



WorkLife Discipleship and Outreach: Another Great Omission

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What are the consequences if we as a church do not have a strategy to drive the discipleship of people's work lives? Our answer matters because the American church is at a historical crossroads with great implications if we do not change how the church engages the world it is called to reach.

At the end of WWII, England had the same church attendance that the US does today: about 35 %. Today Britain is largely post-Christian with only 6 % now attending church. Britain's quaint village churches failed to change their paradigm and now find themselves stuck behind their own rock walls.

Mark Greene, who is John Stott's protégé and the director of the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, has warned American evangelicals that either we change the way church is done here or face the same fate of irrelevance. Specifically, he points to the current disconnect between local church ministry and the marketplace as one of the causes for greatest concern. Tim Keller pastor of Redeemer in Manhattan agrees. As he has pointed out, the shrinking of Christendom means that the internally focused church must missionally re-embrace equipping people for public life or face ministry obsolescence.

According to George Barn's latest findings in his book *Revolution*, the problem is real and it is alarming. The average evangelical coming out of our churches has a spiritually fatal disconnect between faith and daily life. Most admit that the church service is the only place they worship God. Half would say they have not even experienced God's presence in the last year. Only 9% of those who call themselves born again have the basics of a biblical worldview. With results like these, how can we as churches be optimistic about our current discipleship efforts?

As alarming as it is, the problem is not always obvious. A pastor responds: "Our church is making disciples. Those disciples go to work. We teach them how to have a quiet time and how to share their faith. Our member, John, is passionate about the marketplace and leads a prayer group at work. I have even preached about being a Christian at work. We want to see our city reached for Christ. Who doesn't? So, what's the problem?"

The problem is, according to Barna, most of our members are missionally ineffective. The majority define success in life without mentioning their faith. Fewer than one out of ten wants to be known by others for their relationship with God. Is it any surprise then that, as Barna observes, "the typical church member will die without leading a single person" to Christ?

Q: What are the consequences of no WorkLife strategy for the local church's . . .

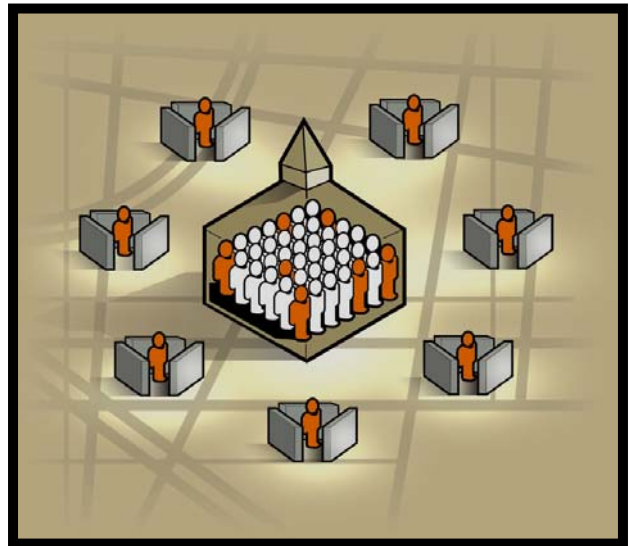
- Discipleship?
- Worship?
- Ministry?
- Community?
- Mission?

The average church, of course, addresses all of the purposes at some point in its ministry. The problem is that sporadic and isolated events do not constitute an effective plan for discipleship. As Saddleback clearly understands, it takes intentionality to effectively pastor the purposes of the church. The missional area of WorkLife is no exception.

WorkLife is the area where this fatal disconnect between life and faith is the greatest in the daily lives of believers. The fact that Enron's indicted former CEO Kenneth Lay was a trustee of his local congregation says as much about the way we do church as it says about him. The double-mindedness in the lives of believers are but reflections of the disconnects in our own approaches to ministry.

WorkLife discipleship is like the fictional continent of Atlantis. It somehow fell off the map of the local church. Look on any church's website and you will not find WorkLife even mentioned in the church's all-important stated mission, vision and values. The church does not identify pastoring people's work lives as part of their purpose, yet it is the place where their members' faith is challenged with the greatest intensity and frequency.

