

# Faith at Work

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### **Being Ambitious**

#### **Excel Still More 1 Thessalonians 3; 4**

Three times in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica Paul urges his readers to excel still more. They were already doing well but there were some areas in which they could do better. Paul was encouraged by the way these young Christians were growing, he had received a report from Timothy that they were continuing in their faith and had expressed their love and concern for him and his companions. They were standing firm, resisting temptation and were genuine in their commitment – but there was still room for growth. The first area Paul suggests that they should strive to excel in is in relation to their love for one another. He goes further than this, the love that they have for one another should extend to all men (and women). It is comparatively easy to show love to those we like or get on with, but to love all people, even those that are sometimes objectionable and even offensive? In this context Paul is reminding the Thessalonian Christians that they were not to confine their affections to those in the church but to extend them to those who were not part of their fellowship. If we are to reach people with the good news of Jesus Christ we must love them in the same way that Paul loved those he led to faith in Thessalonica and that Jesus showed when he gave up his life for us all.

Secondly Paul urges these young believers to excel in their personal lives. In particular they were to be pure in their behaviour, especially when it came to their sexual relationships. At the center of the need for constraint in the area of sex Paul points out the need not to defraud a brother. To take something that belongs to another is fraud, it is inconsistent with any notion of the expression of love. The attitude of the community in which this church lived was casual in regard to sexual relationships. It is evident that it was common for lust to be given fairly free reign and fidelity in marriage was not held in high esteem. As a consequence Paul reminds these believers that their behaviour was to be different, it was not appropriate to pursue relationships with another man's wife or to commit adultery. Our own generation is very casual in its attitude to sex. It is no longer expected that sexual relationships will be confined to marriage or that a marriage will be of lifetime duration. In the midst of these lax moral views Christians are called to be different, to be pure and wholeheartedly committed to their own marriage. They are to excel in their marriages so that they may not reject the Holy Spirit that God has given to them.

The third area in which these Christians was to excel is in business! The reason that they needed to excel in their work life was so that they could behave properly toward outsiders. When Paul uses this term he is referring to those who are not Christians, their salvation is always at the forefront of Paul's thinking. The way we conduct ourselves at work and in business is essential to the way we communicate the good news of Jesus Christ. In fact it is only as we work hard that we are able to conduct ourselves properly toward those outside of the church.

Our work is not just something we do to earn money, or the way we occupy ourselves between bible studies and church meetings. It is the primary way we demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ to those outside of the church. Paul calls us to strive to excel in the area of business and work. We are to demonstrate to the whole world that our work is important to God and we are to commit ourselves wholeheartedly in to excelling in the way we work and do business. It is as we excel still more in our relationships, marriages and work that we make known the good news of Jesus to those outside of the household of faith.

## Faith at Work

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### Make It Your Ambition **1 Thessalonians 4:11-12**

Three times in Scripture Paul talks about ambition. In Romans 15:20 he writes that it had been his ambition to preach the gospel, not where someone else had preached but in new fields, to people who had never heard the gospel before. In 2 Corinthians 5:9 he declares that it has always been his ambition, in whatever he did to be pleasing to God and now in 1 Thessalonians 4 he urges his readers to make it their ambition to mind their own business and to work hard with their hands so that they would be able to behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

We can well understand the first two of Paul's ambitions because they involve the spiritual aspects of life. Surely it is reasonable to be ambitious to reach the lost with the gospel and every Christian should obviously do their very best to please God in whatever they do. But to make work an ambition? Surely this is worldly, a desire that belongs to unregenerate life. Not so, Paul makes it clear that it is his desire that the Christians to whom he writes should strive to be successful at work.

The word that is translated 'ambition' in many of our Bibles comes from the compound Greek word meaning to love honour. In other words Paul is suggesting that his readers should deliberately seek to receive honour from people, and from God, they were to be ambitious and successful. There is a tendency among some Christians to assume that success is somehow unspiritual, that it is wrong to be recognized as an achiever in our chosen and God given fields of endeavour. Nothing is further from the truth. God does not delight in failure; in fact many times in the Scripture he gives instruction on what must be done in order to succeed. It is suggested by some that we should seek success in spiritual concerns such as soul winning, answers to prayer, even preaching but we should remain silent about our achievements in the business world. Somehow or other our work is unspiritual, unfortunately this idea reflects a total misunderstanding of ministry and the opinion that God has of the work we do.

All of the things we engage in should be expressions of worship, our activity at church, the songs we sing and the prayers we offer, but also how we spend our recreation and the business we conduct each day of the week. Most believers will spend far more hours at work than they ever will at church, and it would be unreasonable to presume that God is not interested in the way we spend the majority of our time. He is not only interested, he wants to see us succeed, and in fact he wants to work alongside us so that we will succeed.

The ambition that Paul speaks of however does not draw attention to itself. We are not to be ambitious for glory and so even in our success we do not promote ourselves but instead point to the one who gives that success. It is as we remain in right relationship with God that we can not only expect to succeed in all of our endeavours but we can also be sure that the focus remains on God. It is not wrong to succeed – God expects it. Christians are not called to be mediocre; they are to be ambitious to do well. They should exert every effort to succeed in their God given fields of service. It is not only reasonable but right that we receive the respect that comes from others when they see that we have been diligent to apply ourselves and gain the profits and rewards that come from hard work and integrity. Paul says to excel still more as we make it our ambition to mind our business, to work hard and therefore conduct ourselves properly toward outsiders. How ambitious are you? Are you working with God to ensure that you do succeed in the things you commit to?

### A Quiet Life **2 Thessalonians 3:11-13**

The first thing we are to be ambitious to do is live a quiet life. These two things seem to be in conflict with one another. Most ambitious people are far from quiet, they like to make sure that other people are aware of their achievements – they want to draw attention to themselves. But we are to make it our ambition to live a quiet life.

Success and self promotion are not the same thing. Many very successful people are known for their humility, they are self effacing often pointing out the achievements of others while minimizing their own. While the brash, in your face, cocky self-promoters are seldom appreciated and often find that their success is short lived and may even be tinged with controversy. Tragically this equally applies to some prominent church figures. Preachers who draw a crowd because of their personality, making promises of success that almost suggest that God is at their beck and call. These men and women cannot be said to be living a quiet life, they love the limelight and the attention. When the ministry succeeds it is because of their talent, hard work, or gifts and God seldom receives the glory. Of course this is a bleak picture that paints an extreme but these figures do exist and we have all seen them. But given that all of us are called to ministry and that ministry is where we spend the majority of our time, the workplace, those same excesses we deplore in preachers and other figures of prominence in the church should equally be deplored in the workplace or on the sporting field.

There is some sort of paradox that suggests that it is right and proper to pursue work choices and careers that provide greater material benefits and badges of success while this same attitude is condemned among pastors and church leaders. I am not suggesting that pastors should accept a call to a church on the basis of the financial package they might receive or see a move to another church as a promotion, but if we are to extend the notion of ministry to activities outside of the pulpit, as we should, then shouldn't the values we find reasonable in the market place be equally reasonable in the pulpit? Rather than condemn pastors for having a worldly or mercenary attitude to their roles, perhaps we, in the marketplace should adopt the notion that we are called to our workplace, it is our place of ministry – it is a divine calling whose success is not determined by the salary package or retirement benefit we receive.

We are exhorted to live a quiet life, a life that does not draw attention to itself; one that is at peace, a life that is at rest and content with its lot. We must not confuse ambition to succeed with discontentment. Paul wrote that even though he had experienced hunger, deprivation, imprisonment and other sufferings he had learned to be content. He also experienced success. He established churches, spread the gospel into uncharted lands, preached before religious leaders, performed miracles and witnessed the salvation of many and was one of the pre-eminent religious leaders of his day. In all of these things he says that he had learned to be content, but his ambition remained. He pressed on for the prize that was to be given to him at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's life was one of constant activity, even when chained to a soldier or locked in a prison cell he remained active, he wrote and prayed, preached and taught. Yet he remained humble, he was self conscious about his appearance before other people and the effect he might have on them. He didn't promote himself, he was conscious of the authority and calling he had but he did not draw attention to himself or seek any credit.

We are to be ambitious to succeed but also to live a quiet life, to be content with our lot convinced that if we work hard and remain in relationship with God, success will take care of itself.

### Minding Your Own Business **1 Corinthians 3:6-15**

How easy is it to be more concerned with what everybody else does than our own business? It is much easier to point out the weaknesses in others and their own lack of success than to honestly evaluate our own performance. But Paul exhorts us to be ambitious to mind our own business. We are to make a determined effort not to get caught up in affairs that don't concern us.

In his second letter to the Thessalonians Paul expresses concern that he had heard that some of their number were acting as busybodies, not working but living undisciplined lives. These people were told to get to work and eat their own bread. They were to mind their own business. When he wrote to Timothy, Paul singled out young widows as those who could learn to become idle, going from house to house as gossips and busybodies. They get this way because they do not have anything to occupy themselves with. His expectation was that these young widows should remarry and keep house! While such a suggestion today would probably get the militant feminists among us up in arms, in the context of the day it was not usual for women to pursue careers and the norm was for them to be fully engaged managing their own home. For married women their primary ministry was managing a good home. This was not some activity that was accepted merely out of necessity but because it was a high calling that God had placed on their lives.

In whatever vocation we find ourselves there are times of drudgery and boredom. Not everything we do is exciting or challenging. This is not only true for the vocation of housework, but for that of teaching, gardening, machine operating or banking. It is often in those times when we are carrying out repetitive tasks that don't require our full attention that our mind wanders into other people's areas of concern. Rather than just concentrating on the job at hand we start wondering about what others are doing, sometimes those thoughts become negative and even detrimental. If we are not fully occupied in our work the temptation to engage in conversation with others, or to meddle in their affairs increases and unfortunately, for most of us we eventually give in. The protection we have is to be fully occupied. Not only does this give us a defense against the temptation to be a busybody it will also gain for us a reputation for hard work, diligence and industry.

Paul was quite specific about our attitude toward busybodies – we are to take special note of them and then to refuse to associate with them. However we are not to treat them as enemies, but by our attitude to convince them of their folly (2 Thessalonians 3:11-15). How easy is it for us to fall into the trap of engaging with those who are idle? Whether it is over the water cooler, the telephone or the office desk it is easy to get into a conversation that starts OK but ends up somewhere else. A few minutes turns into a lengthy chat and our work suffers because of it. Too often Christians are criticized at work because they talk too much about their faith or their church and while we should always want to take the opportunity to share the good news, when we are at work our time belongs to the person who employs us.

If our ambition is to mind our own business we will need to make a determined effort. It won't happen by accident and the devil will take every opportunity to throw barriers and temptations in our way. When the two-minute chat threatens to turn into a lengthy conversation, move away. When the office gossip approaches your desk, get busy or move away. Learn how to finish 'phone calls and discourage the person who loves to waffle about things that are really of no importance when you and they should be more profitably employed. Make it your ambition to earn a reputation for discretion, hard work and industry and in this way you will behave properly toward outsiders.



# Faith at Work

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## Work With Your Hands **Acts 18:1-3**

When Paul writes that we should work with our hands is he suggesting we should all aspire to manual labour? Even though there is some undoubted benefit in doing creative things with our hands and exerting ourselves physically I do not think this is what he meant. His emphasis is that we should provide for ourselves and not depend on others for our daily needs.

Paul was trained as a theologian but also as a tentmaker. In Acts 18 we read that he stayed with Aquila and Priscilla and worked together with them because they were all tentmakers. This was their occupation not just some handy work they were employed in, at some point in Paul's life he must have received training in this particular trade. There were many times when Paul was not working at his trade, he traveled the world as an itinerant missionary and was often supported by those he ministered to, but on the occasion he was in Corinth he went back to practicing his art. At other times Paul writes that rather than be a burden on the young churches he had established he and his companions supported themselves, they were entitled to support but they chose not to meet their own needs.

Preaching, teaching and pastoring are all legitimate occupations and Paul makes it abundantly clear that those who engage in these activities are entitled to be remunerated. To be a teacher or pastor is a high calling and of no less value than any other occupation, but it is no more important as a ministry than any other either! All vocations are equally valuable, they are all places of ministry and it is hoped places that God has called men and women into rather than just some job they do. Sometimes however the fact that something is lawful or legitimate does not mean that we have the right to claim it. Paul could legitimately call on the churches he had established to fund his missionary endeavours, but he chose not too. Rather than impose a cost on them that would have been difficult for them to bear, he chose to find employment in an occupation he was trained in to pay his own way. In doing this he also made it possible for these young churches to use their money in other ways to alleviate the needs of the poor or spread the gospel.

The point that Paul was making is that it is important to work hard at whatever vocation we are called to. It may be that over time we will be expected to do things that seem a little outside what we would normally do, perhaps you feel absolutely called to full-time pulpit or pastoral ministry and yet you have to work at something else in order to pay the bills. If this is so, then God's command is to work hard at whatever it is you are called to do and accept it as a ministry that he has called you to. At other times you may be convinced that the job you are doing is the one that all of your life's events have led to. It is the result of your education and training, the courses you have done and the disciplines you have exercised. If this is so, then take it as God's call on your life and his ministry for you. Work hard and expect to succeed and then use the benefits you receive to assist others and to spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

While I am sure that Paul did not see tent making as God's primary call on his life I am equally sure that the tents he made were good tents. I am confident that when he put his mind to completing his trade he was fully committed. He did not just see this as a means to earn a living but an opportunity to use his skills in the marketplace to bear testimony to his faith in Christ. Whatever workplace you find yourself in right now accept as God's choice for you until he tells you differently. Until that happens work hard at what you do as though you are working for God not for man and then you can be sure that he will give you the opportunity for higher honour.

### Behaving Properly Toward Outsiders **Colossians 4:5**

The reason Paul gives for why we should live quiet lives, avoid being busybodies and work hard with our hands is so that we can act properly toward outsiders. He sees a real connection between how we conduct ourselves at work and the way we will be received by those outside of the church. Too often we, as Christians, fail to take our work importantly as if it doesn't matter how well we do in the workplace as long as we turn up to church on Sunday's and 'worship' the right way. Paul sees it differently.

Most of us will have far more contact and opportunities to share the good news at work than in any other place. This is where we connect with non-believers and spend most of our waking hours. It is unlikely that our testimony will have much credibility however, if we have a reputation for laziness or are lax in our attitude to work. Christians must aspire to being known as hard working employees, fair and just employers and honest buyers and sellers in the market place. We will only achieve this as we mind our own business and live quiet and unpretentious lives.

In his letter to the church at Colossae Paul wrote that his readers should be wise in the way they acted toward outsiders, making the best use of their time and every opportunity. In particular he points to matters of speech, we are to let our words be seasoned with salt so that we will know how to respond to everybody. Acting wisely toward those outside of the church is very important. If we expect to reach people with the good news we must be credible, the message must be reflected in the way we live. As Christians we often emphasise the need to do the right thing and this often reflects in those activities we choose not to get involved in. Over the years Christians have been more known for what they are against than what they are for and as a consequence they are caricaturized as non-drinking, non-smoking, non-gambling, non-swearing, non-dancing wowsers who think all enjoyment is sinful. While many of the values Christians do hold can be Biblically supported, the shame is that they hold them while having a less than ideal attitude to their work and involvement in the community in which they live. It is not my intention to comment on the rightness or otherwise of these Christian taboos, but simply to point out that it is disappointing that the reputation we have is not one that is positive but almost entirely negative. Where is the caricature of the hard working, industrious men and women of integrity that live quiet lives, refusing to gossip and meddle in other people's affairs? Where are the people who insist on employing Christians because they know they will always turn up on time and work hard while they are there, always paying their bills promptly and never overcharging?

