

LIFEGROUP LESSON



“The Call to Influence”
(Part 1 of 3)

Workplace as Missions Field



TIPS FOR DISCUSSION FACILITATOR

Ensure that the aim is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. The discussion questions provided are intended to bring out the relevance for today.

Begin with a prayer for the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Encourage everyone to participate in the discussion.

Begin the discussion by reading the sermon passage (where applicable), and discuss about its overall meaning by asking what could be the key focuses/emphases in that particular passage.

Spend appropriate amount of time on each question with as many members as possible making a contribution. At the end of each discussion the leader should summarise the main points that have arisen and direct the group towards making them applicable in their individual lives.

A balance must be kept between ascertaining what the Bible teaches and what are the opinions of participants. So the facilitator should make sure that there is an understanding of the passage before questions are raised.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

We should treat our workplaces as our missions field because ...

1. We Spend a Large Portion of Time at Our Workplaces
2. We Can Have Global Connection through Our Workplaces
3. We Should Exercise Our Godly Influences at Our Workplaces

Understanding of Our Ministry at Work

It is important for us to start by not dichotomizing between our ministry and our work. In the Bible, the word “ministry” means serving, and thus ministry is simply helping and serving others, and meeting needs. Ministry can also be defined as any activity which potentially involves a two-directional priestly service, i.e. touching people and places for God, and touching God for people and places. In this sense, marketplace ministry simply means creating meaningful value out of our work, living out our calling to be good stewards of resources that God has given us and serving as a positive Christian witness in our workplace:

- **Meaningful value:** In business, value is realised when the products or services are sold in return for profits and earnings. This value is thus determined by dollars and cents and is often created by those who define what value to create. However in God, a different value is practiced. We are called to be in a divine process of value-creation – defined as increase, growth, rulership and taking care. God wants us to create value that is meaningful in His eyes, from the perspective of eternity, and from the framework of what is value-able to God.
- **Good stewards:** In the Old Testament, a steward is a man who is “over a house” (Genesis 43:19; Isaiah 22:15, etc.). In the New Testament, a steward can mean either one to whose care or honour one has been entrusted (Matthew 20:8, Galatians 4:2); or a manager or superintendent (Luke 16:2-3; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2, Titus 1:7). God wants us to be accountable to him over responsibilities and resources that he has delegated to us. This includes the work and people in our marketplace. All things belong to God, and we are his executors and stewards.
- **Positive witness:** Every member in the church is called to be a witness, and this ministry of all believers (i.e. the “priesthood of all believers” in 1 Peter 2:9) includes being involved in ministry wherever we are, not only through the local church, but through friendships, in the home and at work. Our first responsibility must be to witness to those who are already our friends, relatives, neighbours, and colleagues.

Discussion for Point 1: We Spend a Large Portion of Time at Our Workplaces

- Some Christians today may believe that full-time ministry is the highest calling one can receive and is the only work that really matters to God and His Kingdom, or some may believe that God does not belong at the office. Do you think these are the right perspectives? Give reasons for your answer. How much time per week do you spend on doing “spiritual things”, such as fellowship and ministry? On the other hand, how much time per week do you spend in your workplace or school? Do you think that you are ‘wasting your time’ there? Explain your answer. What do you think should be the relationship between your work and your ministry? Read Titus 2:9-10. What is the potential impact from how you spend your time in the workplace, either in relating to people or in executing your work? The preacher exhorted us to make the most of every opportunity in our workplace and not merely live our lives there. Hence, in what specific ways can you make the most out of your opportunities in your workplace? Pray for one another in the LG for God to open our eyes to identify these opportunities.

Discussion for Point 2: We Can Have Global Connection through Our Workplaces

- List the different nationalities that you have in your workplace (or school) out of those people whom you know personally or regularly interact with. Combine the list as a LG community. How many nationalities in total does the LG have connections to? Which nationalities (and region/continent) does the LG have the most connections to? Read Matthew 28:19-20 carefully. What do you think is the obvious implication of the Great Commission considering the global connectedness of the LG? What are some possible reasons why believers may at times not see the opportunities to participate in global missions through their workplaces? Strategize how the LG can step up and play a more intentional role in global missions based on the LG’s global connectedness.

Discussion for Point 3: We Should Exercise Our Godly Influences at Our Workplaces

- Make a list of the people whom you know you have a direct influence over at your workplace (Note: Do make sure you include those whom you oversee at work, your peers, as well as those who are your supervisors). On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being very positive), how would you evaluate your influence at work. Give reasons for your evaluation. Why do you think it is necessary and important for believers to stand up and be a godly influence in their workplaces? Read Matthew 5:13-16. In what ways do you sense God leading you to exercise more godly influences at your workplace? Share some of the difficulties that you face when trying to exercise godly influence in your workplace. Pray for one another to have greater wisdom from God and greater dependence on God in handling these difficulties.

*Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything,
to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them,
but to show that they can be fully trusted,
so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.*

~ Titus 2:9-10 ~

Appendix A (For general reading and reflection)

Ministry in the Marketplace

Some of my earliest memories are of the marketplace

By Ed Silvano,

Excerpted from *Anointed for Business* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books)

I grew up in a two-story house overlooking the main plaza in San Nicolas, Argentina. Like in every Spanish town, the plaza was the center of life. The Plaza Hotel, flanked by the Catholic cathedral and the police station, was on our block. On the east side were the courthouse, the National College, and the Social Club, where the city fathers gathered. On the north side were Customs, the Italian Club, and homes of the leading lawyers and politicians. On the west side were the National Bank, more homes, and a popular restaurant that between meals set tables on the sidewalk and doubled as the town café.

