a member of the professional clergy or a leader in the synagogue.

We read in the gospels that Jesus and His disciples often went back to the waters to fish. Jesus even sent Peter back to catch a fish to pay his and Jesus' taxes (Matthew 17:24-27).

Of His 132 public appearances in the New Testament, 122 were in the marketplace. Of the 52 parables Jesus told, 45 had a marketplace context.

Workplace ministry and the early church

Of the 40 miracles recorded in the book of Acts, 39 happened in the marketplace. Only one of the 40 extraordinary manifestations of God's power happened in a religious venue: the healing of the lame man at the temple gate called Beautiful (Acts 3:1-11).

The elders of emerging churches often were marketplace leaders who due to their role in their cities and societies produced salvation movements. Lydia was a wealthy wholesaler of expensive fabric (Acts 16:14). Dorcas a designer and manufacturer of inner garments (Acts 9:39). Paul, Priscilla and Aquila tentmakers (Acts 18:3). The Ethiopian eunuch was the finance minister of a prominent kingdom (Acts 8:27). Erastus a city treasurer (Romans 16:23). Theophilus a high-ranking government official (Acts 1:1). Cornelius was a military officer (Acts 10:1) and Simon a leather tanner (Acts 9:43, 10:6).

Paul ran a profitable tent maker business on many of his ministry trips. In Ephesus his for-profit operation was large enough to provide for him, his team and even the needy (Acts 20:33-35).

When the time came to establish a missionary centre from which to spread the gospel, God moved the spiritual vortex from Jerusalem to Antioch, a powerful merchant city located on the convergence of the important trading routes.

Transformation

Acts 1:8 NASB "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses in both Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth." Workplace ministry not only change people it also transforms or bring about change in cities and nations: Jerusalem (city), Judea (region), Samaria (a nation) and the remotest part of the earth (the whole world).

The apostles filled Jerusalem with the good news in just a few weeks by leading thousands to the Lord (Acts 5:28, 6:7). As a result, Jerusalem experienced transformation at the deepest level: The needs of the poor and the widows, two very vulnerable groups, were met (Acts 6:1-7). The hungry were fed and the sick healed (Acts 2:45, 3:8). The gospel even had a positive influence on the Sanhedrin, the most powerful forum the Jews had (Acts 5:33-39). Solomon's Portico became the place for a steady stream of signs and wonders, giving the emerging Church favour with the people (Acts 5:12-15). The movement was so dynamic that eventually the streets and sidewalks of Jerusalem were turned into evangelistic venues where sick people lined up hoping that the healing shadow of Peter would fall upon them (Acts 5:15).

Soon multitudes from nearby cities flooded Jerusalem (Acts 5:16). What a change! This was the city that had previously grieved Jesus to the point of tears (Luke 19:41-42).

It all began on the Day of Pentecost when the disciples left the enclosed confines of the upper room and went to the open space of the marketplace. On that day Peter, the fisherman, became the first fisher of men, setting a pattern soon to be replicated throughout the Roman Empire. This movement was led not by individuals notorious for their religious acumen, but by people known for their roles in the marketplace: fishermen, tax collectors, farmers and more.

The 3 business partners (Paul, Aquila, Priscilla) transformed Asia, a myriad of towns and cities, culminating with Ephesus, the site of the most dramatic power encounter recorded in Acts (Acts 19:1-13). This city, with its demon-driven economy and a marketplace that was the citadel of evil, experienced a radical transformation.

We need to do the same and build the Kingdom of God in the workplaces in our cities if we want to transform our city, our nation and the world.

Our work is our worship

Colossians 3:23 (TEV) "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as though you were working for the Lord and not for people." It is important that we view our work as an act of worship to God. No matter what we do, sweeping the streets, running a corporation or selling cars, our job is more than a job. It is an act of worship.

Whatever we do, we should do it with enthusiasm, because we are working "as though I am working for the Lord and not for people."

If we begin doing everything task "as though you were working for the Lord and not for people", how would the way we work change?

Why the workplace?

- Work has been part of God's design from the beginning (Genesis 1:28; 2:15) and when we work for Christ, all work becomes a worship service to God (Colossians 3:23). Work in its different forms is mentioned more than 800 times in the Bible, more than all the words used to express worship, music, praise, and singing combined.
- The Bible contains over 2,300 verses on money, possessions and stewardship. Jesus often spoke about it in his teachings and parables.
- The workplace is one of the few places where believers and non-believers spend a great deal of time together and get to know each other.
- We spend about 60-70% of our waking hours at work.
- Many people form some of their closest friendships at work.

- In a country or organization, it may be forbidden, restricted, or ineffective to publicly display Christianity, but Christians have an opportunity to talk individually with their co-workers. If we are diligent, compassionate, trustworthy and respectful, co-workers may respond to us with curiosity. They may ask us about the source of our compassion and integrity and naturally we will talk about Jesus as we respond. They may find this kind of conversation less intimidating, off-putting or insincere, and may find it more relational, open-minded and authentic than if they were talking with a stranger or going into a church.
- Paul transformed Asia by his actions in the marketplace. The marketplace is where the lost are. It is also the place where the converted needs encouragement and support. It is where life happens, daily. It is the heart of society, so take the Kingdom of God to the people.

Workplace ministry in action

1. Consider your work as your calling and ministry. Use your job as a ministry vehicle so that the gospel will be shared and heard by every person in your sphere of influence just like the disciples and Jesus did.
2. View work as an act of worship. God gives us our work, talents and skills so that through them we might worship Him. Attitude and actions speak louder than words to non-believers.
3. Live a Christian life at work. Be God's ambassador. Manifest the life of Christ in your workplace. We must allow God to show us how to work well, how to succeed, how to love our fellow workers, how to experience the power of God in a workplace context so that they see a difference in us. That is what changes the world.
4. Apply Biblical principles to your decisions, work and work ethic. Honesty, diligence and excellence. Expect strong opposition when you operate in a godly way.
5. Do business or work in the fullness and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Marketplace Christians need to know that spiritual warfare is a central component of our daily routines, whether we are aware of it or not. The enemy and his evil forces constantly try to destroy lives and organizations.
6. If you are in a leadership, supervisor or managerial role, be a good shepherd to your flock.
7. The workplace is also a place where the converted needs encouragement and support. Be a Barnabas, an encourager to others, especially fellow Christians. Provide backing and assistance where you can.

Not only impact the people at work but also the workplace, city and nation. Associates at work become the primary source of building meaningful relationships that can lead to salvation

(evangelizing co-workers). However, we must go beyond that. As a workplace person, God has granted you unique contacts and resources that are largely unavailable to religious leaders. Some people have great influence on mainstream society, others are unsung heroes with low profiles, but each of us has been divinely called to bring the Kingdom of God to the heart of the city and nation. You might never step into the pulpit, but you have access to business, government, entertainment, sports, financial and other leaders. These are all avenues which may be closed to the church. Take inventory of your business relationships and resources as well as your community contacts. Through your unique position in the marketplace, you have the exciting opportunity to invest in God's Kingdom and to serve Jesus. Intentionally use your position in the marketplace for the cause and glory of Christ.

For each of the above 7 points brainstorm ideas about "how to" put the concepts into practice.

For example: part of living a Christian life at work means to make Matthew 25:35-36 a reality to those around you. Matthew 25 (NLT) "For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me." What can you do at your workplace to fulfil this command?

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