Make no mistake your work matters. It matters to God and also to those who are not Christians. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work hard with your hands, and then you will act properly toward outsiders. Then you will be able to make the most of every opportunity and people will want to listen to what you have to say because you have earned the right to speak. Your primary place of ministry is your place of work; it is where God wants you to be, it is what he has prepared you for and why he has given you the gifts, talents and abilities he has. Now all you need to do is add to those God given resources the desire to work hard and succeed and the attitude to please him in all that you do.

Is the way you work pleasing to God? Does it open up doors of opportunity for the gospel to be proclaimed? Make these things your ambition and trust God to make the way open for you.



### Not Be In Any Need **Acts 20:33-36**

A consequence of working hard is to be free from need. While God expects that those with the capacity to do so should help those in need he also wants us that can to provide for ourselves, not only so that we won't be in need but so that we can contribute to the relief of others who are less fortunate than us.

The profit motive is a powerful reason to work. No one goes into business with the intention of losing money (apart from those who are manipulating the tax system), and very few, if any, would put in the hours they do without the desire to make a profit. There is nothing wrong with being successful, and to be successful in business almost inevitably means making money. Most of the great men and women of the Old Testament were financially successful, but unfortunately many of them also came to grief because of their wealth. As an example Abraham and Lot separated because their possessions were too great for them to live together. There is a significant difference between not being in need and not being in want and the balance between the two is not easy to find.

In the early church there were those who were in need, but also some who had more than was necessary for their own requirements. The consequence was that those that had an abundance made available to the needy the resources required to alleviate the need. The Bible says that because of this there was not a needy person among them (Acts 4:34). The great tragedy was that even in this atmosphere of generosity there were those that tried to gain for themselves a reputation by the way they used their wealth. Paul makes it clear that his attitude towards wealth was simply that it was a means to an end. By earning money he did not become a burden on others, he was not in any need. Of course we know from the biblical record that there were many times that Paul suffered hunger and personal loss and his idea of his needs being met were probably quite different to many of our own.

Paul was able to write that by working hard he could be an example of how others could contribute to the needs of the weak. As we make it our ambition to work hard and succeed in our vocation we will inevitably reap financial rewards, but as it has been said before if God gives you a million dollar salary it is not so you can have a million dollar lifestyle. It is quite clear from Deuteronomy 8:18 that it is God who will ultimately determine whether or not you will be financially successful, your power, talent and ability come from him. When we make our success a source of pride we are headed for a fall. God chooses to give some the capacity to earn great wealth and to others he gives the capacity to succeed with less. Unfortunately because we live in a world where sin is dominant and men and women generally do not equally share the benefits and blessings God has given to them, there are those in our community, and even in our churches who are in great need. It is as we make it our ambition to live quiet lives, to mind our own business and work hard that we are able not only to act properly toward outsiders but we can help those who are in need as well.

The example of the early church is one we should want to copy. What a marvelous testimony to God's grace it would be if it could be said of the modern church that with 'great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them'. The members of this church understood that wealth was given to some so that all could benefit. Ask God to give you the ability to see that the success he gives you is a testimony to the trust he places in you to use his resources wisely.

### **Ready for Work**

Made Ready For Work    **Ephesians 2:10**

For many years whenever I read Ephesians 2:10 I immediately connected the idea of good works with those ‘spiritual’ activities that were done in connection with the church and its program. They obviously included feeding the hungry, healing the sick, visiting prisoners and so on. While there is no question that these are very definitely good works, are they the only works God prepared for us to walk in?

Paul describes these works as ‘good’, that is to say they are morally or physically benevolent. In Colossians 1:10 he tells us that we are to bear fruit in every good work. Assuming that the activities we involve ourselves in are not, by their nature, evil or else intended to bring some disadvantage to somebody or offence to God, they are good works. The question that remains is whether these activities are those that God, before the foundation of the world, prepared for us to walk in. To walk in something suggests that we are engaged in a particular activity over a reasonable period of time, there is a sense of continuity and purpose in our actions. It does not give the impression of infrequent, casual activity but rather a long-term, determined course of action or behaviour. So whatever the works are that God has prepared, they are something that should occupy a significant part of our time and energy. Obviously these works are significant, because God prepared them even before we were saved, they are not trivial or valueless. Most importantly God prepared them and he intends that we walk in them.

The activities that occupy most of the time for those in business or the workplace are of course their employment. Most of our life leads us to the job we have, whether it be our schooling, training, natural inclination or abilities. As we look back on our lives, quite often we can see the various things that have prepared us for things we are doing now. Of course this is not always so and some of us can be found in jobs that are just fill-ins, or a means of providing money so that we can do the things we want to. But if we are involved in meaningful employment it is usually because of the circumstances of our life and the choices we make. God has not only prepared good works for you to walk in, but he has also moulded and enabled you so that you can do so adequately.

There sometimes seems an implication that work is, if not actually evil, merely a necessity to meet the needs of life that occupies our time before the more meaningful activity of church affairs. Spiritual work is done at church; our jobs and places of employment are secular. This is nowhere taught in Scripture, while mankind was forced to live a life of work and toil because of his disobedience to God, work itself was never considered to be evil. In fact we see that on the 6 days of creation God worked, and then he rested. He insisted that his people should work 6 days and then rest on the seventh. Work is God’s idea; he planned it and intended that his sons and daughters should engage in it.

What then are the good works that God has prepared for you to walk in? Do you believe that the job you are now doing is the one God prepared for you? Is it the one that all of your training, education and circumstances has shaped you for? Or are you just filling in time until something more spiritual comes along? Unless you are sure that the job you are doing is not the one God wants you to do, in which case you shouldn’t be there anyway, assume that it is God’s choice and commit yourself to bearing fruit in these good works.

### A Calling or Just a Job? **Acts 18:1-4**

Is the job you are in a ministry, a calling – or is it just a way to make money to pay the bills? Have you ever thought about your job in terms of it being God's chosen place of ministry for you? If you haven't now would be a good time to start. God has prepared and equipped you to glorify him in the work that he has provided for you, but sometimes we are less than sure that the place where we work is where God wants us to be. How can we know that we are in the place of God's chosen appointment?

In the first place it is really important to think of your work as your ministry, not just the place of your ministry. Sometimes we get the idea that the workplace just provides the context for us to do spiritual things like witness and pray. But we don't always see the work itself as being a spiritual undertaking. We must start to see work itself as something that God takes pleasure in and is therefore a means by which we may worship him. Whether you are a carpenter, a nurse, an engineer or a salesperson God is interested in what you do and he is pleased when you do a good job. Secondly it may be appropriate to ask yourself whether or not you prayed about your career choice, or whether you actively sought God's counsel and felt a sense of call to the place you work. After all we expect our missionaries and pastors to be 'called' to their ministry so why shouldn't you?

It may be that you have a sense of calling to be a teacher, or pastor, evangelist or some other type of 'full time' ministry, but you need to work in order to pay the bills. Paul found himself in this position when he engaged in the trade of tent making. It is unlikely that he saw this as God's primary call on his life but circumstance made it necessary or desirable for him to take on this work. What then about your work in these situations? I am sure the quality of Paul's tents was beyond reproach, I am equally sure that he didn't overcharge his customers or cheat his suppliers. I am quite certain that everything he did in his place of work was with a mind to glorifying God and acting properly toward outsiders. This clearly is to be your attitude to your employment when you find yourself in need of finding work in order to support the ministry that God has called you to.

The Bible tells us that Peter left his nets to follow Jesus, while he did go back to fishing for a while, this was not God's calling on his life. Matthew stopped being a tax collector when he decided to follow Jesus, but there is no suggestion that Zacchaeus resigned from his business. In fact his encounter with Jesus caused him to start doing business in a Godly way. Erastus continued as the city treasurer while a follower of Paul and there is nothing to indicate that Lydia gave up her business interests after her conversion. On the other hand there were others who were dependent upon the church for their financial support. The issue here is not whether the type of work you are doing is spiritual or not, in fact all work is, for the believer, spiritual, but whether or not it is God's idea for you to be in that place of work.

Are you working in the place God wants you to be? Is this so that you can serve him in other ministry elsewhere or in addition to your work, or is it the primary place of service for you? Be clear in your mind about these things, it is not that your attitude to your work should change (unless it's out of sync with God's will now) but that your understanding of God's eternal purposes for your workplace and your part in it may need to be re-evaluated. If your work is your primary place of ministry, then it must be first priority in your service. Other legitimate activities, even church based activities, must not be allowed to encroach on the time and energy you give to your ministry. Remember this is not your job – it is your calling. It is the ministry that God has equipped and enabled you for.

### Signs Along The Way **Jeremiah 31:21**

What do we do when we are unsure that we are in the right place? What if we don't think our job is the one God has in mind for us, but we are not really sure? Is every job, no matter what, our ministry? These are all legitimate questions and most of us have faced them at one time or another – even those in the pastorate! For a number of years I was (what was called in the denomination I was part of) a pastoral carer. That meant that I was responsible for looking out for a number of other pastors, making sure that if they were struggling or facing difficulties it didn't go unnoticed. A good number of these pastors confided that they were unsure of whether they were really called to their ministry or if in fact they were in the right church. I confess that as a pastor I have faced similar doubts. What is true in the pulpit is also true in the pew. Many people are uncertain that the job that occupies so much of their time and energy is in fact the one that God has picked out for them.

There are a number of measures that can be taken to gain some sort of assurance that we are where God wants us to be. In the first place do the activities we engage in conflict with the what the Bible teaches? Are our values and morals compromised; are we able to be ethical and honest in all our dealings? Some occupations are clearly outside the will of God, the young women who has made her way through prostitution will certainly need to change her occupation, as will a stripper or seller of pornographic material – these are obvious, but some less so. What of your company sells tobacco products or alcohol? What if you are involved in part of the gambling industry such as horse racing? What if the news agency you own sells dubious materials? Some people will be quite clear in their opinions about these things while for others there will be uncertainty. The three obvious things to turn to are prayer, the bible and the counsel of Godly people. If these three line up then there is a clear indication of what is right to do. Sometimes however it remains for the inner conviction of the Holy Spirit to direct you in the way you should go.

If you become convinced that the job you are in is not where God wants you, or if you seem to be going through a succession of career choices that leave you unsatisfied it may be a time for some healthy reflection. What led you to make the decision you have about the job you are in? What were your circumstances at the time, how was your relationship with God? Was anything special happening in your life? What was your motivation? Jeremiah suggests we should set road marks on the road so that we will know the way we have come – what are the road marks in your life? What are the pivotal experiences that have caused you to make the choices you have? As you consider these things it may bring into perspective the reasons why you are where you are or why you feel unfulfilled. There is nothing more certain than if God has called you to a ministry, vocation or arena of service and you turned aside, you will remain unfulfilled until you put it right. Go back to the time you made the decision to work where you do and ask yourself whether you were being obedient to God. If you weren't then repent and ask God's forgiveness. He may then either give you a sense of fulfillment in your present job or provide the way to leave and this time when he tells you to do something, do it! On the other hand if you are convinced that you are where you are because it is where God wanted you, thank him for it, accept it as your ministry and until he moves you elsewhere work as hard as you can in the job you are in. Your job is not a life sentence, it may be that after a season God will move you to another field of ministry, be open to it, but don't push. Remember your workplace is a place of spiritual warfare, expect opposition but be confident of the victory. Frustration, dissatisfaction and boredom are tools of Satan to render you ineffective, don't become fooled into making wrong choices about your work – seek first the Kingdom of God and he will make your way plain.

### Gifts, Talents and Abilities **1 Corinthians 12:12:4-7**

Much is written and said about Spiritual gifts, the Bible clearly teaches that all Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling within them and that he gives each a special enabling for service. These gifts are described in various places in the Bible and no doubt these lists are not meant to be exhaustive but rather an indication of the range of the characteristics of God that are to be displayed by their use. One thing that is clear is that each person is given a manifestation of the Spirit. In common language a manifest is a document that discloses something that would normally be hidden from view, and in this sense the gifts of the Holy Spirit disclose those aspects of the character of God that would normally be hidden. How does this relate to the workplace?

The work of the Trinity in Spiritual gifts is that the Holy Spirit according to his choice distributes the gift, but the place of ministry where that gift is to be exercised is to be determined by the Lord Jesus Christ. Even then we cannot presume upon the effectiveness of that ministry; that is decided by God the Father. Each of us have received a gift, even though many are unaware of what gift they have, but what is our place of ministry? For many years it has been taught, or assumed, that the place to exercise your gift is the church. If the purpose of these gifts includes making known the invisible attributes of God to the world it would make no sense to confine their use to the church, one hopes that those inside already know God and have the means to understand him better. However those outside of the church do not have either that knowledge or the ability to discover for themselves. What better place than the work place is there for you to put God on display? And how better can you do it than by allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal him by the gifts he has given to you?

If you were to ask the average person in your work place what aspects of God's character they would most like to see it is probably not going to be preaching or teaching. They probably get enough of that already, but they may want to see mercy or love or compassion. They may have a need that requires healing or a problem that needs solving. Maybe your business needs a miracle or an employee a word of encouragement. These are the gifts God gives to his children and your place of ministry is where the Lord Jesus Christ has put you – for most of us, the workplace.

We should not confuse our gifts with our talents or abilities. You may have been trained and educated in administration but know that this is not the way God wants to supernaturally reveal himself through you. But this does not mean that you should not honour and glorify God in the way you administer. Perhaps you work as an engineer but God has supernaturally given you the gift of healing. While you glorify God in your engineering you will be constantly aware of the needs in the workplace that can be healed by an act of God's grace applied through you. If you have the gift of compassion you will probably notice the wounded and hurting gravitating to you with their pain, while at the same time you are making efficiencies as a cost accountant. Sometimes your gifts will be reflected in your career, perhaps the nurse has the gift of mercy, or the manager that of administration. Sometimes God will add the supernatural edge to your job, but at others there seems no obvious relationship between your work role and the gift you have. Whatever the gift you have, and you do have one; it is up to you discover what the place of ministry is that Jesus has prepared you for. Remember that he puts you there so that you can reveal his character and nature to those who would not otherwise see him. This is an awesome responsibility, but also a privilege, imagine how much more effective you could be if you and number of others all showed different aspects of God's character, so that his whole nature was revealed in your business?



### Work That Produces Fruit **Colossians 1:10**

God has prepared work for us to do, some of that work is acts of charity and mercy, and some so-called spiritual activities in and through the church and others are in the vocations and careers in which we are employed. I say so-called spiritual activities because all work that Christians engage in is spiritual. There is no distinction between secular and sacred for those who belong to the church. It is significant that in some non-Christian cultures all of life has some spiritual significance and yet we in the Christian church make a distinction between spiritual and secular activities as if God is not interested in the things we do outside of the church. We know of course this is not true. God expects that we bear fruit in the work that he has provided for us to do, but what is that fruit?