City Hall was three blocks away, but it made its presence felt by the sonorous carillon that faithfully announced the time at 15-minute intervals 24 hours a day.

The plaza was wedged between the port and the city's two main streets where most of the businesses operated. It was such a vital part of the city that everything of substance happened in or around it. It was there that the military parades and political rallies took place. On Saturday evenings beautiful girls and handsome boys would choreograph the ritual of courtship under the attentive eyes of mothers, who would stand nearby, and fathers, who would sit at the café and pretend to discuss sports and politics.

This area of town was called el centro (the center) because everything revolved around it. In essence, it was the marketplace in a microcosm. Through the ages, cultures around the world have fashioned their own versions of the marketplace, but they always included these three basic components that were found around the plaza in my hometown: business, education, and government.

Early Christians made the marketplace the focal point of their ministry because their occupations regularly took them there. As they conducted business, it was natural for them to present the Gospel to the people they encountered. Marketplace people played a vital role in the emergence, establishment, and expansion of the early church—in fact, most of the followers of Jesus Christ remained in full-time business while simultaneously conducting full-time ministry. This was possible because they saw the marketplace as their parish and their business as a pulpit, to them witnessing was not an occasional activity but a lifestyle.

Generals, Not Privates

Today, millions of men and women are similarly called to full-time ministry in business, education, and government—the marketplace. These men and women work as stockbrokers, lawyers, entrepreneurs, farmers, chief operating officers, news reporters, teachers, police officers, plumbers, factory foremen, receptionists, cooks, and much more. Some of them have great influence on mainstream society, others are unsung heroes with low profiles, but each of them has been divinely called to bring the kingdom of God to the heart of the city.

Unfortunately, many of these marketplace Christians feel like second-class citizens when compared to people who serve full-time in a church. This should not be the case. No matter the occupation, Christians who work at secular jobs need to know that they are not perpetual privates in God's army just because they have not gone to seminary. They have the potential to become full-fledged generals whose ministry is in the heart of the city, instead of inside a religious building.

Not only is it OK to do ministry in the marketplace, but God has explicitly called these Christians. They have been chosen and empowered by the Holy Spirit for a divinely sanctioned assignment.

Most marketplace Christians already know that their ministry and their occupation are somehow connected, but they do not comprehend exactly how. Even though they sense that they have a call to ministry, they hesitate about exchanging their secular setting for a religious one. Quite often they are told that this vacillation is due to lack of faith or, worse yet, an attachment to worldly things. This indictment leaves them confused because deep down they feel that their spiritual destiny is in the marketplace.

Unfortunately, many of these marketplace ministers fail to fulfill their divine destiny because they are often derided as untrained or uneducated. This is not a new accusation. It's exactly what the two businessmen-turned-ministers, Peter and John, were called by the religious clique. This should never happen because the requirement to be a minister is not religious education; rather, it is the spiritual conditioning that comes from "having been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

Jerusalem Transformed

Such conditioning allowed the apostles to fill Jerusalem with the good news in just a few weeks by leading thousands to the Lord. As a result, Jerusalem experienced transformation at the deepest level: the needs of the poor and the widows, two vulnerable groups, were met (see Acts 6:1-7). The hungry were fed and the sick were healed (see Acts 2:45; 3:1-8). The Gospel even had a positive influence on the Sanhedrin, the most powerful forum the Jews had (see Acts 5:33-39). Solomon's Portico became the place for a steady stream of ministry, giving the emerging church favor with the people (see Acts 5:12-15). Soon multitudes from nearby cities flooded Jerusalem (see Acts 5:16).

What a change! This was the city that had previously grieved Jesus to the point of tears but was now giving Him tremendous joy! It began on the Day of Pentecost when the disciples left the enclosed confines of the Upper Room and went to the open space of the marketplace. On that day Peter, the fisherman, became the first fisher of men, setting a pattern soon to be replicated throughout the Roman Empire. This movement was led not by individuals notorious for their religious acumen, but by people known for their roles in the marketplace: fishermen, tax collectors, farmers, and more.

Three Business Partners

It did not take too long for these enthusiastic preachers to transform myriad towns and cities, culminating with Ephesus, site of the most dramatic encounter recorded in Acts (see Acts 19:1-13). This city, with a demon-driven economy and a marketplace that was the citadel of evil, experienced a radical transformation. It is not a coincidence that at the center of God's move were Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla. Their dual ministry-business status connected them to the religious community through their teachings and to the marketplace by their tent-making enterprise.

Today, in general, religious leaders have little interaction with unbelievers, even less with prominent ones. The church does not command the attention or the respect of the marketplace. In fact, quite often it is considered irrelevant and seen as some sort of social parasite. To compound this misconception, church members who do have relevance in the city on account of their position in the marketplace tend to disqualify themselves from leadership in spiritual matters. The most common self-inflicted put-down is "I am not a pastor—I am just a layperson."

The call to serve in the marketplace and the call to serve in traditional religious settings are both valid and interdependent, since they involve ministers who respond to the same divine calling. **Whether people are priests in the Temple or kings in society, God has called each one of them.**