

Kingdom Workers
A Small Group Curriculum for Marketplace Christians

**“Keep your eyes open for God, watch for his works;
Be alert for signs of his presence.”**
(Ps 105:4 *The Message*)

Introduction

We love listening to each other’s testimonies. But how often do these stories move us to deeper change? Do the stories fade from our memory after we say a prayer of thanks? Or do they encourage us to ask questions about ourselves? Do we ask what we might do if we were caught up in similar situations? How often do we pay attention to the work of God in our marketplaces?

Kingdom Workers is a small group curriculum. It aims at helping you recognize God at work in the marketplace. It also provides a framework for you to share testimony about God’s work in your own life – including your workplace, your relationships and your daily life.

The ***Kingdom Workers*** project comprises nine case studies formatted for small group learning. Each case is based on the real-life experience of a working person in Richmond Hill Christian Community Church (RHCCC). You and your small group are invited to use this material.

How does it work?

The underlying truth of ***Kingdom Workers*** is that the Holy Spirit is active in the world, including our marketplaces! Our Lord Jesus promised us an Advocate to be with us forever. This is the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, goes to work with us, even *before* we walk into the office! Other people may not realize that the Spirit is present, but as followers of Jesus we know Him because He lives in us (John 14:16-17).

The studies in ***Kingdom Workers*** may be treated as exercises to help us discover how God is working through the Holy Spirit. Our task is to learn to discern *how* God was involved in specific situations. There are no model answers. The whole point is to encourage you to think, pray and make decisions by faith. Although each case comes with a conclusion based on what actually happened, it does not mean that you would have to act in exactly the same way in the same situation, because other factors could be at work.

Synopses

Case Study #1: *Speaking Out*

Synopsis: Gerry is a work team leader dealing with compliance issues in a major financial institution. His immediate supervisor considers one of his team members, Alfred, to be a liability, and wants to let him go. Gerry senses injustice at work and stands up for Alfred against the flow of corporate culture.

Case Study #2: *Sales Pitch*

Synopsis: The integrity of a commission-based worker in a financial institution is put to the test when she comes under pressure to hit production targets. Victoria finds that faith is a daily journey of learning to trust God.

Case Study #3: *Peacemaker*

Synopsis: Instead of firing an employee for cause, business owner Henry is moved to listen to the story behind her behavior. He discovers that it is really not for him to manage other people.

Case Study #4: *Career Move*

Synopsis: An administrative worker in transition seeks affirmation from God as she takes the road to a new career.

Case Study #5: *Suddenly Unemployed*

Synopsis: Infuriated at his seemingly sudden lay-off, a team leader contemplates legal advice to seek more compensation and redress.

Case Study #1: *Speaking Out*

Alfred had always been the quiet one in the team, almost to the point of being shy. He was diligent and careful in his duties, which consisted of compliance-related work to support frontline brokers. But he was not the kind of person who would liven up an office party. People did not regard him as much of a team player. Some even found him outright unsociable. So it came as a bit of a surprise when Alfred raised his hand to speak during the discussion session.

It was just after lunch in the training centre. Team leader Gerry had taken Alfred and the rest of his sales support unit to the offsite team-building event. Their company was one of the country's top financial investment institutions, and there was intense pressure to keep the numbers looking good. While not directly involved in sales, the support department carried most of the regulatory and compliance workload. Mike, the area director and Alfred's immediate supervisor, had decided to join them for a time of informal response to the morning's pep talk, with a view to boosting morale. The focus of their conversation: "How do I see myself contributing to the team in the next five years?"

Most of the people in the room knew they were expected to encourage each other with insights and aspirations. But they also knew to speak carefully, especially with more senior managers around. After all, nobody ever scored brownie points for making inappropriate remarks.

To make sure that everyone was tuning in, Gerry asked: "Alfred, how do you see your career taking shape with us?"

"Well, I've been thinking quite a bit about what I do. I'm wondering if I'm on the right career path," Alfred replied, quietly but deliberately. As the group pondered how to respond, Alfred spoke again. "I don't know if I really like this job. I'm not sure if the investment business is for me."

Just then, someone said, "Looks like you have some soul searching to do, Alfred! For now, why don't we get back to the focus of our discussion?" Another person interjected, "Here's my take on this morning's session on team work. I think we can get from good to great by" As the conversation continued, Gerry started wondering how Mike would interpret Alfred's unexpected candor.

The next morning, Gerry was summoned to Mike's office. "I'm very concerned about Alfred and how he is affecting your team," Mike said. "We should be focused on efficiency and effectiveness, and it doesn't help to have people like Alfred dragging everybody down with his negative remarks. You need to do something about it."

"Alfred's a very loyal employee, though he may not be an outgoing person. And the sales people have given him a very rough time," Gerry explained.

"I've reported this to the division chief. You know how much he's hung up on smooth-running teams and all that. Guess what he told me," Mike said.

"You're not saying..."

"He said we should let him go. Yes, fire him!"

“Isn’t that overkill?”

“We must do something. We have no room for loners.”

On leaving Mike’s office, Gerry heard the same question internally over and over again: “Is it right to get rid of a person just because you don’t like the way he works?” It was time to pray.