We know that the Bible speaks of fruit of the Spirit which is identified in Galatians 5:22 and consists of characteristics of life which glorify him. They include love, joy, peace and kindness. Elsewhere in Scripture Jesus tells his disciples that they are to bear fruit and so prove that they are in fact disciples. While the fruit spoken of here is no doubt consistent with the fruit of the Spirit it also has a stronger application, that of reproducing. The vine that Jesus speaks of in his analogy of bearing fruit needs that fruit to reproduce. The seed is contained in the fruit and unless this seed is formed no new plants will grow. God expects that we will set seed that will produce new life, new believers who have come to faith through our example and witness.

In the work that we do we should expect to bear the fruit of new life. Our witness and example should provide opportunities for us to share the good news of Jesus Christ with those we work with or for. Peter reminded his hearers that they should always be ready with an answer for the hope that is within them, this should be our example also. As people become curious about the reason why the fruit of the Spirit is evident in our lives they may be prompted to ask what it is that makes us tick. This is the opportunity you should be waiting for. God expects that we bear fruit, this is why he has prepared good works for us to walk in. We must be always on the alert for an opportunity to share the good news, not by preaching at people but by allowing God to make himself known through the way that we live, the attitudes we display, and the Spiritual gifts we employ as we engage in the workplace we are in. It was Francis of Assisi that said 'by all means preach the gospel, and if necessary use words'. This is good advice for the work place, but if we are to see people discover the good news for themselves there will come a time when we will have to speak. We need to be ready with an answer when they ask. How ready are you? Are you confident that you could explain to those you work with how to become a Christian and what that will mean to them in the future?

We are expected to bear good fruit in the work that we do. Certainly God wants to bless our efforts and make us successful but the primary reason we do these works is to advance the Kingdom of God. When Jesus received the anointing of the Holy Spirit he declared that he was going to do a number of good works, and these he did. But he also stated that he came to earth to seek and save those who were lost. Jesus never lost sight of the fact that his primary purpose was to rescue men and women from the grasp of Satan. He did good works but they never interfered with the best work he could do. The fruit he bore are the lives of the boys and girls, men and women who will reign with him in eternity because they have received the good news. God has prepared good works for you to walk in, but never lose sight of the fact that his primary purpose for you is that you make disciples wherever you go, teaching and training them so that they too can become disciple makers.



### The Marketplace Church Connection **Ephesians 4**

If our primary place of ministry is the workplace, what then is the role of the church? Is congregational meeting necessary, does being a Christian require that we attend a regular meeting with other believers? These are all valid questions and while there are times when they are asked by people simply looking for an excuse not to go to 'church' they deserve a considered response. In the first place, as we have already discussed, church is not a building or an organization but is the term used to describe all those people who are united in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. On this basis we do not 'go' to church, we are the church. Wherever two or more believers meet together it can be said the church exists in that place. Whenever those two or more make an agreement to meet at a particular place or at a particular time, organisation is required, there is nothing spiritual about this, neither is it unspiritual, it is just necessary. Apart from this it is only natural that believers will want to meet with others who share their beliefs, values and aspirations.

In the days immediately after the church was born the new Christians met in each others homes, in synagogues and in other places to have fellowship, pray and learn. They ate together and encouraged each other in the things that they were discovering. As they grew in their faith they also arranged to collect money to assist others in need and to send out missionaries, they appointed leaders to give them guidance and they adopted rules that governed their beliefs and practices. These things evolved with time and developed to meet needs as they arose. This fledgling church did not set about planning a corporate vision with constitution and by-laws attached, they listened to the Holy Spirit, responded in faith and then put in place the organization that was required to carry out the instructions they received. In its simplest form the church is the gathering of two or more believers with the intention of mutual encouragement and growth.

With this understanding it is evident that the church is not the place that we invite people to hear the gospel, it is the gathering of believers. We have tended to make the congregational meeting the primary place of evangelism, and while there is no question that large public meetings are appropriate vehicles for evangelists to proclaim the good news, this is not the primary purpose of the church. The early church met together to learn and to grow. It did this in the context of worship. This ought to be the purpose of the church meeting today. It is a place for believers to come to be built up and equipped so that they can walk in the good works that God has provided for them to do. Church is where we go to recover from the week we have had and to be prepared for the one to come. It is a place of healing and nourishment. The connection between the church and the marketplace is that the church prepares us for our ministry in the marketplace.

Each week, as we gather with other believers, we should be built up and equipped for the ministry we have been called to. It is not the pastor's job to evangelise your friends and workmates, it is yours. It is his job, and that of other gifted people, to equip you so that you can do the work of the ministry. It is as we each do this work that the body grows. It grows numerically because day by day new people are added and it will grow in maturity as our spiritual character is developed by doing works of righteousness.

If you want to grow in your faith, if you want to be effective in your ministry then it makes sense to take the time to meet with like minded others who will be able to encourage and support you. You will also be able to multiply your effectiveness as you pool your resources and complement each other in your shared responsibility to share the good news.

### Working Together 1 Corinthians 3

Early in the church's history there was competition. Some believers wanted to be known as followers of Apollos, others of Paul or of Peter. Some wanted to be preachers, others teachers of workers of miracles and healing. More glory was given to some than to others and there was an unhealthy preoccupation with personal ambition of the type that did not glorify God. Paul's letter to the church at Corinth addresses a number of these issues. His emphasis throughout was that we are united in faith and love and our desire should be to work together and in harmony.

It is the Holy Spirit that determines the gift that any believer has; it is not given on the basis of individual talent or ability, but by the sovereign choice of God. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who chooses the place where that ministry should be exercised and God who determines what the results will be. There is no place for selfish pride in our ministry; it is not we who receive the praise, honour and glory but God himself. Paul reminds his readers that we are co-workers in God's vineyard, one person may sow the seed, another water the growing plant and yet others who do the pruning and harvesting. No one worker is greater than another and each needs the other to be successful. Our workplace is the place where seed is sown and it may be that the ministry you have is to sow that seed. Perhaps a word here or there or the consistent reliable witness of your behaviour will result in a seed taking root and beginning to germinate. Or it may be that as you develop relationships opportunities emerge for you to share your testimony or minister to a particular need in a workmates life – you are tending the seed that has been sown. On the other hand you might be just in the right place when that plant is ready for harvest. Perhaps you are the one that is turned to when your friend is ready to reach out God. Each of us has a part to play, no one is more valuable than other, all of our contributions are equally vital.

Paul reminds his readers at Corinth that they are responsible for their contribution. They need to pay strict attention to how they build on the foundation that is laid by Jesus Christ. We do not need to be concerned with how someone else is doing, but we must be very careful to build as well as we can with the resources we have been given. Each of us is given gifts, talents, ability and time to use to build the Kingdom of God. Some of us will build by teaching, others by encouraging or acts of generosity. Still more will be enabled to pray for miracles or healing and so on. Whatever the gifts we have been given they are to be used to build God's Kingdom. In any building endeavour people of differing skills and abilities are brought together to work side by side. Usually the plumber does not do the work of the electrician and the plasterer does not fit the roof tiles. Each tradesman knows his or her area of expertise and works in that area. They depend on the others to complete the job. So too in the task of building the kingdom we each have a part to play. We should not to do the work assigned to others, but we do need to pay attention to the job we've been given.

If it is your job to sow the seed in people's lives that others will nourish and bring to harvest, then it is necessary that you do it. If you don't, who will? If you don't share the good news with your workmates, who will? God has placed you where you are in work, life and community because there is a job you need to do. He hasn't given this job to anyone else – just you. We all know what it is like at work when one person doesn't pull his weight an extra burden is placed on everyone else. So too in the work of the Kingdom, if you don't do your job, others will have to do your share. As we each do what is assigned to us, alongside others who are doing what they have been equipped to do, then the whole building will grow.

### **Church in the Marketplace**

#### **A Church Is Born Acts 2**

Apart from a couple of references to the church by Jesus in the gospel of Matthew, the first time the term is used to refer to an identified group of people is in Acts 5:11. Some translations of our Bible include the word in Acts 2:47, but most do not. This word that we have come to understand as 'church' refers to a group of people who have been called together for a particular purpose. It doesn't refer to an institution or building, although in order for a purpose to be accomplished some organization would seem to be required.

Jesus final instructions to his followers were that they should wait in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. When this happened they were to be his messengers, going everywhere with his gospel leading people to faith in Christ. On the Day of Pentecost, a Jewish festival celebrated 50 days after the Passover in thanksgiving for a completed harvest, Jews from every region gathered together in Jerusalem. Acts 2 tells us that at this time the followers of Jesus were gathered together in one place, and while they were there, perhaps praying together the Holy Spirit came down and engulfed them. After this dramatic event the disciples started to preach.

The result of the preaching of the disciples, and in particular Peter, was that thousands of believers were added to the number of Jesus' followers. It has often been remarked that the church was not born in the upper room, but in the marketplace. The disciples needed the upper room, a place to wait in obedience to the instructions of Jesus but if they had stayed there after the Holy Spirit had fallen on them they would have just had a wonderful experience. They had to leave the upper room and go down among the people who needed to hear the good news. It wasn't until they did that the church was born. There was already some organization in place, clearly Peter was identified as a leader and they had made arrangements to replace Judas and keep the number of apostles at 12. Those that believed were baptized, and you can't baptize 3000 people without some sort of organization! They also started to share their abundance with one another so that there would be no one in need. But it was not their organization that made them a church; there was something about them that set them apart from the rest of the community. It was their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You are not part of the church because you have some denominational tag, or because you attend a particular building once or twice per week. It is not because you are organized or even institutionalized in the way you conduct your religious affairs, it is not because you engage in charitable works or share some religious experience. You are the church because you have been called together for a particular purpose, and that purpose is to glorify God through a relationship with his son, Jesus Christ. Whether it is in the place you work, or the community in which you live, you have been called from among them because you have chosen to commit your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. There is one church but it gathers together in many places. Sometimes it is in a specifically designed building at others it is in a park or place of employment. Jesus said wherever two or more are gathered in his name, he is right there among them. This is the church. The church was born in the marketplace and to be faithful to God's purposes it must continue to live there.

#### **The Public Square Acts 17:17**

## Faith at Work

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In recent times much has been said and written about the need to take our faith and the gospel into the marketplace. Sometimes however we seem to confuse the marketplace with the workplace. In New Testament times the marketplace was a place of public gathering, an arena where the city elders would sit and talk, where conversation took place and entertainment was provided. It was also the venue for traders to bring their produce for sale and for gossip to be exchanged. In short it was the heart of every community.

In the days before television, Internet, radio and even newspapers exchange of news and information was conducted in an entirely different way than it is today. The marketplace was the forum where everything happened. Travelers from other regions would share the latest from the places they had been, the latest philosophies were discussed on street corners and on the plaza and beggars came to receive a few coins to relieve their suffering. Any new religion or belief would be a topic for discussion. The Bible tells us that some religious leaders loved the recognition and applause that came from the marketplace and we read of children sitting there, idle people just lounging around and the sick being brought in case there was someone who could give them healing.

If the good news was going to be preached, this is where it needed to happen. Where else would people from all walks of life, all sectors of society hear the message? When I was pastor of suburban church in a reasonably affluent suburb I would spend hours each day in my office alone. Most people in the community worked and the streets were almost deserted during the day. I found I needed to go and sit in a nearby shopping center just to connect with ordinary people and hope for an opportunity to connect with somebody. The church and its message were not at the intersection of life; they were hidden away in a back street that seldom attracted passing interest.

The marketplace as it was understood in the New Testament is largely absent from today's society. It has been replaced with mass media and suburban life. However there are still some remnants, there are communities where a market day is a significant part of life, others where the coffee shop strip is a feature and yet others where a significant cultural event provides opportunity for interaction and discussion. The modern shopping mall or retail center has become for many the new marketplace. Young people often go there just to 'hang out', sometimes they will go to a movie or have something to eat, but often they will just lounge around talking, enjoying each other's company and sometimes getting themselves into trouble. Another place where news is discussed and relationships formed is the hotel. The public bar becomes a safe environment in which to share the latest gossip and even personal needs under the liberating influence of alcohol.

Where are the marketplaces of modern life? Where do you go to connect with the people in your community? Are there safe havens you can go to, places where you can be yourself without the need for a mask to hide behind? The disciples knew what they needed to do to get the news of the gospel out: they went to the marketplace. This was where they would find people to speak to. If these men had stayed in the synagogue or even the upper room and discussed among themselves the church would not have been born and it would not have grown. It was good news, people needed to hear it and best way for this to happen was if they went where the people were and told them.

**But What About the Workplace? Colossians 3:22-4:6**

## Faith at Work

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For some people the marketplace is their place of work, but for most of us it isn't. It is our place of recreation, conversation even buying and selling but it is not the place we go to earn our living. Like nearly everything else, the way we do work has changed significantly since the days of the New Testament. In those times computers, power tools, radios, calculators, ballpoint pens, automobiles, refrigerators and washing machines did not exist. Most businesses were conducted from home and even though some were employed as labourers and traveled to work, even domestic staff were usually considered as slaves and lived on the premises in which they worked. There were city officials, doctors, teachers of the law and so on but most people were employed in small craft type trades and carried out their business on their own doorstep. The working day was, according to Jewish literature, from 'sun-rising to the appearing of the stars' and a labourer was to be paid at the end of each day on which he worked. All of this is a far cry from our modern industrial and technological workplaces.

However the principles that Paul expresses in his letter to the Colossians are just as relevant. In the first place servants are to work hard at what they do. In other words if you work for someone else you are to do your best in all you do. You should work as if your master is not merely some earthly employer but Jesus Christ himself. Our work should not be performed just to please others but because it is right to do well at whatever we do. Sometimes we find it difficult to be conscientious because of the nature of our work, or the attitude of our employer, but our service is a form of worship that is being offered to Almighty God. If we see our labour in this light it may change the way we conduct ourselves. The other side of this is that a responsibility is placed on Christian employers to show justice and fairness. I have known Christian employers who are careful to get the last ounce of flesh from their employees only giving to them what the law legally requires and resisting doing more at every step. While demanding more than what is reasonable from their employees they object to giving more than they absolutely have to. This is particularly so when there is a glut in the labour market and employers can have their pick of the best workers. Employers are reminded that they themselves have a master who is in heaven. This same master is the one we go to in order to seek grace when we fail and ask for favour rather than justice.

The way we exercise faith at work is in the first place the way we conduct ourselves, it is recognizing that our work is worship and what we do is our offering to him. We are reminded in Scripture that our worship is to be offered with thanksgiving, indeed this is the only acceptable form of worship. It follows that if our work is worship and if our worship is to be offered with thankful hearts then we are to conduct ourselves at work with grateful hearts. Unfortunately there are many Christians who are so discontented with what they do that they make it clear to everybody. Their work is not characterized by joy, but suffering. Many employers or business owners speak of their businesses as if they would rather be doing something else, everybody is against them, the legal and tax systems are not fair and economic circumstances are all wrong. Employees want too much and business competitors are treating them unfairly. None of these attitudes reflect a heart of worship. If you are in business it should be because God has called you there, this is your opportunity to render to him acceptable worship, giving thanks with a grateful heart. The first obligation imposed on the Christian at work is, Paul says, 'do everything without grumbling or complaining that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among you appear as lights in the world (Philippians 2:14-15).

