

WORKPLACE WITNESS

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→ INTRODUCTION

90,000. That's the number of hours that the majority of people in the UK in full-time employment (about 45-50 hours per week over 40 years) will probably spend at work (and this includes the hours spent commuting to and from work). In some parts of the world it may be more. Do you ever wonder if giving 90,000 hours of your life to secular employment – as most Christians do – can be justified in the context of pressing human problems facing humankind?¹ (R. Green)

So why do we work? Can work be justified? He goes on to say of course it can; but not simply because work is a means of income; or because it provides opportunities for witness; or because work is a result of the Fall.² True: work is a means of income; does provide opportunities for witness; and work as we know it is also fallen. Nevertheless, work is justified simply because we were made to be the image of the Cosmic Worker, who worked for six days, and rests on the next.³ And although work as we know it is fallen, we also know that God is in the business of redeeming a fallen world. But, the question is: are we?

In his book **Thank God it's Monday**⁴, Mark Greene not only suggests that '[s]ociety encourages us to believe that our faith is private and has no place in the working world.'⁵ He also suggests that the church gives faith no place in the working world too, because we seem more concerned with getting the world into the church, then with getting the church out into the world. We are more concerned with the five-to-nine than with the nine-to-five. So we have come to value the ministry of the church-worker over the ministry of the workplace-worker.⁶ It is no wonder, then, that the workplace has become a neglected mission-field. But, he writes,

'God doesn't change when we walk into work. But maybe we do.

The Holy Spirit doesn't suddenly realise he's in an office or a factory and say, "I'm off now. See you later at the prayer meeting."

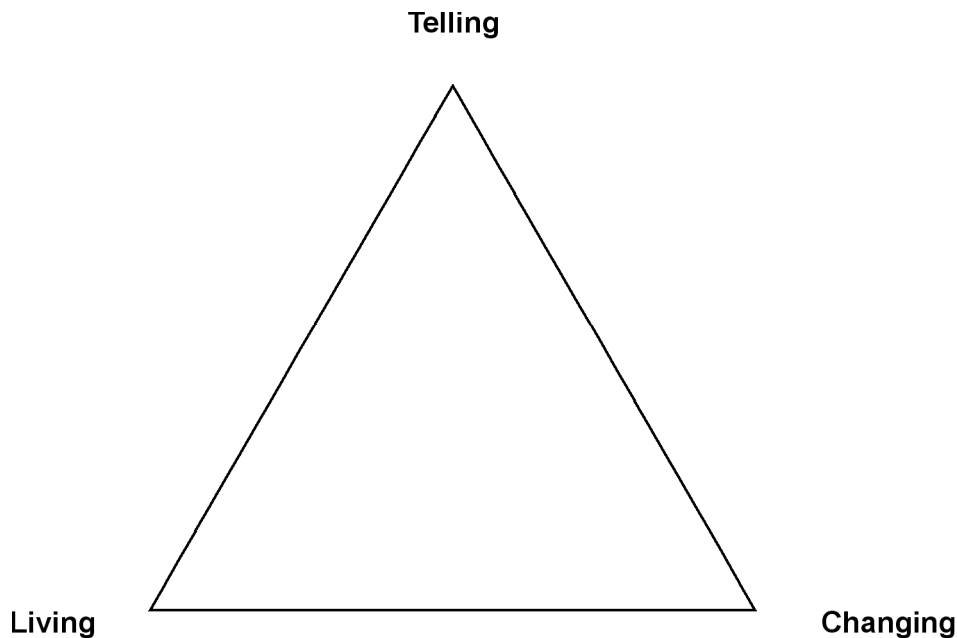
The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of mission, doesn't say, "Well, here we are in the office. Forget the evangelism bit – I'm just into the fruits bit now."⁷

This is a good thing because the workplace is where most people are most of the time. Therefore, the workplace is a highly strategic mission-field. And we see this reflected in the Bible: from Adam the gardener through to Paul the tent-maker. **What other jobs did characters in the Bible have?** Most of the Bible happens in the workplace!