Check out the budget. There is no line item for WorkLife outreach or WorkLife discipleship. Neither does it rate a staff position on the ministry chart. In all but a hand full of churches, you will look in vain to find it listed under their official ministries.



So what do you call a priority that is not articulated, funded, or staffed and which has no strategy? Call it what you will, but it is any thing but purpose driven. "So what?" our hypothetical pastor responds, "We don't have a ministry to deaf either and that hasn't stopped our church from thriving." Perhaps this reaction was influenced by the Marketplace ministry of the past. It was stereotypically a specialty ministry for a small niche of white-collar businessmen. It was also almost exclusively a parachurch phenomenon.

True WorkLife Ministry is different. It is the missional commitment of the local church to WorkLife evangelism and discipleship. Not everyone is in the marketplace, but every one of your members has a work life. So does every unbeliever your church ever hopes to reach.

What is WorkLife Ministry? It is a sustainable plan and process of the gathered church to envision, disciple, equip, commission, and support the scattered church. It is the local church engaging its members in their work places as they walk well with God at work while reaching and transforming their workplace for Christ. This missional lens is one vital element to what it means to be a healthy church because it has implications for all the traditional areas of local church ministry. It is a missing piece to the larger picture. The lack of a focused WorkLife missional lens is handicapping each of the core purposes of the church because the greatest evidence that they exist is how they are lived out in all areas of our members' lives, the largest part of which is spent at work.

Discipleship

The church continues to perpetuate partial-life discipleship.

The church's product is life. The local church exists to foster God-filled life where it previously did not exist. That is the thrust of the Great Commission. People spend the greatest portion of their waking lives at work. If we do not have an intentional, systematic and comprehensive strategy for how our local church helps people live out Jesus' life at work, then it means that the largest segment of their lives is going without intentional discipleship. The sad fact

is that most churches do not have a plan for discipling people in their work lives apart from the occasional sermon series or small group study which rarely produces lasting change because of the lack of consistent follow-up.

Our discipleship tracks have been great explaining faith but somehow overlooked life. The reason is that mainstream evangelical spiritual formation is suffering from tunnel vision. I was raised in a Christian home with parents in ministry. I grew up in standard-bearer churches committed to evangelism and discipleship. Furthermore as a professional in ministry, I was discipled and trained by the best the parachurch had to offer and was actively winning and discipling others. Yet I was never discipled in my calling or work life. Stop and ask yourself, were you?

One day as a historian I came across the discipleship curriculum that the puritan pastor Jonathan Edwards had been trained in by his church in how to have a god-filled work life. They even had a name for it. I was surprised to find that it was not “calling” as I would have expected, but “*technologia*”, a Latin term for their little-known method of teaching the art of God-centered work. It had textbooks. It even had a historical and theological tradition that somehow I had never been taught in seminary called the Second Reformation. Edwards and his fellow students—future pastors and merchants alike—were tested in it in order to graduate from early Yale. The puritans knew what it meant for the church to purposely pastor people in their work. We do not.

If you asked an engineer in one of our churches what designing computer components has to do with the kingdom of God, my bet is that he or she probably could not pass the test. The reason is that we modern evangelicals have no functional equivalent for the systematic work life discipleship teaching that Edwards took for granted. That is why we find the Puritan outlook so intriguing. We do not have or teach the transferable concepts of a God-centered work life.

In Luke 3, when John the Baptist preached the kingdom of God, the immediate response of the soldiers and tax collectors present was, “What shall we do?” John gave them specific answers about the implications of discipleship for their work situations. The modern church like John has been preaching the kingdom, but it has not sufficiently answered the question of what discipleship means for daily life. Look through our best discipleship curriculum. You will find a glaring omission. We have not been discipling people for their 9 to 5 calling at work. As Howard Hendricks says, “You cannot impart what you do not possess.”

The modern church, like John, has been preaching the kingdom, but it needs to sufficiently answer the question of what discipleship means for daily life.

Yet, possess and impart it we must. Tim Keller argues that in post-Christian twenty-first century America, for the church to be missionally effective, one of its core characteristics must be that it “theologically train lay people for *public* life and vocation.” He explains that “In ‘Christendom’ you can afford to train people just in prayer, Bible study, evangelism—private world skills—because they are not facing radically non-Christian values in their public life . . .” But to prepare people to live amid the anti-Christian culture of today, “the laity needs theological education to ‘think Christianly’ about everything and work with Christian distinctiveness.” Our missional context dictates that “ministry” be redefined: “In a ‘missional’ situation, lay people renewing and transforming the culture through distinctively Christian vocations must be lifted up as real ‘kingdom work’ and ministry along with the traditional ministry of the Word.”