**The Church at Motorola    Philemon 1-3**



## Faith at Work

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I recently spoke with a businessman who lives and works in China. He explained that in his country there are no church buildings and therefore no denominations, rather the church exists wherever people gather to share their faith and experience of the Lord Jesus Christ. The most common place for these Christians to gather is the workplace, and so there is the church at Motorola, or the church at Mary K and so on. Wherever a number of Christians meet, this is the church.

We all know that denominations are man's idea, not God's. Over the years men and women have found a variety of reasons to form separate congregations and adopt new names. Often these new groups have started as 'reform' movements within an existing denomination with no intention of becoming a new corporate identity, but somehow or other with the passage of time constitutions are written, statements of belief formulated and practices and procedures adopted and a denomination is born. While it is understandable and even reasonable for people of like mind and belief to want to meet together it should never result in people identifying themselves by their denominational tag rather than their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I find it sad to hear people boast of 'their' church or denominations achievements as if they are somehow separate from others in the body of Christ. There is one faith, one Lord and we are one body, there is no room for the arrogant suggestion that somehow the denomination we belong to is better than another.

Isn't it refreshing to think of the church at Motorola, or on the wharf, or in the university or maybe even in the shopping centre? A term that refers to Christians from all walks of life who come together to worship and express their faith in the places where they meet or work. When Paul wrote to the believers at Rome he was addressing all those Christians who lived and worshiped in that city. It seems that they met in a number of houses, but they were the church. The businessman I spoke of believes that in a sense the workplaces we engage in have become the new nations of the twenty first century, it is they that determine our culture and the language we speak. Our values are in part determined by our vocation or the places in which we work. It is only a logical extension then to suggest that the church will be formed in these places of business. Of course there are large holes in this analogy, and whether the church in the workplace can engage all of life including family and community is problematic. However in a real sense when you meet with fellow believers, wherever that is, there is the church. It isn't necessary to have buildings, programmes, constitutions and budgets in order to be the church you just need to meet with one or two others and invite Jesus to join you. The idea that there can be a church at Coles or Telecom is exciting. When believers meet together to take spiritual responsibility for their workplace and to pray for their fellow employees we can be confident that the Kingdom of God will advance. As the church in the workplace prays for the success of the business, the welfare of the staff, customers and suppliers the atmosphere will change and opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ will come up. As an added bonus, as God answers the prayers of his people, the profitability of the company will increase, the attitude of employers and employees will improve and all will benefit from the success God brings.

In China the church exists in the marketplace because it cannot meet elsewhere, perhaps God is using the hostile environment there to convince the church here of the need to get back to the basics. Church is about men and women meeting together to encourage each other in their faith and commitment and to pray for the community of which they are a part. For many of us the most significant community we have is the one where we spend most of our waking hours, the workplace.

**Two or More Matthew 18**



## Faith at Work

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On the occasion in Matthew's gospel when Jesus speaks of the church he declares that wherever two or three are gathered together, he is in their midst. Jesus had been speaking to his disciples about the need to maintain discipline, he gave instructions that if one of their number was to fall into sin then they had the responsibility to go to him in private and try to convince of the need to change his ways. In the event that they were unsuccessful they should then get one or two others and try again. If the fallen brother or sister would still not change their ways, the whole church should get involved. If a person persisted in deliberate sin they were to be treated as if they were unbelievers. The passage of scripture does not say that these people were to be excluded as such but they could not expect to enjoy the level of fellowship that was possible among those that were walking in Christ's light. At the same time Christians are encouraged to act considerately toward outsiders, behaving properly toward them so that they might come to faith. This responsibility remains on Christians in the way they conduct themselves toward those that have fallen away.

As Jesus expanded on his theme he assured his followers that whatever the church bound on earth would be bound in heaven and likewise whatever the church set free would be set free in heaven. In case these disciples felt that a large assembly was necessary for this to happen, Jesus went on to say that wherever two or three were gathered, that was enough. Indeed wherever two or three are, there he is. Jesus does not need a crowd before he will turn up, he doesn't demand minimum numbers, he makes the simple promise that if you and a couple of others get together in his name he'll be there. Not only that but whatever you agree on and ask him for, he will do it. I think if we realized the magnitude of this our lives and our communities would be revolutionized. Even though most of us are familiar with the passage in Matthew and probably can and do quote the verse about Jesus being present whenever two or more are gathered, I don't know if we really believe it. The communities in which we live are in urgent need of transformation; there are lost and hurting people wherever we turn. Many of the people we work with are struggling in many areas of life and long to be set free, and yet we have this promise – if two or more agree on something, God will do it. Some of our businesses are in need of a miracle, sales are down, expenses are up, machines break down and there are the inevitable staff problems, and yet when there are two or more Christians in those businesses do they think to meet together and pray about it? When our communities are facing particular needs, when the schools are encountering funding shortfalls and aged care is inadequate - do two or three get together and call on God?

Despite our knowledge of the verse we have mentioned we live in a culture that says more is always better and we at least give the impression that God listens more to the big 'churches' and the large prayer gatherings than he does to the two and three, but this is not so. The prayers of the few are as vital as the prayers of the many. The church exists in the two's and three's wherever they meet, if you know of at least one other believer in your workplace and you agree together to call on God, then there is the church. You and that one or two other people are the church at the Commonwealth Bank, or at the High School, or the Shire Office or wherever you work and you have tremendous authority to act as God's agents in that workplace to bring freedom to the captives and to bind the activities of Satan. If you haven't done so already then seek out another believer in your place of work and agree to pray together, asking God to intervene miraculously in your business and in the lives of those that work there. If you can't find someone in your immediate place of business then meet with others who work nearby over lunch or before work, remember wherever there are two or more, there's the church.

**The Kingdom Within Luke 17:21**

## Faith at Work

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The religious leaders of Jesus Day were anxious to know when the kingdom of God was going to come. They were expecting signs and wonders to herald the coming of the Messiah, not realizing that he was standing in their midst. Jesus gave a startling reply, not only would there be no advertising of the kingdom, in fact it would be right there within or among them.

It would seem that many have fallen into the trap of wanting to advertise the Kingdom with signs and wonders as if we need to put on a show to attract a crowd. Jesus said plainly that the Kingdom was not going to come with signs to be observed and people would not point and say 'Look, here it is!' When Jesus entered a town he didn't ask for advance announcement, the only time that it happened was prior to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and even that wasn't organised beforehand! There is no evidence that the apostles sent out leaflets in advance of their arrival in the towns they visited, in fact if they did it would probably have only hastened their arrest. There is nothing wrong with letting people know that something is happening and there is an opportunity for them to hear good news, but it seems much of what we do in the name of the gospel is creating celebrity status for gifted men and women. In reading the gospel accounts the impression is gained that Jesus didn't like a fuss, he avoided publicity and just went about his business in a fairly dogged and determined way. The kingdom that he announced was not going to be one of pomp and ceremony, no signs and wonders to accompany it, it would be among the people and they may not even know.

The Kingdom of God is one of those things that is not easy to get your head around. We know that it is a kingdom that is yet to come, but it is already here! Sometimes believers fall into the trap of living entirely for a future kingdom, paying no regard to the world in which they live, while others are so convinced that the kingdom is to be enjoyed here and now that they give no thought to eternal issues. The reality is that now we appreciate in part what we shall later enjoy fully. We can anticipate the blessings of union with God in Christ while we live here on earth, but at the same time, along with Paul, we can long to depart this life so that we can be with Christ in his eternal kingdom. The Kingdom of God is here and it is experienced not only in our personal relationship with Jesus Christ as he reigns as King, but as we meet with others who likewise give allegiance to the King of Kings.

One thing that is sure is that subjects of a Kingdom should demonstrate the values and aspirations of their King. They should serve him loyally and willingly and they will in return enjoy the benefits that are given to citizens. As we attend our workplaces we do so as subjects of God's kingdom and our behaviour should reflect this, but as we enter those workplaces we take the authority of the Kingdom with us. The Kingdom of God is within us, as we meet together but also personally. As we go to work, or home or school the kingdom of God goes with us. So long as you are at work, so too is the kingdom of God. His presence goes with you wherever you go and because you are an ambassador of his kingdom you have the right to exercise his authority.

This week go to work with renewed confidence knowing that you represent the highest authority there is and that he is able to do far more than you can think or even dare to imagine according to the power of God that dwells within you.

**The Place of Battle   Ephesians 6:10-19**

## Faith at Work

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It stands to reason that if God wants to bless and make us successful in the workplace Satan will be doing his best to upset these plans. We know that we can have victory in the places we go given that we are continually in the power and presence of God himself and that whenever two or more agree together to bind or loose something on earth, these same things are bound and loosed in heaven. But the reality is there is no victory without conflict. You can only win a fight that you have been in.

Most of us who are employed in some capacity in the business world will know that there are battles every day. For some reason normally rational adult employees seem to feel the need to act like children once they cross the threshold of work, competitors do their best to undercut your prices by the merest margin while suppliers take offence at the idea that you will reject their product in favour of a rival company. The first sign of rain, or hot weather, or symptom of flu is sufficient cause for a day off and critical machinery always seems to break down just as you enter peak demand times. How much of this is the normal ebb and flow of business and how much is spiritual warfare? Have you ever considered that your workplace is a place of spiritual battle, a battle by the way that God expects you to win? Your workplace is potentially the greatest opportunity for you to make a significant contribution to the advance of the Kingdom of God. You will probably have far more opportunity to meet and talk to non-believers at work than at any other place. Certainly it is more likely you will meet them there than at church. If Satan is able to reduce your effectiveness at work, then he has had a victory. Clearly then this is a place where we can expect to be involved in spiritual warfare. Next time one of your co-workers or employees seems to say or do something that just manages to push you too far, or when you have to deal with that one worker who always seems to bring out your worst, consider whether or not those people may have become the unwitting tool of Satan to destroy your witness. When that critical machine breaks down for no apparent reason ask yourself whether Satan is involved.

If you are attempting to exalt Jesus Christ in your business make no mistake Satan will be active. He will not surrender this ground to the Lord Jesus Christ without a fight and you will be right in the middle of it. The good news is that as the apostle Paul writes we must put on the whole armour that God provides and then stand still in the battle knowing that it is not ours but his. The news gets better, the battle is already won – Jesus won it on Calvary and in the resurrection, but unfortunately there are still some skirmishes being fought as Satan is pushed further and further out of God's Kingdom. If you have invited Jesus to join you at work then he has, not only that but now your business is legitimately part of God's kingdom, sure maybe not everyone in it is a Christian yet, but probably not everyone that goes to the church you attend on Sunday's is either. Satan will continue to harass and annoy you and from time to time circumstances will occur which are clearly demonically inspired. When this happens take hold of the authority that is yours, resist the devil and he is bound to flee from you. Proclaim that the Kingdom of God has come to your workplace; tell Satan he has no place there and then confidently and diligently do all that you need to do to accomplish his purposes as he strengthens you. Be bold in your approach to the battle you are in, don't look for a demon in every failed sale, or attack of the flu but be alert to the reality of spiritual warfare. This is not something we need to be afraid of for as the Scripture says: greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world, but we do need to be alert for Satan is like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Be on your guard, stand firm and rejoice in the victory that is yours through Christ Jesus.

### **Shepherds in the Marketplace**

See the People **Matthew 9: 35-36**

Some years ago I was in Argentina attending a conference on evangelism with delegates from around the world. As part of the conference we traveled by bus or air to various towns and cities to assist the local church in ministering to their community. It was a great time of blessing, miracles were experienced, people saved and lives changed. One morning however God lead me to read Matthew 9:38 and it wasn't until later in the day that I realized the import of what he was saying. As a group of us traveled by bus to the city of Rosario we enjoyed fellowship and encouragement together anticipating what God was going to do, but as we approached the city the bus rounded a bend and came upon what can only be described as a slum. The contrast between the green fields, comparatively affluent travelers, the luxury coach and the slum and its inhabitants was stark.

God reminded me of the passage I had read that morning. These verses relate the activities of Jesus as he traveled through towns and villages preaching the gospel, healing the sick and teaching in the synagogues, all of the things we were doing on our conference. But the significant thing that God lead me to in this passage was that Jesus stopped what he was doing and saw the people. Depending on the version of the Bible you use, this verse may be translated slightly differently, but in any event – he saw the people. What God was saying to me at that time was 'don't get so caught up in your agenda, the things you are doing and even the miracles and the blessings that you fail to see the people'. At that time I was a 'full-time pulpit minister', by that I mean I was employed to be a pastor in a local congregation, and I confess that there were many times that I got so caught up in the next part of the church program, the next activity, conference, spiritual retreat or evangelistic endeavour that I failed to see the people. In fact sometimes the whole thing would have gone a lot better if there weren't any people, especially those with needs. God was very clear, I had to stop and see the people; this is what it is all about.

A little while ago I was getting ready to attend a breakfast with a visiting Christian politician from Asia and once again God drew me to this passage. In the past I had been 'full-time' in the pulpit and worked in the secular world in order to pay the bills and fund the ministry, but now I was 'full-time' in the business world and pastored a church 'part-time' – these descriptions are all wrong – but you know what I mean! Now I saw my primary place of ministry as the marketplace I was engaged in, but God brought me back to this passage of scripture. What he told me was 'the message I gave you in Argentina when you were a pastor, is the same for you in the marketplace – in other words stop what you are doing and see the people'. God was telling me that my primary role in ministry whether it was in the pulpit or in the marketplace is to see the people.

In business it is very easy to get caught up in making profits, increasing sales and reducing costs so that the people become a commodity or a resource. In fact the language we use reflects that – we don't refer to our employees as people but human resources. As a minister in the marketplace our primary responsibility is to care for the people that God has given us responsibility for, of course we need to make a profit, otherwise we won't be in business very long – but we must not get so caught up in our agenda that we fail to see the people and their needs. We can start by learning their names and finding out a little about them. We may discover their needs and probably also their strengths. Once we know them and the things that are important to them we are better able to pray for them and on their behalf and start to fulfill our pastoral responsibility in the marketplace to which we have been called. This week as you go about your day-to-day business in the marketplace remember to stop and see the people, and have compassion on them.

### Sheep Without A Shepherd **Numbers 27:16-20**

As the people of Israel came to the end of their wandering through the wilderness God spoke to Moses and reminded him that he would not be the one to lead them into the Promised Land. Even though Moses tried he could not change God's mind so his concern immediately transferred to the people that he had been leading. These people had given Moses a lot of grief, they had been stubborn, disobedient, had argued and complained, had threatened to kill him and more than once rebelled against his leadership, but even now as he was facing his own death his prayer was for them.

Moses asked that God would appoint a leader for these people, someone to teach them what to do and where to go, otherwise they would be like sheep without a shepherd. This same thought was reflected in Jesus' words in Matthew 9. Whether Jesus voiced his cares aloud or in private conversation to Matthew is not stated but we do know that he had compassion on the people because they were like sheep without a shepherd, distressed and dispirited. He was presumably thinking back to the request of Moses many years before. The people that Jesus saw were poised to enter the Promised Land but they didn't know what to do or how to get there. The Promise for these people was not a geographic locality but eternal life in the Kingdom of God, and the entrance was through faith in Jesus Christ, but they needed a shepherd to show them the way.

