

# Is Workplace Evangelism A Fruit Or A Goal?

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I once worked as the interim marketing director for a sports marketing company. For twelve months I worked on developing relationships with the other employees. I never forced an opportunity to "share Christ" with anyone, but eventually God opened the door. One day John, the sales director, came to me and asked if I had ever helped anyone with marriage problems. I had gone to lunch with this man several times and we had never talked about spiritual things, but I had shared my background, so he knew I had worked with Christian organizations and had a "workplace ministry" in addition to my consulting with companies.

John began to open up and confided that he was in the midst of a marriage crisis. He and his wife were about to separate. Over the next few weeks we began to talk about spiritual issues. Finally, one day he asked me to come into his office where I explained that no marriage can get help without God being in the centre of it. I asked John if he had ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ; he said he had not. We bowed our heads in his office and I led him in the "sinner's prayer."

## **The Workplace as a Mission Field**

When we think about evangelism in the workplace we must look at Jesus as our ultimate role model. There are several things we learn about Jesus' methods of speaking into the lives of those He came in contact with. Jesus used the workplace as the setting to reach many people. Consider this: where do the majority of people spend the majority of their time interacting with the majority of the lost world? The only place that fits that description is the workplace.

Consider that of Jesus' 132 public appearances in the New Testament, 122 were in the workplace. Of the 52 parables Jesus told, 45 had a workplace context. Furthermore, Jesus spent His adult life working as a carpenter before He went into a preaching ministry. This is one of the more interesting observations about the life of Jesus. He did not begin His "public preaching" ministry until he spent His adult life serving mankind as a simple carpenter in His earthly father's small business. If Jesus spent those ten to fifteen years in a workplace job, and only three years in public ministry, what does that say about the importance of work? God uses work to accomplish many things in the lives of His followers.

One thing we notice about the method of Jesus in speaking to those in the workplace was that He dealt with each person in a unique and personal way. There were no formulas. Today the church often seeks to develop the latest and greatest evangelism program to present the gospel and gain a conversion. Jesus went beyond these methods.

## **Gospel of Salvation versus Gospel of the Kingdom**

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10).

Although there are situations where "tactics" might work well, Jesus modeled an approach that dealt with the whole person, not just salvation. The church has often preached the "Gospel of Salvation" instead of the "Gospel of the Kingdom." What is the difference? Well, in the New Testament you find Jesus speaking to people about the Gospel of the Kingdom many more times than the Gospel of Salvation. The Gospel of the Kingdom is mentioned 66 times in the New Testament. Jesus saw that people not only needed salvation, but they also needed to experience God in every aspect of their lives. This is the Gospel of the Kingdom. If God's plan was only about salvation, we would all go to heaven immediately after receiving salvation.

In Jesus' ministry, it was often a healing that brought someone to faith. Or an encounter with a demon. Or a struggle with an ungodly lifestyle. All of these issues dealt with life and the kingdom of darkness. Dealing with these issues often led to a commitment to Jesus. That's why He brought the Kingdom of God to these people.

Recently I was meeting with a workplace ministry leader of a large church. During the course of our conversation he asked me if my ministry focused on evangelism in the workplace. I said that it did, but not in the way he was thinking. I told him I believe evangelism in the workplace is a byproduct, not an end in itself. Instead of providing "tools for evangelism" I encourage the individual to allow Christ to transform his life regarding work and calling. When a person understands who he or she is in Christ and is motivated to love Christ and serve Him, evangelism is a natural byproduct of the relationship. Jesus modeled this when He answered the disciples' question regarding the greatest commandment. "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:36-40).

The bottom line priority for every believer is to love God and to love others. Evangelism is the fruit of a love relationship with God and love towards others. So often we try to motivate people to evangelize out of guilt, shame, or duty. This usually yields little fruit that does not last. I am not saying that tools are not appropriate to use when sharing the gospel. I am only saying that everything proceeds from the heart. In order for a believer to bear fruit (of which evangelism is but one part), he or she must have a transformed life that will yield fruit from obedience motivated by love for the Father.

### **The Movement of God in the Workplace**

I have been following the movement of God in the workplace for the last eight years. Apparently I'm not the only one-even the secular media has taken note of a growing phenomenon. Laura Nash, a business ethicist from Harvard University, recently said that "spirituality is exploding in the workplace." The last several years have witnessed increasing numbers of men and women who are applying biblical principles to their careers, Christians who are not afraid to share their faith with co-workers, and prayer and Bible studies taking place on the premises of large corporations.

For example, in February 2002 some Coca-Cola employees launched the first Christian Fellowship of Coca-Cola. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recently launched a Christian employee association, the first government Christian employee association of its kind. A recent study by the Norwalk, Connecticut-based research firm, Yankelovich Partners, revealed that 70 percent of those surveyed had discussed their faith at work, and 55 percent of respondents said they had prayed for career guidance. Even George Barna has cited this movement as the next wave of focus in the local church: "Workplace ministry will be one of the core future innovations in church ministry."

### **Current Examples of Workplace Evangelism**

People are coming to Christ through the ministry of those in the workplace. Let's look at a few ways this is happening by way of some case studies.

*Prayer Evangelism*-Jan was the "No. 2" executive in a Fortune 50 branch of a cellular company with 100 employees. God began to show her the importance of intercessory prayer for her business and the employees in her division. She committed herself to praying for each person individually, and now reports that "within just a few months of praying I began to see the Lord working mightily. Over a two-year period we had over 50 Christians in our company serving God."