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➔ TRIANGLE

We're going to look at workplace witness through three sides of a triangle, which we will call: living, telling, and changing. By "living" we mean living the Christian life out in the workplace; by "telling" we mean telling other people about Jesus and about the difference he has made to your life; and by "changing" we mean having a vision of how God meant the world to be, and being proactive in bringing about this change. Now, you cannot do one properly without the other two. For example, if I am truly living out the Christian life in the workplace, then I will also be taking opportunities to tell people about Jesus, as well as taking opportunities to improve the workplace.



Before we look at each of these in turn: living, telling, and changing, I want to ask you quite a fundamental question: **what do you think are some of the differences between campus and workplace?**

Perhaps these differences can be summarised under two headings:

Campus	Workplace
Expression	Suffocation

University tends to be a time of self-exploration and self-expression: perhaps not always, but most of the time. The workplace, however, can be a time of frustration and suffocation. Whereas you can strut around the Student Union like you own the place, from being on top of the pile, you may very well find yourself being a dogsbody at the bottom of the workplace pile. Moreover, whereas you might take it for granted that you can walk around campus being yourself, you might very well find that in the workplace you are not quite yourself, or at least like the person you want to be. In short, work can make you feel less than human, which can come as a bit of a shock if you take feeling human for granted. Work can feel like being hit by a sledgehammer. Of course, it might not be like this for all of you. But it could be like this for many of you much of the time. So how as a Christian are you going to respond? Let us look at "living" first.

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→ LIVING

What do you think are the distinctives that mark out the life of a believer in the workplace? (Are any of those distinctives shared with non-believers? And if so, how distinctive are they?) Allow us to suggest that the most distinctive thing we have is our relationship with God.⁸ (Now whether that relationship is something that gives us an advantage over non-Christians is something that John Griffiths takes up in the first Bible study in his series **E-mails from Hotel Babylon**, subtitled 'How to Live in Sin and Get Away with It.')

⁹ Having a relationship with God is why Paul can tell the Colossians, **"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men."**¹⁰

In what follows, we talk about our relationship with God in terms of spiritual breathing. When we breathe physically, we breathe in and we breathe out. When we breathe spiritually, we are filled with the Spirit and we confess our sins. Spiritual breathing is a way of talking about the rhythm of appropriation and confession in the life of the believer. Let's look at confession first.

Confession is to agree with God about the wrong things in our lives. 1 John 1v9 tells us about confession: **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."** Confession is to spiritual breathing what breathing out is to physical breathing.¹¹

Appropriation, on the other hand, is to receive God. This is because God gives us his Spirit, very much like a husband keeps giving **himself** to his wife in marriage.¹² Like a dance in which a husband leads, and his wife is responsible to keep in step, so we have a responsibility to keep in step with God by continually being filled with his Spirit.¹³ In Ephesians 5v18 Paul writes, **"be filled with the Spirit,"** or literally, "keep on being filled with the Spirit." So being filled with the Spirit is to spiritual breathing what breathing in is to physical breathing.

Now, one of the things about spiritual breathing is that we can do it anywhere: we don't need to wait for the next church meeting, or even our next quiet time. Indeed, in the pressure of the workplace, we might find it difficult to even have a quality quiet time. (So woe betide the church leader who admonishes his flock to have quality quiet times, without first realising the pressures of the workplace.)