Jesus said that the people were distressed and dispirited because they had no shepherd. He saw the people and he had compassion on them, they didn't know where to go or how to get there, how would they without anyone to lead them? As you look out at your marketplace what do you see? Do you see people who are lost and lonely and do you have compassion on them? The people in your world need shepherds; they need men and women who are called by God to lead the sheep into good pasture and to protect them against wolves. As Jesus looks at these same people what does he see? Does he see sheep without shepherds or does he see faithful men and women caring for the sheep that have been entrusted to them?

Ed Silvano writes that the conditions are right for revival in a community when every sheep has a shepherd. In other words when every man, woman and child has someone looking out for and caring for him or her. Revival actually comes when these people know who their shepherds are. Wherever you have been placed in the marketplace you have been given sheep to care for. Not all of these sheep are in the fold yet, some are still wandering the hillside waiting for someone to find them and lead them into safety. The first step is for you and I to take seriously our responsibility for the spiritual well being of the sheep in our care. We do this by praying for them and meeting their needs when we can. You don't need to go and announce to your workmates and associates that you are their shepherd, just start bringing them and their needs to God. After a while your compassion will be obvious and so will the answers to your prayers and at the right time God will let you lead the sheep into the fold.

Sometimes your 'sheep' will give you grief, in the workplace you will probably have to exercise discipline and that may even result in an employee's dismissal, but it is essential that just like Moses, you continue to pray for them and seek their welfare. You are their shepherd and it is your responsibility to 'lead them out and bring them in', pray that God will give to you, just as he gave to Joshua, the empowering of his Holy Spirit so that you can accomplish the task.



### A Shepherd's Code of Practice **Ezekiel 34:2-10**

The words spoken through Ezekiel are very harsh; they make for uncomfortable reading for those who consider themselves to be shepherds. And of course this means you and me. God condemns the shepherds of Israel for the things they had not done and finished up by telling them that he had rejected them. We must remember that the things that apply to shepherds apply to all of us in our responsibility to the sheep in our care, whether this is in 'pastoral' ministry, the workplace or as mothers and fathers.

The shepherds are first of all condemned for feeding themselves while not looking after the flock, they had not only provided for their own basic needs but in fact had lived luxuriously while failing to care for those in their charge. For those in business this is a serious message, how dare we live in luxury while denying reasonable income to those who work for us? How can we enjoy the pleasures of life while those from whom our profits are derived struggle to make ends meet? The judgment goes further, these shepherds had failed to look after the sick, bind up the broken, bring back those that had gone astray or seek for those that were lost. In fact their severity had caused some of the sheep to go astray and become prey to those that would feed on them.

From this list of offences it becomes clear what sort of things that God expects of his shepherds. They are to look after the sick, help to alleviate emotional and practical needs, assist some to find their way and provide help to those in need. They are to do this in the context of justice and mercy. The shepherd was to care for his sheep before he looked to his own needs. A good shepherd would not go to sleep at night until he was certain that all of his sheep were safe and in the fold. And if there was danger, he may not go to sleep at all.

God looks out at our communities and marketplaces and he expects to see shepherds caring for the sheep. I suspect that too often he will see pastors who are more concerned about their personal needs, salary levels and creature comforts than the lives of the people they are responsible for. And while I do not refer only to paid 'pastors' I do not exclude them either. Too often pastors in congregations are more concerned about their budget, buildings and the numbers who turn up on Sunday than they are the personal and spiritual needs of the people in their charge. They work 'business' hours and surround themselves with the trappings of office that often make it difficult for hurting people to even get an audience. Pastors in the marketplace do likewise. They are so consumed about the bottom line that they fail to see the hurt in their employee's faces. The size and furnishing of their offices reflects their image and position while the workers struggle for reasonable facilities to eat in. The manager's office is air-conditioned but the factory staff swelter in unrelieved heat, dust and dirt.

God demands better from his shepherds. He has appointed them to lead his sheep into good pasture and to keep them safe. Whether those sheep are in the congregation, the community or the marketplace it makes no difference, the shepherd's responsibility is the same. Who are the sheep that God has entrusted to you? Start with your family, then your neighbourhood, the part of the marketplace you are engaged in, either at work or as you carry out your day-to-day activities and if you pastor a local congregation, then those as well. But remember not all of the flock are in the fold, some are outside and need to be brought in, others have gone astray and need to be brought back. Wherever you are you have sheep to care for, their needs are greater than yours, God has given them to you because he trusts you to look after them – but if you don't he will take them from you and give them to somebody else!



### The Great Example **Hebrews 5:1-3**

The great example to shepherds, as in all things, is the lord Jesus Christ. He is the model on which to base all that we do, and this is no less so with his role as chief shepherd. Jesus combines the role of shepherd and Great High Priest in a way that we cannot because it is he who became the sacrifice that satisfied God's demand for justice and took away the penalty of sin. It is in his role as High Priest that he mediates this sacrifice and secures salvation for all those who exercise faith in him. But we are all called to be priests and to exercise this office in a pastoral way.

A priest makes representation to God on behalf of those that he or she is responsible for. This applies especially to those who are not yet in the fold. In other words those people that have yet to come to faith in the lord Jesus Christ do not have access to the father and they need someone to pray on their behalf. The priest also speaks to the people on behalf of God. In this way the priest mediates between God and his people. The writer to the Hebrews explains that a priest was 'taken from among men on behalf of men in things pertaining to God'. It was their responsibility to take a stand for those who did not have access to God and to act on their behalf. In your part of the marketplace there are many men, women, boys and girls who have not yet come to faith in the lord Jesus Christ, they need someone to intercede on their behalf. More than that they need someone who understands their needs and their weaknesses, someone who is just like them.

When the person who prays for someone else comes from the same circumstances and background as they do they understand and can treat them and their needs gently. The priest that is taken from among men can 'deal gently with the ignorant and the misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness'. As a priest in your part of the marketplace you are God's representative – it is your responsibility to speak on his behalf to those in your care. You are to extend his mercy and love to those who stand in need, offering healing and relief to the broken and sick and giving guidance and direction to the lost. But you are also the representative of the people. It is up to you to bring the needs, hurts and burdens of the people to God and ask on their behalf. You stand in the gap between God and them.

God has chosen you because you understand the needs of those in your community; you have suffered the same pain and frustration. You know what it is like to be rejected and hurt. You have experienced lack of direction, confusion and loss. You have faced similar temptations and trials and you can empathise with those around you. Because of this you can treat them gently and pray on their behalf. You will not be quick to judge because you know that except by God's grace you would be in the same situation. God can use you because you have experienced his mercy, love and grace and now you have hope you can offer it to others. God also depends on your ability to make his word clear to those you care for and he places confidence in your ability to make his good news plain.

This is why you are in the place you are, as a shepherd of God's sheep he has given you a priestly role. He has chosen you to act on behalf of the men, women and children in your world and to speak to them on his behalf. He has appointed you to intercede for them so that they will receive mercy and help in their time of need. You are there by Divine appointment, God knows that you are able to be a witness to his grace and is relying on you to make him known in you marketplace.

### Sheep Know Their Shepherds **John 10:1-29**

In the days that the gospel was written the role of the shepherd was different from what it is now. In Australia today sheep stations can often be more than a million acres in size and the shepherd carries out his duties by motorbike or even helicopter. A flock of sheep consists of thousands of animals, but in Jesus' day a flock was small enough that the shepherd would know everyone of them and they would recognize his voice. The sheep got to know the voice of the shepherd because he spent every waking minute with them; he fed them, led them to water, protected them from harm, attended their needs and even assisted in the birth of lambs when necessary.

Jesus was able to claim that his sheep would know his voice and would follow him anywhere. He was so intimately acquainted with his flock that they could tell his voice from others that might try to steal them or lead them astray. He was so concerned for his sheep that he was prepared to lay down his life for them. These are the same examples that we should follow.

Of course this suggests a number of things, in the first place the flock that we minister to must be small enough for us to know intimately. In these days of mega churches where the emphasis is often on numbers rather than intimacy of relationships the congregational pastor is more like a modern day rancher than a shepherd. He attends the needs of the sheep by remote control and calculates what are the acceptable losses that the business of sheep farming can bear. The idea of leaving 99 to fend for themselves while going to search for one that is missing would be laughable. What a far cry from the shepherds of Jesus' day.

You are not called to be the shepherd of every sheep, just those that the father has given to you. There is a flock that you are responsible for and it is these sheep that you must answer for. Jesus was able to say that no one would ever snatch his sheep from him because he carried the authority of his Father in heaven and he is greater than any who would try to snatch his sheep from him. While you are not responsible for the salvation of the sheep in your care, or their eternal destiny, you do carry that same authority from your heavenly Father and you are expected to care for and protect them. Do you know who your sheep are? Paul instructed the elders at Ephesus to take heed to the condition of their flocks, what's the condition of yours?

As you show compassion to the sheep in your flock, praying for them, meeting their needs when you can and extending mercy and grace out of the treasury of God they will come to recognize your love and genuine concern for their welfare. They will begin to recognize your voice and will follow you when you lead. There is an old adage that a shepherd leads the sheep, but a butcher drives them. A butcher is not concerned for the welfare of the animals he is about to slaughter; they are just a means to an end for him. They are the stuff of business, the more he kills and processes the more profit he will make – so he drives them to the slaughterhouse. On the other hand the shepherd is concerned for his sheep's welfare, it matters to him if they get sick or lame. He leads them gently along the way that they should travel; he feeds and nurtures them. The sheep in our care need to be led, not driven. Their welfare is important. Do you drive your sheep so that your profits increase, or do you lead them into good pasture?

Do your sheep know your voice? Do they trust you to care for them even more than you care for yourself? Will you put their welfare beyond your profit margin; will you put aside your busy program to meet their needs? If you do, then God will enlarge your flock.

### The Sheep And The Fold **Micah 2:12**

While it is true that not all sheep are in the fold, or indeed any fold, this is the ultimate purpose of seeking them out. The fold that the sheep need to become part of is God's fold, and Jesus is its chief shepherd. The fact that he is chief shepherd suggests that there are other shepherds of less authority; that's where you and I come in. All of those who come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can be said to be part of God's fold and under the care and protection of the Good Shepherd, but this fold is made up of smaller folds scattered throughout the nations all of which have shepherds or pastors to care for them. Some folds are known by church names, while others are formed in households or business places, still others may be made up of groups that share a common identity such as surfies, bikies or athletes but they all have some things in common.

A fold that belongs to God will always have Jesus at its centre. It may assemble in different places and conduct itself in different ways, but Jesus will always be the focus. There is no right or wrong way that determines how a fold should organize itself, there are certainly some Biblical principles but they stop short of giving a prescription that has to be followed. What is certain however is that all sheep need to be brought into the fold. They need the protection and guidance that comes from God appointed shepherds. Predators easily pick off a sheep that does not have the security of the fold; those that wander the wilderness alone are obvious targets.

As you minister to men and women in the marketplace, it will be your desire to bring them into the fold and it may be that there is readily available a group of like minded people that will accept the new sheep. Unfortunately however this is not always the case and you might experience difficulty in finding a 'fold' that is right for them. Of course like any metaphor we can push the sheep and the fold illustration too far. You and I suffer something of an identity crisis in that we are both sheep and shepherds at the same time. We identify with fellow sheep and may enjoy the company of others in the same fold as them, but at the same time we are fulfilling our role as shepherds to the sheep God has made us responsible for. We are part of a fold, and indeed we must be if we want to flourish in our Christian life, but those we shepherd may not become part of this fold, what then should we do? Should we start new little folds wherever we go or do we take the new believer into an established fold somewhere else, often uncertain about how they will be treated? This is a tough question and there is no easy answer.

It is certain however that the sheep must be in the fold and it may be that in the short term (or even longer term) that the fold they become part of is a small group with you as the shepherd leading them along the first steps of their Christian life. This group may form in your workplace, your home or amongst other like minded people in some other place but like the first believers after Pentecost you will want to enjoy fellowship, learn together from the Word of God and worship. Your role as a shepherd in the marketplace will include bringing the sheep into the fold. It is possible that you are part of a worshipping community that your new sheep will comfortably fit into and your task will be simply to make the connection, but increasingly it seems that this is not the case and there needs at least to be a place of transition for the new believer. As the shepherd of these sheep you will lead them into good pasture and keep them safe from the wolves that will try to devour them.

God does not intend that his sheep be scattered on the hillside, he wants them safe in the fold. He has appointed shepherds in the marketplace to lead and care for them and this is the ministry to which you have been called.

### Fleecing the Sheep **Jeremiah 23:3-4**

In many of today's farms sheep have become little more than a commodity. They exist merely for the purpose of making a profit and while their health is cared for it is more to do with ensuring a good return than it is out of genuine concern for their welfare. Without stretching our metaphor too far, it is sadly true that we can make a comparison between the sheep of the modern farm or station and the sheep of God's pasture. Whether these 'sheep' are in the congregation, workplaces or elsewhere in community they are often perceived as a means to an end rather than the end in itself.

What church pastor isn't asked 'how big is your church' at gatherings of other pastors? Which businessman doesn't evaluate his or her employees on the basis of their utility value to the company? Where is the football or sporting club that isn't concerned with the number of its supporters, irrespective of their individual need or circumstance? In each of these examples the sheep have become numbers or commodities, they cease to have any value except in so far as they provide some sort of return. It is true that pastor's measure themselves and their success on the basis of the number in their congregation, the bigger the flock – the more effective the shepherd. The sad fact is that while the number of sheep that come into the gate of the fold may grow it is often at the expense of those who have gone over the back fence. Many of these sheep have become lost and once more wander in the wilderness.

Recently I sat with a lady on an international flight, in the course of conversation she mentioned that she used to attend a church in the city in which she lived. Unfortunately she found the style and emphasis of the pastor difficult to accept and so she had left. Since she had gone no one had visited her and probably were not even aware that she was no longer there. She is not an isolated case. Everyday men and women are leaving congregations because they are not cared for, and many of these are no longer part of the fold. In Jeremiah's day the shepherds were condemned because they had not tended to the sheep, instead they had caused them to scatter. In our program driven society it is difficult to remember that the fundamental task of the shepherd is to care for the sheep, our own driven ness in achieving the goals we have set for our congregations and ourselves has all too often driven the sheep away. This is true too in the workplace, our drive to succeed, to make more profit and achieve our goals sometimes causes us to see our employees as a means to an end, just another resource to be used in filling our business plan. Employees performance may deteriorate because of personal issues but because we are so preoccupied with the bottom line we fail to notice and do not stop and care for them.

God is raising up a new generation of shepherds. He will place them in congregations, businesses, community groups and politics. These shepherds will have compassion for those in their care. They will remove fear and give a sense of security and they will be genuinely concerned for the welfare of those that God has entrusted to them. The day is coming when God will raise up elected officials who will shepherd their nations, business leaders who will put the spiritual welfare of their employees above their profit margins, community representatives who will genuinely look after the needs of their community and pastors who will know the names and condition of their sheep and who will commit themselves so fully to their God given call that not one will be missing.