We talk about worldview. What we really mean is apologetics. We are primarily defense with no offensive playbook. We are great at arguing why all the “Isms” aren’t, but have never explained to our own people “what is,” the reality God wants them to live out here and now where they live and work. A worldview means God’s view of life in this world. We have not been fully teaching people God’s view of work, which is a major component of their life this side of eternity. Jesus’ Great Commission command to the church was to teach whole-life observance. We have not done that. We are guilty of partial life discipleship.

Worship

The church's primary purpose of worship goes unfulfilled during the hours people spend at work.

The church exists to grow the worship of its people. Paul said, "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work and walking around life—and place it before God as an offering." (Romans 12:1, The Message) But, you cannot offer something as worship that you do not see as worthy. The result is that most Christians have no idea what it means to enjoy God through their job.

The consequence of partial life discipleship is that believers live segmented lives and don't worship God through their work. They are involved with their church because that is where we have taught them that the action is. They go to work only because they have to. It pays the bills. Work is a net spiritual write-off. It does not count. It has no spiritual significance because it is just about widgets. We all know that widgets don't have souls. If making widgets or selling them or managing people who make and sell them has nothing to do with the kingdom of God, then certainly it has nothing to do with worship. Right? Remember, it is not what we preach but what people hear that counts.

People cannot worship God with their work because you cannot give to God something that you ultimately believe is unspiritual.

Impartial discipleship short-circuits whole life worship. People cannot worship God with something that they ultimately believe is unspiritual. Work is off people's spiritual radar screens because it is not a routine part of the vision of their local church. Dallas Willard was right when he pointed out that the kingdom of heaven we too often currently preach has little to do with how to live a God-honoring life in this world. We sell the good life but rarely structure to grow it. If our people are not working as unto the Lord (Col 3:23), then we as a church are failing at our primary purpose, which is the worship of God himself in all we do.

Ministry

The faithful jump through our church hoops yet leave without seeing or fulfilling the ministry of their God-given life work.

C.S. Lewis poignantly observed, "The sense of divine vision must be restored to man's daily work." One of the church's roles is to help people catch God's vision of their work. If our church is not routinely painting the vision of what it means to be on-mission for God in my WorkLife through all our communication and assimilation channels, then people will continue by default to go to work for all the wrong reasons.

As HCAW president Doug Spada likes to say, the church is like an aircraft carrier. A carrier is run by naval officers, but its mission is fulfilled by pilots. If people come on board and only get the message that the mother ship is the vision, then our mission is aborted before it started. It is easy to get them all excited about the ship, but in doing so they can totally miss the bigger mission and their critical role in it. The carrier exists to train, brief, arm and launch pilots to be on-mission. That is how it achieves air dominance. Too many churches are like mothballed aircraft carriers that have become moored tourist attractions rather than active catapults that put out to sea to help people catch and fulfill a vision for their God-given mission.



The problem is that incomplete messaging in the church results in people getting excited about everything *but* their work. We do a series on missions and people get the wrong idea that to be really spiritual they need to quit their job and move to Africa. They go through a membership class and walk out feeling it was just about spiritual gifts and how to plug in to use them at church. Nothing was said about these same spiritual gifts, their God-given talents and abilities, and their implications for their calling at work. They get so excited about church that work paled by comparison. We challenge them to have a ministry, but inadvertently ignore the ministry they already have in their work place. We celebrate their volunteer service that benefits our programming at church but rarely, if ever, affirm or commission them for their calling to serve at the office every day of the week. We do a campaign on sharing your faith at work, but its subtext is that my work only counts to the degree that I can share my faith.

To be sure, missions, spiritual gifts, service, and evangelism all need to be taught by the church. But when delivered apart from their complementary biblical context alongside vocational mission, Satan can twist them into an unintended message to disillusion the working believer.