But this can be to our advantage. Imagine sitting down at your desk first thing in the morning, and having to reflect on what needs doing that day: an invoice needs paying, a person needs phoning; and as you reflect, you ask God to forgive you those things that were not pleasing to him the day before. Then, as you commit the rest of the day to him – the invoice, the person, and so on and so forth – you ask to be filled with his Spirit. Already we are beginning to integrate what were our quiet times with our work.¹⁴

Indeed, one of the Hebrew words for work is **avodah**, which can also mean worship, so there need not be any division between our work and worship. (Perhaps the English word "service" best captures this nuance; and perhaps it would be helpful if what we called worship on Sunday, we simply called "singing" instead.¹⁵)

The discipline of doing this may save us when things get tough. Consider Job's response to the death of his children: **"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship."**¹⁶ Mike Mason notes that "under such circumstances worship does not come to a person naturally or spontaneously, but rather it is a practiced response, a fruit of long faith and discipline."¹⁷

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This is particularly important when dealing with anger and stress.¹⁸ And this is where spiritual breathing goes deeper than just being honest to God about our sins. It is do with being honest to God about how we are feeling. This is another way of breathing out that we see in Job or Psalm 88 or Psalm 137, and perhaps it is best called venting. Conversely, the Psalmist breathes in by giving thanks to God for all that he has done. This often involves remembering how God has acted for Israel. Indeed when Paul commands us to be filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5, he mentions a number of other things like giving thanks, and addressing one another with Psalms, which both seem to be a means of being filled. Letting it all hang out before God like Job or Psalm 88 or Psalm 137 feels at odds with giving thanks to God. So it's probably fair to say that breathing in and out like this is tantamount to wrestling with God. You see, if we suppress ourselves before God, we are more likely to explode at other people. But if we wrestle with God we are more likely to express ourselves appropriately to other people. This is because God can take all our momentum against him or against another person, and turn it round, like some cosmic judo move, to become momentum for the good of another person.¹⁹

The same is true when dealing with fear: take peer pressure for example. Peer pressure might make us feel afraid to dissent from some unethical workplace practice, or from taking opportunities to share our faith. (And it can operate like carbon monoxide, secretly suffocating us.) On the one hand, expressing our fear to God expresses our doubt that God will come through for us. On the other hand, if we ask him to bless us by filling us with his Spirit, he can turn this small step into boldness and courage. Expressing such simultaneous doubt and trust, again, is to wrestle with God. And in the same way that Jacob wrestled with God because he was afraid of Esau in Genesis 32, so we too may need to wrestle with God.

Put another way, **expressing our fears to God expresses our fear of God**. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, and wisdom begins by discerning that we need God because we are not God. Wisdom begins by expressing our fears to God, and wrestling. So the fear of God is the courage to trust God despite the other fears we might have. It is the courage to dissent from unethical workplace practices. It is the courage to take opportunities to share our faith. But whatever it looks like, it is a work of God within us.

To sum up: the way we relate to God affects the way we relate to other people.

➔ TELLING

Actions speak louder than words.²⁰ You will undermine your credibility as a Christian witness unless you work hard at your job.²¹ You are in the workplace to work. **"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody."**²² You will increase your credibility as a Christian witness if you work hard at your people skills.²³ These are skills like listening and loving. Some people seem to be born with them, whereas other people need to work at them. (Moreover, research has shown that those with better people skills or EQ – Emotional Quotient – are more likely to climb the career ladder.)²⁴

Yet insofar as actions speak louder than words, actions without words do not fully communicate the Gospel. You need both. As Mark Greene writes,

We must be tactful and sensitive as we love, and distinguish between the opportunities to serve and the opportunities to communicate the gospel verbally ... we communicate the gospel through our behaviour, but at some point people need to hear the word.²⁵

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And in order to be telling people the Gospel we need to be doing various things: first of all we need to be spiritually breathing, because unless we are full of the Spirit, we will never be bold enough to open our mouths.²⁶

How would you define success? Success in sharing your faith is simply taking the initiative to talk about Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results to God. That's pretty much what boldness is, and it flows from spiritual breathing.

Second, we need to be prepared to give our testimonies. Agapé's **Living and Telling** training suggests that we break down our testimonies into sound-bite answers to five questions: what was my attitude before I took Jesus Christ seriously? Why did I say "Yes" to Christ? How did I say "Yes" to Christ? What difference does Christ make to my day-to-day life? And what is a "Christian"?²⁷ The answers to these questions should be stand alone because people tend not to ask these questions at the same time or in the same order, and rarely will you be able to say everything all at once.