God has promised he will do this, and by his grace will you be one of these new breed of shepherds? Will you declare today that you will fully commit yourself to the sheep that he has entrusted to you and trust him to give you the grace, favour and strength you need?

### **Bridging the Gap**

#### **The Chasm 1 Corinthians 2:14-16**

Sometimes it seems there is a yawning chasm between you and the person you want to reach with the good news about Jesus. There is a gulf that appears to make communication or understanding almost impossible. Is this chasm real or imagined? And if it is what causes it and how do we get across from our side to the other? The fact is there is a gulf between the worldview of Christians and those who do not share their faith. This gulf does not discriminate between Christians and other religious people but separates those with a religious understanding of the world and those who profess to be secular in their understanding. At the time the New Testament was written most, if not all, had a view of their world in which the supernatural was obviously present. Gods were everywhere and so were the statues and idols that represented them. But since that time and particularly over the last couple of hundred years there has been a shift in the thinking of men and women everywhere. The advent of scientific thought caused questions to arise about the origins of life. Acceptance of a creator God as the originator of the world and all that it contained was challenged by the notion of evolution and other theories of science or pseudo-science. As a result a gulf began to appear between those who saw God as the source of all life and those who didn't.

Once people began to question the origin of the life, they then asked about its purpose. If there is no God, then why am I here? Am I just some sort of cosmic accident or perhaps a higher animal? Do I have any other purpose other than the survival of the species? With these questions the gulf deepened and widened. As people became less certain of their place in the world or their purpose they then asked 'how then should I live?' If there is no God, and I have no purpose in life, then does it matter how I live. Shouldn't I be able to make whatever moral decisions I want to as long as they don't hurt anyone else? Why not just eat drink and be merry, because tomorrow I might die! The gulf is now a chasm!

While this is only a simplified overview of the changes in philosophy and thinking over the years it does represent the fact that there is a widening chasm that is growing between those that are convinced in the existence of God and those who are either equally convinced there is none or who are at least unsure. While most don't philosophize about life and decide to act on the basis of their worldview, these views are promoted through our teaching institutions, the media and marketing industries to the degree that they become accepted as right and normal.

There is a gap between you and those you work with; live amongst and perhaps even some in your own home. You will not communicate your message effectively by simply standing on your side of the chasm and shouting across to the other side, no matter how effective your p.a. system is! Over the years the Christian community has used methods to get across this chasm including letter box drops, leaflets, gospel film and other media, music, event evangelism and so on, and while these methods have had some success the reality is that the chasm is getting bigger, at least in the so-called first world in which we live. There are now more people adopting a secular world view in which there is no place for God than there are responding in faith to peace and purpose that God makes available through Jesus Christ.

The task before us is to find a way to cross the chasm so that we can share the good news of Jesus Christ to our fiends and workmates in a manner in which they will not only understand what we are saying but will respond in faith to God's promise of life to them.



### Our Side Of The Chasm **2 Corinthians 4:7-10**

Jesus' final commission to his followers before he ascended to be with his father was that they were to go into their world with his good news and make disciples. He promised them that he would send the Holy Spirit to empower them for the task and that they had his authority wherever they went. But something went wrong. Despite the power and ability necessary for the job and the authority to carry it out, after 2000 years the world is not yet discipled. Christians find themselves hindered by a number of barriers that reduce their effectiveness. These barriers include having wrong priorities, wrong attitudes, wrong motives and the wrong perspective! If we are going to do our part in the great commission Jesus has given to us then we must deal with these personal barriers. We cannot begin to find away to cross the chasm that separates us from those we wish to reach unless we first of all deal with our own hindrances.

Almost everybody you speak to these days says they are busy, or tired or both. They are caught in a time bind. There are never enough hours in the day to do all that they want to do, and that of course includes sharing the good news. Urgent things often get in the way of the important, the fact is that what is urgent is usually urgent for someone else, not for you. It is critical that you take control of your own timetable, remembering to 'make the most of your time, because the days are evil'. We all have the same number of hours in the week, you can't find time or make it, all that you can do is take the time you give to one activity and devote it to another. If sharing the good news is a priority for you, then you will need to take the time for it. Escape the time bind – set yourself free, learn to be productive not just busy!

Another barrier to our effectiveness is the Holy Huddle. While it is essential to have fellowship with believers, some people never leave the holy huddle, preferring to sit and soak up the blessings of God they never think to take the good news they have received and share it with others. I call these people 'wheat bix Christians' they just sit in the bowl and soak up all the milk. Conference and spiritual retreat junkies who go from 'ministry time' to prayer and Bible studies but seldom if ever venture out of their blessed huddle to reach their neighbours. Of course sometimes we stay in our huddles because of fear. We fear rejection by those we want to reach, believing that our message will somehow reveal some weakness or problem that will be offensive to others so we remain separate from them. We may also fear failure, unsure of how to tell them and so scared that we won't succeed we don't try. Or else we might be afraid of being contaminated by those unchristian people with all of their immoral behaviour! Of course all these fears are irrational and are tools in the hands of the devil to prevent us from doing what Jesus has asked us to do.

Another barrier we might face is that of motive, we want to tell people the gospel so that we can add another notch to the spine of our Bible, chalk up another success, and prove our spiritual worth or stature. Or we might simply lack skill, maybe our approach involves Bible-bashing, or dropping tracts in letterboxes and then running away, maybe engaging in debate that promotes argument and division rather than opportunities for the good news.

There are many barriers on our side of the chasm and unless we face and overcome them we will never be in a position to find a way across. What are the things that stop you from fulfilling the commission of Jesus in your workplace, community or home? Are there barriers you need to overcome? Identifying them is the first step in finding the solution!



### Their Side of the Chasm **2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

Communication is a two way process and while there are barriers to the way we share the good news, there are also barriers in the way of those that we want to share it with. These barriers are intellectual, cultural and spiritual.

Our education system and broader society insist that we find scientific explanations for all of life. If you can't prove God then he doesn't exist, there must be scientific explanations for miracles, conversion is a psychological phenomena and so on. There is a suggestion that to believe in God requires that you say goodbye to your intellect. Our culture is based on the idea that every individual has the right to determine what is right for him or her without any interference from a higher authority, certainly not God. Moral views are relative and will change according to the circumstances we find ourselves in, but we clearly do not want someone limiting our personal freedom to make choices that suit us. The idea of a God who has absolute authority and who does not need to explain his actions to our satisfaction flies in the face of all that we grow up learning, this is a huge barrier that needs to be overcome.

All of the barriers faced by those who are yet to respond in faith to the good news have a spiritual origin. In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul writes that the god of this world has blinded the unbelieving so that they cannot see the light of the gospel. He goes on to say that the light which has been given to illuminate the world has been given to us to shine through our hearts, but as Deniece Williams sings, 'If we are the light, why is the world so dark?'

Another barrier thrown up by the devil is powerlessness. According to Ephesians 2:1-3, before we received the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we were dead in our sins. We had no power we were under the control and influence of the prince of the power of the air. No matter how good our intentions we were powerless to escape his snare. The gospel came to set the captives free and until we receive Jesus Christ by faith we are held captive by the enemy to do his will. As Joe Aldrich has written we need to remember that the people we are trying to reach are not the enemy, they are victims of the enemy.

Those that are without sight and without power are also without hope. How can they expect to escape the snare of the devil? They are prisoners, they cannot just escape, they have no power to resist there is no future, no hope, they are held captive. Of course not every non-believer knows this or would be prepared to accept it. Many believe that they are doing very well and have no need of anything or anyone. They can manage on their own, and in any event there is no eternity, this life is all there is so why not get the most you can out of it? When we try to tell them that they need Jesus they cannot see why, the god of this world has blinded them.

Just like the barriers we have that we need to identify and overcome before we can be effective communicators, so too we need to find a way to get over the barriers that stop our friends and workmates from receiving the message. We can't simply blast through their objections; we must act wisely toward them, treating them with respect. What is your strategy for overcoming the barriers that hinder your message? How are you working toward being a better, more effective communicator? How has the light in your life overcome the darkness in the world in which you live?

### Crossing the Chasm **Mark 4:1-20**

There are many metaphors used for describing the process or method of getting from one side of the chasm to the other. Most if not all involve building a bridge of some sort, usually a bridge of friendship or relationship. Of course some methods or suggestions just involve shouting louder, or providing some attraction that might encourage those on the other side to build their own bridge! The metaphor I like is that developed by Christian Businessman's Committees Intl. Which, while recognizing that a bridge needs to be built across the chasm suggests we do this using an analogy drawn from farming.

As we develop a relationship with the person we are trying to reach we start to build a bridge across the chasm of their objections. We speak to their heart by showing that we care for them, as Aldrich writes, we cannot share good news until we are good news. We want to overcome the barrier of isolation that unsaved people often face demonstrating to them that they are not alone in the world, we care for them and so does God. Using the farming analogy, we start to cultivate the soil that is the human heart. Producing a crop involves three distinct phases, in the first place we must cultivate the soil, removing rocks and stones, tilling the soil and adding those nutrients that will enrich the soil. Once this is done we will plant the seed. We must use good seed and plant it properly if we expect a good crop. Cultivation takes much longer than sowing but if done properly will make the task of sowing much easier. Once these phases are complete we wait for the harvest. Harvesting is a comparatively speedy process, if the soil is well cultivated, the seed is good and is sown properly, then provided the climate is right and there are no adverse conditions, we can expect a harvest.

This metaphor relates to the process of evangelism, we cultivate the soil that is the human heart by prayer, good works, social activity, acceptance and understanding. Once the heart is prepared we are ready to sow the seed of the gospel through personal testimony and the application of the word of God. Then at the right time the harvest is reaped as our friend responds to the claims of the gospel on him or her. As we cultivate the hearts of our friend we are building a bridge across the barriers that separate us, once that bridge is built it is our responsibility to cross it to the other side and share the good news about Jesus. Once this is done we can assist our friend to cross the bridge with us to the other side of the chasm. Tragically many Christians and the organizations to which they belong believe that once a bridge is established to the unconverted in their community it is their responsibility to cross it and come to 'church' where they will hear a gospel presentation. This is not what Jesus meant when he said 'go!'

We must build the bridge and then cross it, as we spend time with our friends we will overcome the barrier of ignorance. As the Holy Spirit opens their mind with revelation of the truth, they gain an understanding that was previously hidden from them. Once they have this understanding we will seek to overcome the barrier of indecision by drawing from them a response. Evangelism is a process not an event. It takes time – and effort. Much of that time will be spent in building our bridge, or at the cost of mixing metaphors, cultivating the soil. If we are to reach our neighbours, workmates and friends with the good news about Jesus we must build a bridge. How is your bridge coming along? Have you started with the foundations of prayer and good works, and are you building with the planks of service, social activity, understanding and acceptance? Now is the time to get building!

### Cultivation 1 Corinthians 9

The process of cultivation involves developing a 'redemptive' relationship with your neighbour or friend. Jesus commanded that we are to love our neighbour and when he was questioned about who that neighbour was he used the parable of the Good Samaritan. Neighbours are not just people that we live close to; they include anyone that we have the capacity to draw near to, no matter what our circumstances or where we are located geographically. But to suggest that we need to draw near implies that there is a distance that has to be overcome.

The distance that exists between us and the people we want to reach is often not physical but the result of perceptions, values, beliefs and attitudes. Sometimes there are prejudices that need to be overcome and at other times there is the fear of rejection, criticism or failure. We need to overcome these barriers if we are to become neighbours. Joe Aldrich suggests that there are four steps we need to take if we are going to become a redemptive neighbour. In the first place we must make it a top priority. The apostle Paul said that he was under compulsion to preach the gospel, but that he was also eager to do so. Building relationships seldom happens by accident, there needs to be some effort put in. The second step is to develop a capacity to draw near. This may mean that we have to re-evaluate our personal likes and dislikes, to examine our prejudices and be willing to put them aside in order to get to know, or draw near to someone. It is amazing how our opinions of people change, as we grow closer to them. Thirdly we must develop the capacity 'to become'. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:22 that he was willing to become all things to all people so that he was able to reach some. It might be that you need to develop an interest in football, or gardening to strike up a conversation. You might need to extend the repertoire of your music collection so that you can share an interest with someone you have just met. The final step is to develop a 'caring-sharing' heart. We hear a lot about individual rights these days, but Paul suggested that we have to bring those rights under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in order to reach people with the gospel. We must be willing to become a servant to those we want to win.

Cultivating a relationship with others starts with cultivating your own relationship with God. As we do this we will seek responsive people through the social relationships we enjoy and as we meet with them we will be able to build a reservoir of shared experiences. As we build our relationships we need to look for opportunities to serve and at the same time plant 'spiritual seeds' as we talk about what God means to us and how our relationship with him helps us to cope with the rigours of life. Building relationships is a long-term proposition; we don't become someone's friend just so we can preach to them, but because we value them as a person and enjoy their company.

As we develop in our relationship we should make the most of events like Easter and Christmas and use them as opportunities to gently introduce our new friends to the basis of the gospel. At the same time we should strive to eliminate the caricatures that many unbelievers have of the church and its people. The conviction that Christians are either wowsers or hypocrites can best be dispelled in the context of a caring relationship. As we develop the relationships we have we should expect that at some point you would have the opportunity to share the gospel, so you must be prepared. It is important to have a strategy prepared for the time when your neighbour asks you about the hope that you have and then you will be able to gently lead them into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, at this point your neighbour who has become your friend is now a brother or sister in Christ and you have experienced the joy of bringing them into the family of God.

### Worldly, or Weird? **Romans 14**

In our desire to build relationships with our neighbours we will be confronted with the need to maintain a balance between being radically different from the world in which we live, in order that we will have a message and radically identifying with those we want to listen to our message. Jesus told us that we are to be salt and light in the world in which we live, there must always be a combination of truth and love held in the right balance. This is the tension we face and the challenge we have.

One extreme of behaviour is characterized in the spiritual porcupine, the person who is bound up in legalism and seldom ventures from his or her holy huddle. They believe that since they are Christians that they are not of this world and to associate with the lost may result in them being contaminated in some way. They must 'come out from amongst them and touch no unclean thing'. This is of course an extreme religious worldview and the result is that the audience is lost and they can no longer be salt or light.

The other extreme is the spiritual chameleon that has so assimilated with his or her audience that they become indistinguishable from it. Not only do they go to the pub with their neighbours, but they get roaring drunk as well! They have accepted the moral values of their world and have lost their message. These people can often be heard to say things like 'it's just business, it's not really dishonest' or 'it's OK to cheat on your taxes, everybody does it'. Using the guise of loving their neighbour they have neglected the truth of the gospel.

