

Taking Faith into the 9 to 5 Window

Os Hillman • Work As Ministry

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"A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work."
Ecclesiastes 2:24

As you may know, for years Christians have sought to evangelize the largely unreached people groups who live in what is called "The 10/40 Window"-the expanse between the 10th and 40th parallels north of the equator, from Africa through east Asia. But what you might not know is that there's another window that is opening to allow Christians to introduce people to God: the "9 to 5 Window." It's a window of opportunity that's just as exciting.¹

Angie Tracey, an executive with the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, Georgia, recalls how God was taken out of the CDC Christmas celebration at her centre starting 10 years ago. "First, we had 'Christmas parties'. . . . Then, due to controversy and not wanting to offend anyone, they became 'holiday parties.' Three years ago, it was determined that the term 'holiday' was offensive because it still reminded people of Christmas, so they were renamed 'Snowflake Festivals.'"

However, things have changed today.

Around the time the Snowflake Festival was introduced, God put an idea on Angie's heart: to create an opportunity for Christians to fellowship on the job. She thought perhaps this could happen through a prayer breakfast or a devotional luncheon. She would have been glad if 15 or 20 employees came. But God had something more in mind.

Within 24 hours of the official announcement that the management had approved the agency's first Christian employee association, the Christian Fellowship Group, she received over 200 calls and e-mails from employees wanting to participate. At first, many of the callers were asking her if it was really true that they could have a Bible at their desk and gather in a conference room at lunch for Bible studies. She found that there were employees who were actually going to the basement to read their Bibles during their lunch hours so that no one would say anything to them!

Today, however, there has been a major change. Christians and non-Christians stop by her office to ask her to pray for them or their family members. Christians contact her about how to handle a workplace problem from a biblical perspective. God is moving throughout her workplace. Today the group membership is approaching 400 people, with eight standing committees and an executive committee, and coordinators and Bible studies at many CDC locations across the country. Stories similar to Angie's have been surfacing at a rapid pace in the past five years.

An Overview of the Faith at Work Movement

Many leaders involved in reaching the 9 to 5 Window refer to this move of God as the Faith at Work movement. The secular media has been one of the first to recognize its impact.

In November 1999, *Business Week* reported that five years ago, only one conference on spirituality in the workplace could be identified; now there are hundreds. The article also reported that there are more than 10,000 Bible studies and prayer groups in workplaces that meet regularly.² Two years later, *Fortune* affirmed the existence of the movement in a cover story titled "God and Business," reporting the marketplace presence of "a mostly unorganized mass of believers—a counterculture bubbling up all over corporate America—who want to bridge the traditional divide between spirituality and work." The article went on to say:

Historically, such folk operated below the radar, on their own or in small workplace groups where they prayed or studied the Bible. But now they are getting organized and going public to agitate for change. People who want to mix God and business are rebels on several fronts. They reject the centuries-old American conviction that spirituality is a private matter. They challenge religious thinkers who disdain business as an inherently impure pursuit. They disagree with business people who say that religion is unavoidably divisive.³

In 2004 and 2005, major secular media also did stories on the trend. On October 31, 2004, the *New York Times Magazine* featured a cover story on Christianity in the workplace entitled "With God at Our Desks." The article stated:

The idea is that Christians have for too long practiced their faith on Sundays and left it behind during the workweek, and that there is a moral vacuum in the modern workplace, which leads to backstabbing careerism, empty routines for employees and CEO's who push for profits at the expense of society, the environment and their fellow human beings.⁴

This story came out just days before George W. Bush was re-elected as president with the largest popular vote ever. This presidential race revealed that the key issue for voters was not the war in Iraq, the economy or healthcare. The defining issue was morals and values.

Subsequent features have appeared in the *London Times*, *Boston Globe*, CBS morning news, the BBC, *Atlanta Journal*, CNN, National Public Radio, *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Charlotte Observer*, to name just a few. On March 31, 2005, CNBC aired a one-hour story on faith at work. The international media has also taken note with stories or features appearing in major media in Hong Kong, Germany, England and France.