Third, we need to be praying for people, and for opportunities to share the Gospel with them. (Suggested preparation for this can be found on pages 20-22 of Agapé's *Living and Telling* manual.²⁸ One of the reasons for encouraging students to think about their sphere of influence in these pages, is that it might encourage them to think about neighbours and lecturers or other college staff. This is important because it might force them to relate to people significantly older than themselves, as they will have to do so in the workplace.) Bear in mind that workplace witness is a lot slower, and often a lot less spectacular than on campus.

Fourth, we need to be prepared to share the Gospel with people. The **Knowing God Personally** booklet has been designed with this in mind;²⁹ and instructions for its use can be found on pages 48-50 of the **Living and Telling** manual.

Fifth, it is no bad thing to be meeting up with other like-minded Christians, whether they are in your workplace or not, and praying together for those you work with, as well as chatting through how you might take or create opportunities to share the Gospel. It is important to keep thinking biblically about the world, the news, and workplace issues, whether big like capitalism,³⁰ or small like office parties.³¹ This can help open up conversations to talk about Jesus. Moreover, thinking biblically about the workplace might help us be proactive in changing the workplace, and indeed the world, around us.

➔ CHANGING

It is important for Christians to change the world for the better when we can. Again, actions speak louder than words, although actions without words do not fully communicate the Gospel.³² Actions, especially actions that change the status quo, function like signs or signposts to the coming kingdom. Jesus spent his entire ministry healing people knowing full well that they would become ill again, that the signs would fade. But that did not deter him from changing the status quo, and nor should it deter us. Do we have a biblical view of the workplace? Do we know what and how we would change things?³³ How would we answer an invitation to "come help change the world"?

In many ways, this brings us back to where we started: to understanding that we work because we were made to be the image of the Cosmic Worker, commissioned to "have dominion" over all the earth;³⁴ a commissioning that involves living lives of worship before him, telling others about his great works, and changing the world around us – not a million miles from what Jesus said in Matthew 28v18-20.