*Salvation Resulting from Radical Love*-A friend told me the story about another friend who experienced great suffering for the soul of his boss. Jim worked on a cargo ship and his boss was the captain. Jim was a committed Christian who shared his faith with others and was a good worker, and one day he led the sea captain's girlfriend to Christ. The sea captain already hated and ridiculed Jim because of his faith. When the girlfriend came to Christ, she stopped sleeping with the captain, who blamed Jim for her decision. One day he walked over to the table where Jim was having lunch and began hurling obscenities at him and beating him. Jim tried to defend himself but did not fight back. When Jim was nearly unconscious on the floor, two men entered the restaurant and saw what was taking place. They jumped the sea captain, took him outside, and began beating him. He was beaten so badly that he needed immediate medical attention. When Jim saw the condition of the captain, he came to his aid. The captain was so moved by Jim's act that he began to weep, not understanding what could move a man to have such love in the face of such hatred, and he accepted Jesus at that moment.

*Evangelism Resulting from a Crisis*-My wife Angie had never stepped foot in a church, but she worked for a Christian woman. Angie had no interest in spiritual things until one day she experienced a personal crisis in her life. Her friend Joe Ann pulled her aside and said that God was calling her to Himself through her crisis and she simply needed God in her life. This woman led Angie to the Lord in her office and began discipling her. Eventually Angie began attending a local church.

*Evangelism through Media*-Mars Hill Media, a Minneapolis-based ministry, is a ministry designed to present the claims of Christ through secular media like newspapers, radio, and television. They do this by developing creative ads that tackle modern-day issues while at the same time providing a spiritual solution. God is using a former ad agency executive to present the claims of Christ. They are receiving wonderful reports of salvations resulting from this innovative approach.

*Company Luncheons*-Every Monday at lunch hour, I teach a Bible study at the Covenant Group, a north Atlanta-based insurance company. The company sponsors the luncheon for its employees and anyone who wishes to participate. Chick-fil-A, a local Christian-owned fast-food chain, caters box lunches for the meeting. This has provided a good avenue for believers to meet and provide an outreach to the community.

*A "Meeting Needs" Culture*-Paul Spuler is the Vice President of Spiritual Life at Cardone Industries in Philadelphia. Cardone is the world's largest, privately held re-manufacturer of automotive products, founded over 30 years ago by the late industrialist Michael Cardone Sr., who believed God called him to minister through his business. Paul is responsible to oversee six on-site, full-time chaplains who serve their 3600 factory family members. His department seeks to serve the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of the mostly inner-city, multi-ethnic workforce through one-on-one ministry, benevolence programs, and corporate spiritual enrichment initiatives. "We find that maintaining a focus on the physical needs of our employees, we often have the opportunity to speak into the spiritual lives of our employees," says Spuler.

So often we in the church have been more focused on getting the "sale" instead of meeting the need of the person at the time. Jesus assessed the need of the individual and met the need. Sometimes the best approach to evangelism is to find out what a person's perceived need is and then try to meet that need in order to have the opportunity to give him what he really needs-a Saviour.

The International Christian Chamber of Commerce began a unique training program for the government of China three years ago. This six-part video course entitled *You Can Start A Business* began as a result of a request from China for a training program that would teach market economy with ethics. The program has aired over Chinese public television over 30 times to a potential audience of 250 million households. It is filled with Scripture verses to support the foundations of the principles outlined. Although China did not allow God or the Bible to be mentioned, the biblical principles are introduced with the words, "It is written."

In June 2003, the International Christian Chamber of Commerce (ICCC) and seven other workplace ministries participated in the first International Business Congress which was co-hosted by three commerce departments of the Israeli government. More than 400 business leaders from 40 countries came for the purpose of building business relationships with Israel. Over 1100 matchmaking sessions between these business leaders and Israeli government and business leaders resulted. During these days no one is visiting Israel due to the Arab conflict. They need visitors and business. The Christian business community decided to give them what they want, in order to give them what they need. This event was a huge success and has allowed the ICCC to move their headquarters to Israel. More events are now planned which means Christians will be building relationships with Jews who need the Saviour.

### **When the Gospel of the Kingdom Penetrates a City**

Almolonga, Guatemala is a town of only 20,000 people. Twenty years ago, this city was one of the worst in the nation-the poverty, violence, and spirit worship resulted

in a community that was spiritually and physically bankrupt. There were four jails in the city and alcohol and drug abuse were rampant. The community was in a farming area that depended upon produce sales as their primary source of income. During this period, the land was so arid that it yielded only four truckloads of produce a month.

A pastor in that city began to pray and fast with other intercessors three or four times a week. Over a period of time, people began to get saved and lives began to change. The intercessors prayed against the spirit worship that had so impacted this city. As more and more people became changed by the power of the gospel, the city began to plant seeds of new life. The negative influences began to be overcome.

Now, twenty years later, the community of Almolonga is a transformed, model city. Pastors and other Christian leaders pray together and fast three or four times a week, and 80 percent of the townspeople are practicing Christians. The jail has now closed due to the lack of crime in the city. There are now two dozen evangelical churches in the city and God is even touching the agricultural community in a very unusual and miraculous way—instead of four truckloads a month, they are delivering forty truckloads a week, a 1000 percent increase! However, that is not the most remarkable thing. The produce they are harvesting is many times larger than the size of normal produce. Beets are 4 pounds, lettuce is the size of basketballs, and carrots are the size of a man's arm. What a witness to the benefits of a culture embracing Christianity!

This is not the only community that has experienced such a transformation by God. The Sentinel Group, a ministry in Lynnwood, Washington, has done a one-hour video documentary on four different communities, one of which is Almolonga. The good news is that there are more and more cities being transformed around the world.

The question for you and me is, "How can God use men and women in the workplace—like ourselves—to impact our workplace, communities, cities, and even nations?" Let me assure you, God wants to demonstrate His love and power in your workplace. Then you will experience God's evangelism program.