In the wake of these articles and features, the Christian media has also highlighted the Faith at Work movement, with stories appearing in *New Man Magazine*, *Charisma*, *Christianity Today* and *Decision* magazine. Christian leaders are also acknowledging the trend. Henry Blackaby, author of *Experiencing God*, meets regularly with CEOs of Fortune 500 companies to discuss what it means to

bring Christ into a corporate environment. He observes, "*I've never seen the activity of God this deeply in the business community as I do right now.*"⁵

Kent Humphreys, a business owner and president of Fellowship of Companies for Christ, a ministry devoted to serving executives and CEOs, wholeheartedly agrees with such assessments. "Leaders in the workplace from every part of the country are experiencing a hunger to be involved and they're searching the web to find those who are of like heart. Those who are a little further along in the movement understand the principle, but are now more anxious for training and practical helps of what it looks like in their workplace."

The Faith at Work movement is not just an American phenomenon, nor is it only happening among business executives. Brenda deCharmoy, the business consultant from South Africa mentioned in chapter 2, remarks: "I am beginning to see more and more people and churches becoming aware that the workplace is a key area for God and we should give it more attention. I think the tide has built quite a lot this last year. There is more questioning by workplace people of the issue of God in their 9 to 5 time. I also see more leaders realizing that going to church and leaving God behind does not work in the end."

One subscriber to my daily e-mail devotional, *TGIF, Today God Is First*, summed it up well: "I never really considered my secular work as a ministry until I read your (devotional) . . . now I feel I have as much a ministry as my pastor. I simply have a different mission field." People are hungry to know how to effectively integrate their faith life with their work life, and they are energized by the call.

Let's look more closely at this emerging mission field we call the 9 to 5 Window, which in several strategic ways is growing larger each day.

The Movement in Major Companies

Larry Julian, business consultant and author of *God Is My CEO* (which has sold more than 100,000 copies), says he finds an incredible receptivity in secular corporations to hear what he has to say. "I am seeking more ways to bring my Christian faith into the corporate world where I have spent much of my life. There is an openness that has not been there before."

This openness is partially evidenced by the number of Christian affinity groups that have been birthed in companies within the last five years. The Coca-Cola Christian Fellowship was formed by Steve Hyland in 2002, with 275 people attending the first meeting at their world headquarters. The mission of the fellowship is "to bring together a community of Christians to support each other and the Coca-Cola Company's values and goals, and to achieve balance by integrating their Christian faith at work." This is accomplished through weekly prayer meetings and Bible studies and by providing help to those in need. After a hurricane in Jamaica, the

Coca-Cola Christian Fellowship gathered over 90 boxes of clothing to send to the island country, and the company paid for the freight to ship them.

The Toyota Christian Fellowship, located in two major plants in Kentucky, started in 2003. A group at Continental Airlines began in 1996 with two people who began to meet for prayer over lunch. Today, the group has more than 450 members. Similar groups have been established at AOL, American Airlines, Intel, Texas Instruments and Sears. The Christian fellowship at Sears even has its own choir and has produced a professionally recorded CD, which was underwritten by the company.

One notable feature of this movement in major companies is that there tends to be more unity among believers in the workplace than in local churches. Divisive denominational issues pale in comparison to the common challenge the employees of these companies face in living out their faith at work.

The Movement in Academia

Today, nearly 100 Christian colleges offer business programs that are designed to teach the next generation what it means to lead and manage a business from a biblical perspective. Moreover, the Christian Business Faculty Association has grown from its humble beginnings in 1980 to boast more than 400 members and its own academic journal, the *Journal of Biblical Integration in Business*. But the academic movement is not limited just to Christian schools. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship has launched or supported Christian fellowships in dozens of the best secular business schools in the world, including Harvard, Duke, Columbia, Dartmouth, MIT, Michigan, Northwestern, Chicago, Wharton, Virginia, Yale and the London School of Business.