MATTHEW 28 v 18-20

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

→ NOTES

1. R. Green, *90,000 Hours: Managing the World of Work* (Bletchley: Scripture Union 2002) p.1
2. *ibid.* p.21f.
3. *ibid.* pp.24-50; cf. M. Greene, *Thank God It's Monday: Ministry in the Workplace* (Bletchley: Scripture Union 2001³) pp. 27-35; and T. Vickers, *Transition: The Christian Handbook to Life after Graduation* (Leicester: UCCF 2003²) pp.14-17
4. M. Greene, *Thank God It's Monday: Ministry in the Workplace* (Bletchley: Scripture Union 2001)
5. *ibid.* p.16. On how this came to be, see L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK 1989) pp.1-38
6. M. Greene, *op. cit.* pp.18-21; cf. R. Green, *op. cit.* pp.26-30. On how this came to be, see R. Higginson, *Questions of Business Life: Exploring Workplace Issues from a Christian Perspective* (Carlisle: Spring Harvest 2002) pp.297-322
7. *ibid.* p. 22
8. R. Green, *op. cit.* p.109
9. J. Griffiths, *E-mails from Hotel Babylon*
10. Colossians 3v23
11. H. Cloud and J. Townsend, *How People Grow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2001) pp.161-185 looks at the difference between being forgiven and feeling forgiven. We do not feel forgiven when part of us, perhaps a hyperactive conscience, is playing god. In this sense, therefore, we may be said to be wrestling with God.
12. It is worth noting that the Greek word Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5v5 for the Spirit as a "guarantee" or "deposit" is *arrabon* which has come to mean an engagement ring. Yet the Spirit is also more than an engagement ring or deposit because he is a person.
13. '... you are led by the Spirit ... Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit' [Galatians 5v18, 26].
14. See further the second Bible study in John Griffiths' series, *E-mails from Hotel Babylon*; and note also Brother Lawrence's spiritual classic, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, published in 1692, but still in print! "The time of business," said he, "does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament" (Oxford: Oneworld 1999) p.42. Spiritual breathing could also form the basis for an understanding of the Sabbath as something that we experience throughout the working week, rather than just on a Saturday or Sunday. See T. Vickers, *op. cit.* pp.26-27.
15. R. Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2002) p.65
16. Job 1v20
17. M. Mason, *The Gospel According to Job* (Wheaton: Crossway 1994) p.35
18. R. Green, *op.cit.* pp.51-93 (stress) and pp.113-114 (anger)
19. On bringing our emotional lives before God, see D. Allender and T. Longman III, *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions About God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress 1994)
20. R. Green, *op. cit.* pp.95-111
21. M. Greene, *op. cit.* pp.103-111
22. 1 Thessalonians 4v11-12
23. M. Greene, *op. cit.* pp.43-53
24. See, for example, D. Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam 1998) pp.15-29
25. M. Greene, *op. cit.* pp.50, 66
26. M. Greene, *ibid.* p.67
Each reference to the filling of the Spirit in Acts is to do with witness: in 2v4 the believers "filled with the Holy Spirit" declared "the wonders of God" [v11] in the language of "every nation under heaven" [v5]; in 4v8 Peter "filled with the Holy Spirit" preaches to the Sanhedrin, and in 4v31 "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly;" in 6v8 Stephen (as one of those "full of the Spirit" in 6v3 and 5) goes on to witness through preaching [7v2-53] and, subsequently, "full of the Spirit" [7v55], witnesses through his death [7v54-60] – note that *martyr* in Greek means witness: in 9v17 Saul is "filled with the Holy Spirit" in preparation for his ministry; in 11v24 Barnabas is "full of the Spirit and faith, and a great number of the people were brought to the Lord;" in 13v9 Paul is "filled with the Holy Spirit," and witnesses to Elymas [13v10-12]; and in 13v52 Paul and Barnabas are "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" in response to the persecution which their witness provokes in the first place.
27. *Living and Telling* (Agapé: Birmingham 2004) pp.6-10
28. *Living and Telling* (Agapé: Birmingham 2004)
29. *Knowing God Personally* (Agapé: Birmingham 2001)

30. On the bigger picture of the workplace, see R. Higginson, *Questions of Business Life* (Carlisle: Spring Harvest 2002)
31. M. Greene, *op. cit.* pp.62-64
32. On the balance between social action and preaching the Gospel, see L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK 1989) pp.116-140
33. M. Greene, *op. cit.* pp.82-87; John Griffiths' *E-mails from Hotel Babylon*; and, not from an evangelical points of view, W. Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Doubleday 1998) are excellent places to start answering these questions.
34. Genesis 1v28 in the English Standard Version.

➔ OTHER RESOURCES

General Resources

Good introductory books to faith in the workplace include:

- R. Green, *90,000 Hours: Managing the World of Work* (Bletchley: Scripture Union 2002)
- M. Greene, *Thank God It's Monday: Ministry in the Workplace* (Bletchley: Scripture Union 2001)
- G. Shattock, *Wake Up to Work: Friendship and Faith in the Workplace* (Bletchley: Scripture Union 1999)
- T. Vickers (ed.), *Transition: The Graduates Handbook to Life After University* (Leicester: UCCF)

And, slightly more academic is:

R. Higginson, *Questions of Business Life* (Carlisle: Spring Harvest 2002)

A good book on emotional wisdom is:

D. Allender and T. Longman III, *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions About God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress 1994)

Agapé Workplace Initiative Resources

J. Horne, *Spirituality of Jesus* (Agapé: Birmingham 2004)

Living and Telling (Agapé: Birmingham 2004)

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