The omissions are subtle, yet they give a clear implicit message: my work does not matter. My job has nothing to do with church and, therefore, nothing to do with my ultimate mission. Here is the irony: the more excited and involved I am at church, the more I know my job is a waste. Needless to say, if that's the case, our Ephesians 4:12 efforts to equip the saints are having counter productive results on their vision for their God-given Ephesians 2:10 work of service.

Community

The local church fails to consistently foster small group community at precisely the place where people have the most relationships.

Question: Where is the largest existing regular community in your city? Answer: At work. Jesus used these natural work relationships of his disciples to help recruit his followers. Matthew 9:10 tells how, "While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' came and ate with him and his disciples."

To grow community you have to go where the people are. Today people don't gather daily in the temple. Sadly, they do not even eat most of their communal meals at home. Every day, however, they meet and interact with many people at the office. They probably have more conversation time with colleagues at work than they even do with their own spouses. The average person regularly interacts with 20 to 50 people each week through their work. They would be doing well if they could even name five people in their neighborhood.

Yet, where do we as churches spend the bulk of our time, money and staff encouraging community? In their neighborhood? The point is not to shut down neighborhood small groups but to point out the opportunities for community that we have missed by not having a strategy to pastor the church's purposes in the missional area of people's work lives.

The fact is that community already exists at work. It just needs to be channeled for spiritual purpose. The world of work already has multiple layers of natural relational networks: coffee pot friends, lunch buddies, cubicle mates, acquaintances within the company, those above and below me, contacts in different departments, outside vendors, clients, competitors and peers across my vocational field. These affinity groups gather at regular intervals and are connected by natural communication channels.

By tapping into these existing relational networks and fostering purposeful community where people work, the church better fulfills its purpose of fostering committed Christian relationships. Christians in a workplace small group find fellowship, discipleship, encouragement and prayer support where they need it most: on the battlefield.

A local church also can offer outreach-focused small groups in the workplace. These provide its members with a better platform for ministry. They can invite spiritual searchers into a WorkLife small group that meets in the

workplace near them discussing felt need issues they are facing today. The church is then touching people through their WorkLife and feeding their spiritual discipleship journey before they ever darken the door of the church. Instead of asking them to come to us, we have go to them. This change in direction of the “Walk Arrow” is a fundamental shift in becoming a more missionally effective church.

The church cannot hope to transform a place where it has not presence. By fostering intentional community in the workplace we create new portals into people’ lives for the local church’s transformational discipleship. Doing so increases the length of the church’s ministry reach to those who would otherwise have no contact with the gospel. A church without a strategy to foster the purpose of community in the workplace is a church that has missed one of its greatest opportunities for life transformation.

Mission

The workplace needs to be strategically permeated and effectively transformed by the local church.

Jesus gave us a plan for expanding the outreach of the church. He said, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

No one will argue about the need to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel. It is very encouraging seeing local churches take seriously their opportunity to mobilize their people to reach the world. That is a much needed and long over due development. But, if the American church never effectively reaches its own Jerusalem, then it will be significantly handicapped in growing the kind of churches overseas needed to reach their cultures for Christ.

Go to a church planted by Americans in any foreign mission field and you will see reproduced in that church many of the same shortcomings and unresolved issues you find at home in the American church. It is because we can only reproduce our DNA that changing our missional DNA here at home is so critical. The world needs more churches but it does not need churches that are clones of our internally focused American Christian enclaves, missionally isolated from the life of their city. It is for the sake both of Jerusalem and our mission to the rest of the earth that the local church must bridge the Sunday/Monday divide and find ways to make new inroads for Christ into the places where people work.



This “9 to 5 Window” of WorkLife has been compared to the “10/40 Missions Window” of the Muslim world because both are unreached groups with comparatively little in committed ministry resources. Go anywhere in the world and the marketplace is where you will find the largest group of unreached people gathered each day and yet proportionally it receives little or no intentional ministry focus by the local church.

Make no mistake about it, the *local church* is the crucial *missing piece* to reaching the marketplace, whether it be here or abroad. Unlike the parachurch, the local church already has a force of missionaries to reach this field. They are indigenous and fluently speak the language of these lost masses. They need no financial support as they are paid to go to this mission field every day. They do not need to build bridges as they already have existing relational networks there.