The Movement in Publishing

Whenever there is a move of God, people write about it, and the Faith at Work movement is no exception. Pete Hammond, author of the *Marketplace Annotated Bibliography*, states that *by 2000 there were approximately 350 titles published about the faith-workplace connection, with the first books published in the 1930s. By early 2005, there were over 2000 titles by Christians about the faith-workplace connection, some focusing on leadership and management and other speaking to issues faced by all Christian workers. Since that time this trend has only increased, with more and more publishers entering this category.*

In recent years, magazines for Christians who want to understand how to live their faith at work have been launched. Among them are *Life@Work*, *The Christian Businessman* (both now out of publication), *Business Reform* and the *Regent Business Review*. In addition, a plethora of websites and email newsletters have been spawned, adding more fuel to the movement.

The Movement in Ministries

The International Coalition of Workplace Ministries (ICWM), Scruples.net, and the Coalition for Ministry in Daily Life are three ministries that all serve the Faith at Work movement and track its growth. In 2004, Yale University established the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, which sponsors ongoing programs, fixed-term projects and short-term initiatives dedicated to understanding and revitalizing the ways in which religious commitments interact with culture and shape people's lives.

Fourteen years ago, I could identify only 25 to 50 national or international non-profit workplace ministries; today there are more than 900. In 2004, an International Faith and Work Directory featured more than 1,400 listings of ministries, businesses and churches that have a focus on integrating faith and work.

Among these proliferating ministries, some of the larger ones are the Christian Business Men's Committee, the International Christian Chamber of Commerce, Businessmen's Fellowship International, Fellowship of Companies for Christ International, the C12 Group and the Christian Management Association (CMA). Indicative of the experience of many of these ministries, growth in CMA has accelerated from a handful of members in 1976 to today over 3,500 CEOs, business owners, middle managers, pastors and church administrators representing more than 1,500 organizations, businesses and churches.

Whereas these larger ministries seek to provide a full-service training and fellowship experience to members, many other Faith at Work ministries are primarily event driven, usually offering prayer breakfasts, a speaker series or Bible studies. A typical representative is Bill Leonard, a real estate executive in Atlanta, who decided to reach out to the hi-tech community by sponsoring a once-a-year "High Tech Prayer Breakfast." Every October, leaders in the high-tech community come to hear an inspirational talk that usually includes a salvation message integrated into it. Table sponsors bring business associates as a means of introducing seekers to Christ. In 2004, more than 1,500 people attended the event. The High Tech Prayer Breakfast has spawned other such events in the real estate and financial services industries.

The Movement in the Local Church

Several years ago, George Barna and Mark Hatch made the assessment that *"workplace ministry will be one of the core future innovations in church ministry."*⁶ Though this is now beginning to be realized, Doug Sherman, co-author of *Your Work Matters to God*, cautions that the local church has been slow to embrace this message. He states, *"Our surveys reveal that 90 to 97 percent of Christians have never been trained to apply biblical faith to their work life."*⁷

I can vouch for those statistics. Whenever I ask a church group if they have been intentionally trained to apply biblical faith in the context of their work life, I rarely get more than a few raised hands. However, there are some positive signs that this might be changing. Dr. Bill Hamon is president of Christian International Business Network (CIBN), a division of Christian International, which is a church-based

ministry with a goal of raising up a "company of prophetic apostolic business people," according to the ministry's vision statement. CIBN has one of the most developed networks for church-based workplace ministries in the United States, as well as abroad.

Doug Spada's California-based His Church at Work ministry is one of the newest pioneering efforts to equip the local church to focus on faith at work issues. Spada's ministry does this by creating the infrastructure for a sustainable work-life ministry. His ultimate vision is that churches will send out members to minister in the workplace, just as missionaries are sent out to foreign lands. "We help people launch full-blown ministries within their church," Spada explains. "This isn't, 'Hey, let's meet for breakfast.' This is more of an embedded ministry which makes it part of the DNA of the local church." Beyond that vision, Spada says there's a broader reason for the local church to be creating work-life ministries. "Spiritual renewal movements, particularly in Western culture, are almost always birthed and driven by all segments of a working society, not just the leaders."

Karen Jones, director of workplace ministry at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, agrees. "I believe it is a move of God. I believe it's cutting edge-the next mission field." Southeast Christian Church launched its workplace ministry two years ago based on Spada's model, and Jones says her initial goal is to involve at least half of the church's 20,000 members. "Statistics say that each person has a sphere of influence of about 25," she comments. "So we could be influencing 250,000 people a week very quickly if people understood that their workplace was a mission field." The impact in the community could be tremendous.