The Christian who seeks to cross the chasm from the Christian worldview to the secular runs the risk of being labeled worldly by the religious conservatives or weird by their secular neighbour. The tension of being not of this world but needing to live in it is tricky to negotiate so there are some principles that should be observed. In the first place, familiarize yourself with what the Word of God has to say. Read passages like Luke 7:33-35, Acts 24:16, I Corinthians 9 and Romans 14. Once you have become familiar with the word, watch your balance, maintain a good conscience with God and man, remember it was written about Jesus that he grew up with favour of God and man, strive to do the same. Be prepared to challenge your comfort zone. How many things do you do or not do because its always been that way? Howard Hendricks made the point that the problem with most Christian convictions is that they were the convictions of Christians but not biblical principles. Challenge you beliefs, make sure that you can support your likes and dislikes Biblically and don't condemn people for behaviour simply because you don't like it. However once you have studied the word and challenged your comfort zone, establish some boundaries and stay within them. It is important to recognize that in some cases your boundaries may differ from someone else's, they may feel free to visit a hotel and drink alcohol, but you may not. You may like formal worship every Sunday, but they may not. Make sure the boundaries you set line up with Scripture and that they are appropriate for you, but do not condemn others for the views and values they hold.

The key element in building relationships is finding common ground. What are those activities that you and your neighbour find in common? What experiences do you share? It is in this context that you will get to know one another, but it is also here that your boundaries will be tested, don't be afraid of that, rather welcome it. Seek to maintain a radical identification with your neighbour, but at the same time be radically different so that you will have the opportunity to be both salt and light.

### Ready For The Harvest 1 **Peter 3:8-16**

Every farmer knows that there is a right time for harvest. There is no point in trying to get the crop in too early, and if it is left too late the crop will spoil, it is essential to harvest at just the right time. It is also important to have a plan or a strategy in place for when that time comes. No farmer would wait until the crop is right and then start to think about what they need to do, what machinery they need or where they will put the crop when it is harvested. All these things are planned in advance. Of course the crop is never going to ripen if it is not sown in the first place, and the farmer will have a strategy for this as well.

In the same way we must have a strategy for both sowing good seed into the hearts that have been cultivated and then for harvest at the right time. There are a number of ways that we can sow seed into the hearts of those whose hearts have been cultivated through friendship, prayer, care and understanding, but perhaps the most effective of these is personal testimony. Peter tells his readers to always be ready with an answer for the hope that is within them and the apostle Paul used his own testimony when he appeared before King Agrippa in Acts 26. Are you ready with your testimony? If you were called upon would you be able to provide a convincing explanation for your faith right off the cuff?

There are a number of key principles that should be included in your testimony. You could start with a brief description of your life before you became a Christian, identify a key factor or problem that characterized your life - it may be that you were a workaholic, or lacked peace or a sense of purpose or maybe you were extremely ambitious. Illustrate how this factor affected you in your day-to-day life. Don't dwell on the negatives however, most people you relate to won't identify with you if you only talk about how evil you were or what problems you faced – include some of your achievements, the good things you have done. The second principle of your testimony is a description of how you came to Christ. Avoid using jargon and explain exactly what you mean, remember that to say 'I went forward' or that you 'received Jesus' will probably mean nothing to a person from a secular worldview. There is no need to exaggerate either the events of your life before you became a Christian or your encounter with Jesus. You don't have to be exciting – just real. Remember to include in your description of how you became a Christian enough of the gospel message for your neighbour to understand what Jesus has done for them. You might like to include a couple of verses of Scripture at this point. After you have explained your conversion experience then go on to describe your life since you became a Christian. Once again don't exaggerate, just tell it as it is, don't imply that all your problems have been eliminated but explain how being a Christian helps you get them into perspective.

As you conclude your testimony you will have the opportunity to make a personal appeal. Don't fall short of the mark 'close the deal'. Your desire is that the person you are sharing with will come to the same experience of faith you have, your testimony is the tool you will use to bring them to the point of decision. Of course you will need to give them sufficient information on which to base their decision. You will want to be able to share the basics of the gospel with your neighbour in such a way that they will be able to make a decision to commit themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In other words you need to have a harvesting strategy. What is your strategy? Do you have a plan for the time when you will introduce your neighbour to faith in Jesus Christ, if not now would be the time to put one together- in anticipation of the harvest when it is ready.



### Until Then

#### The Between Times **Jeremiah 29:4-7**

There is a parallel between the times of the prophet Jeremiah and our own days. The people of his day were living in exile, because of their collective disobedience they were taken to Babylon where they were to remain until God re-established them in the city and land of their inheritance. In the meantime they were to live in the place where God had sent them in anticipation of a future when they would live under the rule and authority of the King of Kings. While we have not been taken into a physical exile, as the people of Israel were, we are living under the authority of an alien ruler whose desires are contrary to the plans of God, and we do live in anticipation of the time when Jesus will return and establish his reign.

The times we live in lie between Christ's ascension into heaven and his return in glory, in the meantime our world is under the rule and authority of Satan, the one who stands in absolute opposition to God and his purposes for humankind. These times are appointed by God and will end when he decides they should. While there are things that we can and should be doing which God requires before the return of his Son, we cannot bring forward the day, it is an appointed time and part of God's eternal purpose. When the disciples questioned Jesus about his return in Acts 1, he answered that it was not for them to know when and how this would happen but in the meantime there was work for them to do. That work was to be witnesses to the things they had seen and heard, to be heralds of the good news by the power of the Holy Spirit that would indwell them.

We live in anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ; we are living as aliens in a land under the authority of a ruler whose plans, purposes, values and intentions are in direct opposition to our king. This isn't our land; we are strangers here. It is inevitable then that there will be a clash between our values and those that belong to this world. One of the challenges this poses for us is how to succeed in the world of work, family and community while having different purposes and motivations from those we live amongst. Is it possible to survive, let alone succeed, in the business world with out conforming to the standards and expectations of those around us? Paul's answer to this dilemma was to instruct his readers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds; he went on to say that this was the most reasonable form of worship they could offer (Romans 12:1-3) The solution to successful Christian living in the midst of alien land is not to enforce a set of rules and regulations but to do those things that will serve to renew our minds. Once our minds have been renewed then there will be no problem in deciding between the various choices we are faced with. Rather than try to live under a set of prohibitions, most of which we will occasionally fail to keep, we should focus on filling our hearts and minds with those things that will serve to bring our lives into harmony with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Too often Christians put themselves under a tremendous burden of guilt by following self-imposed disciplines, assuming that this is what it means to live a righteous life. God puts the emphasis on the positive rather than the negative, instead of concentrating on what you shouldn't do focus on those things that will renew your mind. Fill your thoughts with the word of God, communicate regularly with Him in prayer, seek out the fellowship of others whose desire is to grow in Christ, and commit yourself to doing his will in your home, community and place of work. In this way your mind will be renewed and the details of life will look after themselves. Jesus said that we should seek first his kingdom, then everything else would be provided out of his grace.



### Be Involved **Jeremiah 29: 5,6**

The people of Jeremiah's day were told that they were going to be in exile for some time. Many of them didn't want to believe this and there were prophets who were more than happy to tell them that it wouldn't be long before they were returned to their rightful place in the sun. But God condemned those prophets and emphatically declared that the people would remain where they were, under the authority of a pagan ruler until he decided otherwise. There are those today that are so convinced of the nearness of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ that they insist we should disengage from the world we are in and live in seclusion, uncontaminated by the world. God's command to us is the same as it was for the people of Jeremiah's day. Get involved in your world.

There are specific areas of life that we are to be involved in including society, commerce and community. God commanded the people to build houses and to live in them, they were to plant crops and to eat their produce and they were to marry, have children and even grandchildren. They were expected to get involved at every level of life. In this time in which we wait for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the coming of his kingdom we are to engage in everyday life and be part of the community in which we live.

While we are confident in the return of the Lord, and eagerly anticipate it, knowing that it could happen any time, we are to live as if we could be here for a while. We are to show our commitment to our community by building houses and living in them. Living is not just sleeping the night or having a holiday, it involves doing all those things that comprise normal life: conducting business, recreation, buying and selling and so on. A good member of the community takes responsibility for the place in which they live, they will probably be involved in Neighbourhood Watch, the school P&C, local sport, and will vote in local government elections. Building a house suggests permanency, we are not just passing through – we live here.

Anyone who plants a crop expecting to eat its produce knows that there is time involved. In order to succeed with our produce we will need to buy and sell with other producers. We will want to sell our excess, at a profit, in order to buy what we need and have a little left over. We will have to buy fertilizers, hire equipment and maybe employ labour. In short we will be involved in commerce. While we live in our communities, buying and selling with those that live there, we will also engage in raising families. The fact that we are to expect to be here some time is reflected in that not only should we seek a husband or a wife for ourselves, but also for our children and their children. We are not only to live as families but we are to expect to grow. God told the people of Jeremiah's day that they were to multiply, right where they were. To grow and not to decrease.

God does not want us to withdraw from our world; he wants us to live in it engaging fully in all its aspects. That includes the places we work and the communities we live in. His expectation is that we will be salt and light and salt is of little value if it remains in the saltshaker. We must be sprinkled throughout our world, having an effect wherever we are and in whatever we do. In the time we are here before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ let us commit ourselves to being valuable members of our community, contributing to their benefit and being a blessing to all those that live there. Look for ways that you can be used by God to bring his peace to your workplace, society and the community of which you are a part, and then expect God to use you for his glory.

### The Welfare of Your City **Jeremiah 29:7**

The significant things about God's command to the people to seek the welfare of the city is that the city was part of Babylon – they were expected to seek the benefit of a city which belonged to a pagan nation and ruler! This was the city that God was going to send his people to and they were going to be there for a while. In seeking the welfare of this city the people would find welfare for themselves. God expects us to be a blessing to our city; our presence there should mean welfare for all who live in it. We are to be actively doing things that will bring a benefit and prosperity.

God has placed you in a community, it may be a town or a larger city, but you are not there by accident. He has sent you there so that you can be a blessing to it. In the same way you have been sent to a place of employment for the same reason. Apart from the fact that you will bring welfare to your workplace, there is a more selfish motivation, that is, in it's welfare you will find welfare. In other words, as the business grows you will receive the benefit. There are many ways we should be working toward the welfare of our workplace, we should work hard, turn up on time, make sure we are honest all that we do, be polite and courteous to our workmates, employees, customers and suppliers and so on. Above all these things we should pray.

Jeremiah told the people to pray to the lord on behalf of the city that they were sent to. This principle should be extended to your work place; you are to pray on its behalf. But for what should you pray and how do you go about it? The most obvious thing is to pray for the people that you work with or for, then of course are your suppliers and customers. But we can also pray for the business decisions we face and the challenges that will occur in the course of normal operations. We can pray for 'difficult' employees and 'challenging' customers and when faced with machine breakdowns or supply problems we can pray about those things to. At the end of each day many people like to plan their agenda for the following and write up a 'to do' list. I have found that using this list as a prayer list ensures that God is invited to participate in all of the business for that day.

In Revelation 3:20 God declares that he stands at the door of the church knocking, waiting for someone to open the door and invite him in. This is another principle that can be extended to the places in which we work. Jesus wants to gain admission to your workplace, but he needs you to invite him in. If there are other believers in your business that you can join with, then you have the assurance that wherever two or more of you meet together, then Jesus is in your midst. You also know that whatever you ask will be accomplished for you by your father in heaven. Do you pray specifically for the business and workplace issues that you face? Do you expect God to be interested in your success at work? God is in fact interested and he wants you to succeed. He has even promised to assist you in your endeavours, why not invite him into partnership.

Across the world there is a growing network of businessmen and women who have formed a 51% club. This club is merely a loose association of Christians who have determined to make Jesus the managing partner in their business, they give evidence of this by giving 51% of their profits to him as the major shareholder. These funds are used to alleviate systemic poverty throughout their communities. In this way they not only seek the welfare of their company, but their city as well – and God is certainly adding his blessing! This is a conviction that these men and women have come to and is not a rule or obligation imposed on every believer, but there is an obligation for everybody to actively seek the welfare of their city and for most of us this will be best achieved by being successful and growing our businesses.

### Watching Over the Marketplace **Isaiah 62:6-7**

On a number of occasions in the Old Testament God spoke to the people of the need to appoint watchmen. He used three different Hebrew words when describing their role. In Isaiah 62 God describes these watchmen as *shamar*; this is a word that suggests the need for the watchman to exercise great care over those in their charge. That care involved physical protection but also other aspects of a shepherd's role including nurturing, feeding and nourishing. God claimed that he had appointed watchmen over Jerusalem and he gave them specific instructions. It is not too much of a leap to extend this role to the watchmen he appoints over our city and then perhaps to the marketplaces in which we are engaged.

These watchmen are to never keep silent, not that they are to talk incessantly or to preach ceaselessly, but their responsibility was to pray continually. They were to constantly remind God of the need to re-establish his glory in the city. The watchman was to take no rest for himself and in turn to give God no rest until he did what was asked. The primary responsibility of the watchman is to intercede. The intercessor prevails in prayer, often taking no physical rest, but more accurately never giving up until his or her prayers are answered.

God has appointed watchmen over the communities in which we live, further than that he has appointed them over the market and workplaces in which we are engaged. We are those watchmen and women; we have a responsibility to intercede on behalf of the communities of which we are a part. God commands his watchmen to never give up, but to keep on nagging him, not allowing him rest until he establishes his glory in our cities, workplaces and communities. It is God's desire that we pray, but this is costly prayer, it requires that we make it a priority, taking no rest until we have what we ask of him.

The watchman prays from a shepherd's heart, he is concerned for the sheep over which he watches. Some of those sheep are in the fold, but many are not and the shepherd must care for them also. The fold represents all those who have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; they are his sheep and he promises to care for and protect them. But there are many other sheep that are not in the fold, they are the lost sheep and the shepherd will leave those in the fold to go and find them. In your workplace and community there are many lost sheep, many who are outside of your congregation who are lost and in need of a shepherd. As the watchman or woman of your community or workplace it is your responsibility to care for them and bring them into the fold. The first part in fulfilling this responsibility is intercession. Pray continually; don't give God any rest until he establishes his praise and glory in your marketplace, this is what he commands you to do.

The watchman's role is a pastoral one; he or she is to care for those in his or her charge as a shepherd would. In other words God has called you to be a pastor of your community, whether that be the place where you live or the marketplace in which you are engaged. Paul told the elders of the church at Ephesus to be on the guard for themselves but also for flock over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers (Acts 20:28). In this same way you are to shepherd the flock that God has given to you. You are a shepherd and you have a flock to care for. How well do you know the condition of your flocks? Are you able to intercede on their behalf, asking God to meet specific needs? Do you give yourself no rest, praying continually for God to establish his praise in your workplace or community? This is your responsibility, this is why God has put you where you are so that you can remind him of his plans and purposes and lead those who are in need of a shepherd into the pasture he has provided for them.

### Watching Out for Our Marketplace **Ezekiel 3:17**

God uses the word *sāpā* to describe a watchman that makes him or self so aware of all of their circumstances that they are able to gain an advantage over their enemy. It also suggests the ability to lie in wait or to ambush. In a negative way the wicked are said to watch the righteous in order to find an opportunity to slay him (Psalm 37:2), but on the other hand a wise woman looks to (or watches over) her household (Proverb 31:27). Watchmen were commonly employed by rulers of a city to warn against attack or to look out for something or someone (1 Samuel 14:16, 2 Samuel 18:24, 2 Kings 9:17-20) and Ezekiel was appointed as a watchman over the house of Israel so that he could convey God's warnings to the people.