In new the global economy, many Americans in business have more regular business contacts with people around the world than your average missionary does. Furthermore, when it comes to sending them on short-term missions, people's work skills are one of their most natural entrées to the needs of people in another part of the world. The problem with this potential missions force at home and abroad is that they just do not see it. They do not see their workplace as a mission field. To them it is where they have to go to get a paycheck. They do not see their skill as a ministry tool. To them it's just what they do at the office. Their today is nothing special; it's just another day on the job.

A church without a plan to envision, disciple, equip and mobilize its people for the mission of their work lives is an aircraft carrier whose planes are parked and rusting on deck. The mission has not been mapped in the briefing room. The runway lines have not been painted for takeoff. The enemy owns its airspace. It is a ship missing much of its purpose.

That is why a healthy local church is the most critical missing piece to reaching the Jerusalem where people go to work everyday. Only the church has the people and resources to reach it. Only the church has the God-given global responsibility to disciple people's whole lives. But the key to developing that church to its mature mission potential is its pastor. Every carrier needs a captain to lead it into battle. If WorkLife is not on the map of his battle plan for the local church, then his people will remain largely out of action.

When it comes to sending them on short-term missions, people's work skills are one of their most natural entrées to the needs of people in another part of the world.

WorkLife Ministry happens when church leaders take seriously Jesus' Great Commission, not just to raid the marketplace collecting evangelistic scalps, but to grow an authentic presence on the public square making disciples whose life is salt and light to all those they work around.

Needless to say, a local church that is not intentionally mobilizing and equipping its people for this mission field will have limited impact on it. People's work lives constitute one of the largest untapped markets for local church ministry impact today. This kind of transformation of a sector of life and society, however, does not happen by accident. It must be purposefully driven.

Conclusion

When Jesus looked at the people in the city of his day, Matthew says, "he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36). When Jesus looks at the crowds coming out of our churches on Sunday heading toward another week of work, he sees that they are harassed too. They are harassed by the stresses of too little sleep, a torturous commute, impossible bosses, fractious co-workers, inadequate health insurance, the stalking specter of unemployment, cursing customers, the ever-present juggling of career and children, and the threats of constant corporate change—just to mention a few.

Worst of all I fear Jesus sees that in many ways they are still sheep without a shepherd. The church has long prided itself on pastoring people, but it has somehow overlooked the pastoring of its people's work lives. Imagine a shepherd that only cared for the sheep when they were at home at night and on weekends. People need the church to shepherd them in their 9 to 5 calling just as intentionally and vigilantly as churches shepherds their worship, their youth group, their children's ministry, their family life or their prayer life. The consequences for this lack of intentional missional ministry to people's work lives go to the very foundations of the purposes of the church itself.

In *Boiling Point* George Barna predicted, "Workplace ministry will be one of the core future innovations in church ministry." As Mark Greene and Tim Keller have warned, the day to innovate and reproduce that kind of local church is now.



Hear me right: WorkLife is not the next new essence of the church, but it is a missing core component to a fully developed, healthy church. It is not *the only critical* thing, but it is *a crucial* factor to a local church's effective missional ministry. It is one area of life delivery where we have not been intentionally fostering the churches purposes.

Jesus knew that sheep cannot even go for even a day without a shepherd. He knew the church needed intentional leadership to fulfill its purposes. His delegation of missional responsibility was deliberate, clear and direct. It was to you and I, the leaders of the church, that he entrusted the intentional direction and purposeful growth of the church. He said to Peter, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?” ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘You know that I love you.’ Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs’” (John 20:15). Dare we tarry any longer?

For many years the local church neglected Jesus' Great Commission in its lack of resourcing of global missions. Robertson McQuilkin termed that failure *The Great Omission*. WorkLife is a further area where local churches have unwittingly failed to intentionally resource a critical aspect of its Great Commission ministry. WorkLife faces us with another great omission.

“Seeing the crowd, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

—Matthew 9:36

About His Church at Work

His Church at Work is a solution provider assisting local churches to pursue an Ephesians 4:12 WorkLife discipleship process—equipping their members to walk well with God at work and to be a transforming presence in their Worklife. www.HisChurchatWork.org 4080 McGinnis Ferry Road Suite 204, Alpharetta, GA 30005 404-935-5757

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