The 5,000-member Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, is another church that has adopted Spada's process. Geoff Bohleen, outreach pastor for Wooddale, says workplace ministry allows his church to reach out to the people that they would never reach otherwise. "There's no way our pastoral staff is going to get into all those offices-but our people are already there," he explains. "Our pastoral staff is limited in terms of the connections, the relationships and the friendships we can have with people who need Christ. However, we've got 'Wooddalers' all over the place."

A Catalyst for Revival

*In his book *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, Dallas Willard notes, "There is truly no division between sacred and secular except what we have created. And that is why the division of the legitimate roles and functions of human life into the sacred and secular does incalculable damage to our individual lives and the cause of Christ. Holy people must stop going into 'church work' as their natural course of action and take up holy orders in farming, industry, law, education, banking, and journalism with the same zeal previously given to evangelism or to pastoral and missionary work."⁸*

That message is getting through as the Faith at Work movement sweeps across the land, and the potential is great for it to effect genuine revival across the culture. Dr. Peter Wagner, noted church growth expert and former professor at Fuller

Theological Seminary, also foresees this revival. In *The Faith@Work Movement*, Dr. Wagner notes, "I believe the workplace movement has the potential to impact society as much as the Reformation did. I have read 84 books on this movement and have 54 pages of handwritten notes. It is what the Spirit is saying to the churches today."⁹ Below is a list of what I believe we can expect to see in the next five years as a result of God's move among believers in the workplace:

- Intentional training along with practical application in the local church to help men and women understand that their work is a ministry, along with practical application
- Churches that equip and support Christians in their workplace callings
- A movement similar to Promise Keepers, with major events around the Faith at Work theme
- The integration of the Faith at Work message into the focus of the men's movement
- A more proactive acceptance of Faith at Work issues on the part of corporations
- Prayer making more of an impact in the workplace
- The transformation of cities, as those in authority become more active and passionate about their faith where they work
- A greater expression of faith in government agencies, the entertainment industry, educational institutions and corporate workplace
- A greater number of people coming to Christ as major ministries embrace this move of God and integrate it into their operations
- An increased number of miracles in the marketplace because of Christians who are willing to move into arenas that the religious leaders have believed were taboo
- Influential roles for pastors, who, although often last to embrace the movement, will find it to be the breakthrough they have been seeking

In other words, there is a revival coming; a revival that is returning us to our roots to understand what the Early Church understood-that work is a holy calling in which God moves to transform lives, cities and nations.

Indeed, we live in historic times. Using our collective influence in companies, ministries, colleges, the media and the local church, God has suddenly and providentially begun reaching the 9 to 5 Window. Let us not miss our opportunity to be part of this movement.

How About You?

1. Can you see the move of God in your workplace? Cite three areas where you have seen the activity of God in the workplace in recent years.
2. List three ways you might be able to start making a positive Christian impact in your workplace.

End Notes

1. Parts of this chapter have been adapted from Os Hillman, "The Faith at Work Movement: Opening the 'Nine to Five' Window," *Regent Business*

- Review. <http://www.regent.edu/acad/schbus/maz/busreview/issue9/faithatwork.html> (accessed March 2005). Copyright 2003. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
2. Michelle Conlin, "Religion in the Workplace," *Business Week*, November 1999.
 3. Marc Gunther, "God and Business," *Fortune*, July 2001, p. 59.
 4. Russell Shorto, "With God at Our Desks," *New York Times Magazine*, October 31, 2004, p. 42.
 5. Michael Ireland, "Experiencing God Author Sees Hope for Revival Among Businessmen," <http://www.crosswalk.com/525158.html> (accessed April 2005).
 6. George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point: Monitoring Cultural Shifts in the 21st Century* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), p. 253.
 7. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Thank God It's Monday* radio program (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 2000).
 8. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), p. 214.
 9. C. Peter Wagner, quoted in Os Hillman, *The Faith@Work Movement: What Every Pastor and Church Leader Should Know* (Atlanta, GA: Aslan Group Publishing, 2004), n.p.