The role of the watchman is prophetic, he or she is appointed to warn against danger and to alert the inhabitants of a city to the threats they face. God has appointed you as a watchman or woman over your community and marketplace. If you are going to be effective in your task then you must be fully aware of the dangers and threats as well as the requirements God places on the people. What are the threats that face your community or marketplace today? Are there significant moral issues, perhaps hotspots of drug abuse or crime in your neighbourhood? Maybe there are business practices that are unethical or even illegal in your workplace. Are there people you care for whose lives are on a downward spiral due to alcohol, promiscuity, greed or dishonesty? The watchman is to warn against danger and alert the people to the consequences of their action. Ezekiel was told that if he failed to warn the people he was to watch over then he was liable for their lives, but if he faithfully proclaimed God's message then he was free from any other responsibility toward them even if they refused to listen.

God has appointed you as a watchman or woman. The wise woman in Proverbs 31 diligently took care of her family's every need; this is the first responsibility of every father or mother. This is how you exercise your role as a watchman. Then you are responsible for your part of the marketplace, the lives of those under your influence are your responsibility. If you don't warn them of the danger they face, their lives will be held to your account. This is an awesome responsibility – it would be well to pause and think on this for a moment. God has placed you on the wall of your community or workplace to look out for the people and to tell them whatever He has to say. This is why you are there, you are his spokesperson, he is depending on you.

It is not popular to speak out against the moral, social and ethical ills of our community and workplaces, it is much easier to just pray about them. But there comes a time when the watchman does more than pray, he or she also speaks out. If you are to be God's watchman or woman then you must be prepared to be more than just a quiet witness, certainly there are those who have been clearly given a prophetic gift or office, but all of us are called to watch out for those under our care. The good watchman makes himself aware of the dangers and takes action to warn those at risk, in this way he or she complements the intercessor who brings these needs to God in prayer, but at the same time he or she is urgent in making the threat known.

The battle we face is a spiritual one, it is fought in the heavenly places but its effect is felt right down here on earth. While the intercessor takes up the fight in the heavenlies the watchman prepares the troops for battle on the ground. He or she is informed about the enemy's strategies and also the weaknesses in the community's defense. If the watchman is doing his job, then not only will the people in the city be prepared for the attack when it comes, it will be delivered and the enemy defeated.

### Protecting The Marketplace **Jeremiah 31:6**

Another word used to describe the role of the watchman is *nāsar*, which means to safeguard and keep something in one's care. God describes himself this way when he speaks of his role as the keeper or watchman over all men (Job 7:20, Isaiah 27:3) but the word is also used to guard material things, possessions or the fortifications of a city. In Jeremiah 4:16,17 the watchman keeps guard around a besieged city stopping those inside from receiving help or deliverance. The watchman is to protect those in his or her care and take whatever action necessary to prevent any harm from coming to the city.

In earlier times a necessary part of the defense of any city was the city wall. This wall prevented invaders from gaining entrance unobserved, but also only allowed people to leave through its gates. It was essential that the wall be maintained properly and that the watchmen stay at their appointed places so that they could sound the alarm in the case of any attack or threat. If the wall was breached, the defense of the city was at risk. Our modern cities generally do not have walls, although some of the more affluent suburbs have 'gated' communities, which prevent undesirables from gaining access, but there are still cities around the world that have walls from an earlier time in their history. I worked for a time in a maximum security prison which was surrounded by a wall on which were located watchtowers where armed guards were stationed to both keep prisoners from leaving, but also to prevent unwanted visitors from gaining access. The wall was an essential part of the prison's security, regular checks were made on its condition, and the guards were often subjected to surprise visits to make sure they were alert. There are spiritual walls around our communities and workplaces on which watchmen have been placed, but which must also be kept in good repair. The enemy is always looking for a breach in the wall through which he can gain entrance, and our responsibility is to ensure that such an opportunity does not exist.

In describing the role of the prophet in Isaiah 58, God reminds them of their responsibility to speak on his behalf, warning the people about the consequences of their sin. He goes on to say that if the people were to listen to his message and change their ways, doing as he asked them then they would be called repairers of the breach and restorers of the streets where people live (Isaiah 58:12). This passage gives us a clue about how we are to act if we are to protect our communities against the attacks of the enemies. Essentially what God was telling the people to do was to look out for the poor, the needy and the afflicted. Perhaps the greatest opportunity we give to the devil to do mischief in our communities is through the areas of poverty, affliction and misery, if we are to deny these opportunities then we must repair the breaches in our walls.

Sadly many Christians live almost entirely unaware of the social needs of their communities, they don't know any poor people, they are ignorant of the misery and affliction suffered by many and fail to see the need around them. There are Christian employers who deny decent working conditions to their employees and while they live luxuriously complain bitterly about having to pay even an award wage or provide mandated benefits. The watchman will repair these breaches, not only will he or she speak out against injustice they will also work to bring it to an end. As a watchman you will work hard to build up the fortifications around your city, community, workplace. You will identify areas of weakness in your defenses and strengthen them. You will also warn the members of your community of the approaching danger and remind them that God will hold them responsible for the way that they live. What's the condition of the wall where you have been stationed, is it in need of repair – then now is the time to go to it!



### Building the Wall **Ezekiel 22:30**

Our cities are in danger of being overrun with evil, it seems that violent crimes are on the increase, incidence of drug abuse is soaring, childbirth outside of marriage is accepted as normal, abortion is seen as a woman's right and should be exercised if a career is threatened or a financial burden produced, smoking, obesity and alcohol pose huge costs to the health budget, interest in the occult is increasing and schools are routinely guarded by armed police. In this climate of social dis-ease God looks for someone to stand in the gap, to rebuild the defenses of society and is amazed that he can find no one.

The consequence of someone not standing in the gap of their community's walls is to have that community destroyed. God has placed you in the place you are in for a purpose, so that you can watch out for those under your care. He wants you to pray for them, fight for them, act on their behalf and to protect them against the enemy. God says through Isaiah the prophet that he looked for someone to intercede on behalf of the people but he could find no one. When he looks out at your community, workplace or city what does he find? Does God see watchmen and women at the gate crying out day and night so that God's praise will fill the city, does he see others warning the people of the danger to come and urgently calling the people to change their ways? Is he able to find those who cry out against social injustice and who do their best to change the circumstances of the poor and the oppressed? Or when he looks at the Christian community does he find complacent Christians enjoying a season of praise and worship as they congratulate each other on how well their 'church' is going and how good the music program is?

We live in a between time, the time between the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and his return in glory. We eagerly anticipate that return, but until he comes God has given us a ministry to fulfill. He has placed you in the family, marketplace and the city you are in so that you can watch over them. He has called you to be watchmen and women who will take seriously the responsibility to care for his people. We live in desperate times, the people need a saviour and they need someone to lead them. God has given this responsibility to you. The task is urgent, no one knows how long it will be before the return of the Lord but right now the enemy is camped at the gate looking for an opportunity to force his way in and loot, rape and pillage the people of God's possession. How well do you know your enemy, are you are aware of his strategies and devices for leading people astray? Have you identified the weaknesses in your community's defenses that he will exploit and have you recruited others to work side by side with you on the wall so that your defense is secure?

When Nehemiah organized the people to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem he made sure that everybody knew their place on the wall. They all had a job to do and there were others who guarded them while they worked. Each of us has a role in building the walls of God's kingdom and it is essential we know what part of the wall we are supposed to be building. If there is someone missing from the wall, or if they have not done their part then the defenses may be breached. It is not up to the unsaved of our cities to build the walls against Satan, it is up to you and me. We need to identify the places of corruption and bring them before God in intercession. We need to speak prophetically against the injustice and moral sickness that permeates our society and we need to warn our children of the dangers they face. We must watch over our cities, we must watch out for our cities and we must protect our cities and pray for their welfare. For those engaged in the marketplace, apply this principle to the place where you work. God is looking for someone who will stand in the gap and build up the wall – will that be you?



## Review Questions

### Being Ambitious I Thessalonians 4:10-12

#### Excel Still More

1. What things does Paul suggest we should excel in?
2. How is it possible to love all men (and women)?
3. What do you think about the idea that we should excel in business?

#### Make It Your Ambition

1. What three ambitions did Paul speak of?
2. What ambitions do you have?
3. Is it right to be ambitious?

#### A Quiet life

1. What do you think it means to live a quiet life?
2. In what way do you see being quiet as related to peacefulness and contentment?
3. Is it possible to be successful but still quiet?

#### Minding Your Own Business

1. What should be our attitude toward busybodies? Why?
2. Why do you think Paul singles out young widows as potential busybodies?
3. What deliberate actions can you take to make sure you mind your own business?

#### Work With Your Hands?

1. How do work and ministry relate to one another?
2. What is the most important ministry you can be involved in?
3. What reason is there to 'work with your hands'?

#### Behaving Properly Toward Outsiders

1. What is the connection between work and proper behaviour toward non-Christians?
2. How are Christians thought of in your work place?
3. How does your work, or the way you do it, open opportunities for the gospel?

#### Not Be in Any Need

1. How does your work help alleviate the needs of others?
2. What is the reason why some people succeed more than others at work?
3. How does your experience of the church reflect that of Acts chapter 4?

### Ready for Work

#### **Made Ready**

1. What good works has God prepared you for?
2. What things in your life have prepared you for the job you have now?
3. What should you do if you realize you are not in the job you should be?

#### **A Calling, or Just a Job?**

1. In what way are you called to your job?
2. Is your job your ministry or just a means to pay the bills?
3. How can you treat your job as your ministry?

#### **Signs Along The way**

1. Are you convinced that you are in the right place of ministry?
2. What three things do you need to line up to be sure of God's will?
3. Do these things line up for you?

#### **Gifts, Talents and Abilities**

1. How does the Trinity work in the use of the gifts you have?
2. How are you able to use your gift in the your place of ministry?
3. Are your gifts the same or similar to the natural talents you have?

#### **Work That Produces Fruit**

1. What fruit does God want you to bear at work?
2. What pruning needs to take place for you to produce more fruit?
3. How does being successful at work relate to bearing fruit?

#### **The Marketplace Church Connection**

1. What is the connection between the church meeting and the congregation?
2. Do Christians need to go to church?
3. What should happen at meetings of the church?

#### **Working Together**

1. How do we work together to build God's kingdom?
2. How does what we do at work affect this?
3. What tools has God given to you to do the job he has provided? How do you use these tools to assist others?

## The Church In the Marketplace

### **A Church is Born**

1. What were the circumstances that led to the birth of the church?
2. Why were the disciples together?
3. What organization did the first church have?

### **The Public Square**

1. What do you understand by the term 'marketplace'?
2. What are the marketplaces in today's society?
3. What is the modern equivalent to the 'upper room'?

### **But What About The Workplace?**

1. What should characterize the relationships we have with our employees?
2. How should employers act toward their employees?
3. How do we demonstrate our faith at work?

### **The Church at Motorola**

1. What do you think about the idea of a church at work?
2. Do you think that we derive our identity, culture and values from our workplaces?
3. What do you need to do to establish a church in your workplace?

### **Two or More**

1. How important is it to exercise discipline in church?
2. What does it mean to treat unrepentant Christians as tax-gatherers and sinners?
3. Are there one or two others in your business, or nearby that you can meet with?

### **The Kingdom Within**

1. What did Jesus mean when he said the kingdom is within you?
2. How is the kingdom made known if it isn't by signs and wonders?
3. What does it mean to suggest that we take the kingdom of God wherever we go?

### **The Place of Battle**

1. Have you ever thought of your workplace as a spiritual battlefield?
2. What sort of things does Satan use to harass you in your workplace?
3. What measures can you take to ensure you will have victory in the battles you face?

### Shepherds in the Marketplace

#### **See the People**

1. In what way are we to 'see the people' in our part of the marketplace?
2. What happens when we see the people as Jesus saw them?
3. Why do the people need a shepherd?

#### **Sheep Without A shepherd**

1. Who are the people in your world that need shepherds?
2. Who are those in your flock?
3. What can you do to shepherd the sheep you have been given?

#### **A Shepherd's Code of Practice**

1. What are the elements of a shepherd's code of practice?
2. What sort of things can distract the shepherd from the things he or she should be doing?
3. What happens if we don't do the things God requires of shepherds?

#### **The Great Example**

1. What was the example Jesus gave us?
2. Why is it important that the shepherd be drawn from the sheep?
3. What is Jesus depending on you to do?

#### **Sheep Know Their Shepherds**

1. How can the sheep know their shepherd's voice?
2. Who of us would leave 99 sheep to look for one that is missing? Why?
3. What do you think of the statement 'the shepherd leads the sheep, but the butcher drives them'?

#### **The Sheep and the Fold**

1. What is the difference between the sheep and the fold?
2. What are things that all of God's folds have in common?
3. How do you bring sheep into the fold?

#### **Fleecing the Sheep**

1. How do shepherds fleece the sheep?
2. How important are numbers?
3. What is the new generation of shepherds that God is going to raise?

## Bridging the Gap

### **The Chasm**

1. What is the chasm that exists between those with a Christian worldview and those who don't?
2. What has caused this chasm to grow?
3. What percentage of our community do you think is on the 'other' side of the chasm?

### **Our Side of The Chasm**

1. What sort of beliefs and attitudes keep us on our side of the chasm?
2. What do you think of the 'holy huddle'?
3. What ways can you think of to start moving to the other side?

### **Their Side of The Chasm**

1. What are the obstacles that keep people on the other side?
2. What is the origin of these obstacles?
3. What can we do to reduce or remove them?

### **Crossing the Chasm**

1. How do we go about crossing the chasm?
2. How does the metaphor of farming relate to building bridges?
3. What are three phases of farming and how do they apply to crossing the Chasm?

### **Cultivation**

1. What does cultivation involve?
2. What do you think is the best way to start cultivating a redemptive relationship?
3. What are some of the caricatures that non believers have of Christians?

### **Worldly or Weird?**

1. What are the two extremes we must extreme when building relationships?
2. What safeguards must we take?
3. What common ground do you think you can find with your neighbours?

### **Ready For The Harvest**

1. Why should you have a sowing and harvesting strategy?
2. What is the benefit of a personal testimony?
3. What things do non believers need to know before they can make an intelligent decision to become a Christian?

Until then...

### **The Between Times**

1. What are the 'between times'?
2. How are we live in these times?
3. What can we do to help us live the right way?

### **Be Involved**

1. How are to be involved in our world?
2. In what way can we be 'salt' in our community?
3. What can we do to make sure we do not compromise our faith?

### **The Welfare of Your City**

1. Why should we seek the welfare of our cities?
2. How do we do that?
3. In what way can you invite Jesus into your marketplace or community?

### **Watching Over The Marketplace**

1. What does it mean to watch over the city or marketplace?
2. What is the difference between the flock and the fold?
3. In what way are you a pastor to your workplace or community?

### **Watching Out for our Marketplace**

1. What does it mean to watch out for our marketplace?
2. What sort of dangers should you be warning the people about?
3. In what way is this a prophetic role?

### **Protecting the Marketplace**

1. How can you protect the marketplace?
2. What are the walls of your marketplace or community?
3. Where are the breaches in the wall?

### **Building the Wall**

1. How can you make sure the walls are secure?
2. What is your place on the wall?
3. What others are helping you in the task?