Part I

- 1. What was bothering Gerry?*
- 2. Why did he hesitate to fire Alfred?*
- 3. Up to this point, how do you think God was involved in the story?*
- 4. How would you pray if you were Gerry?*
- 5. What would be the best way to write the ending of this story?*

Conclusion

Gerry simply could not get Alfred out of his mind. No, he had to talk to Mike again. He got up and walked to Mike's room.

"Mike, I understand where you're coming from in dealing with Alfred. I agree we need to build strong teams of people with the right work attitude. But I really believe that getting rid of him like this is a bit too much," Gerry said, tentatively.

The manager's answer surprised him. "In that case, ask HR to get Alfred a job in another department."

Gerry decided to push a little harder. "How about asking HR to arrange three months of career counseling for him? If he shows improvement at the end of that, we should respect his decision and let him stay with us. If not, we can still let him go. But this way we have everybody's interests covered. It's a win-win situation." Gerry knew full well that his suggestion could backfire, but it would be worth every bit of risk.

Finally, Mike agreed to Gerry's suggestion and gave Alfred a three-month reprieve. Gerry was not sure exactly why Mike gave way. He was just thankful that Alfred now had a second chance.

End

Part II

- 1. How does scripture speak into Gerry's situation? What principles can I learn from the case study for my personal growth?*
- 2. How do they apply in my own situation? When I face a dilemma, how do I respond?*
- 3. How is God involved in my daily work? What part does God play in the way I make decisions about work and career?*
- 4. What specific marketplace experiences can I share to benefit my community?*

Case Study #2: *Sales Pitch*

Victoria could hardly believe her ears when the branch manager said she had to meet her sales quota over the next six months, or face the prospect of losing her job. In the three years since joining the firm as a sales agent, she had languished in the last quartile of the branch's monthly rankings, and the rules of the game simply did not favor weak performers. Nevertheless, it was both frustrating and humiliating to hear someone write her off in the insurance-financial sector.

"We've talked about this before. You're not bringing in new money, and I think you should seriously consider switching to another field," said Bill, the branch manager.

"I've worked just as hard as everybody. I've done more calls than anybody. And I have some excellent client testimonials," Victoria replied. She knew it was a lost cause, but she was not going to give up.

"I know you're putting in the effort. That's why I asked you to consider joining Marco's team. You remember that, don't you? "

Victoria recalled her meeting two weeks earlier with Marco, the branch's top agent. Bill had suggested that Marco take her on as an associate. In practice she would have been more like an assistant. The difference was that she would need to adopt the tactics of the high power team -- a sales pitch that she found dubious.

"The secret to making successful cold calls is this: get your foot in the door," Marco had said. "Do whatever you need to get face time with your prospect. Once he's on the phone, give him the benefits. Zero in on features and the returns, even exaggerate. Yes, it's okay to inflate expectations."

"But isn't that against regulations?" Victoria had asked. In her heart, she knew that it would throw integrity out of the window.

"Not really. You're just dressing it up. Once you meet the prospect, follow proper procedures. Bring the pamphlets, show the literature, then get him to sign the order. Never give details over the phone, and insist that you need to explain everything in person. Unless the prospect specifically asks for it, you don't have to give away everything," Marco had replied. "You know the hit rate for cold calls in my team? It's not your normal 1% or 2%. No, we're talking about 10 to 15%."

The mini lecture had left Victoria speechless. But Marco was not finished. "The secret to increasing sales is this: always sell products that give you the highest commission."

Victoria had wanted to direct Marco's attention to the regulations and professional ethics that aimed at protecting investors' interests, but she held back when she realized that Marco was fully aware of compliance issues. He just believed that he could bend the rules to his advantage. The question was whether Victoria wanted to go with the flow.

"Thanks, Marco, for sharing your experience. I'll get back to you in a couple of days." She started praying as she left the boardroom. *Father, do you really want me to stay in this business?*

Part I

1. *What was the issue facing Victoria?*
2. *Why did it make her uncomfortable?*
3. *Up to this point, how do you think God was involved?*
4. *How would you pray if you were Victoria?*

Conclusion

For the rest of the day Victoria wrestled with the pros and cons, but by the time she got home she had made up her mind. *No, I mustn't do it their way. Father, I must walk in your ways.*

The next morning, she woke up depressed. On her way to work, she started rationalizing. *Maybe I should join Marco's super team for now. I don't have to do everything they say. I can modify things. This way I don't have to worry about being kicked out in a few months. I work in the world, but I don't have to belong to the world. When my career is on track I will ultimately have more time to serve the Lord, and be a light in the dark.*

The day turned out to be a busy one, with the phone ringing almost nonstop. Victoria had no choice but put aside the whole matter. That night, however, she felt increasingly restless. *Should I, or should I not?* The debate was still raging in her mind when she fell into a fitful sleep.

When morning came, things were hardly any better. Victoria knew that she was going nowhere. *O God, my motives are so mixed. My heart is not still. My head is not clear. I don't even know what to ask for.*

She opened her Bible to Psalm 1. *Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners and sit in the seat of mockers.....* After several readings, she came to another scripture. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.* These were familiar verses that had led her through other trials. But this time she heard an inner voice asking, *Do I really trust God? How much do I trust him?*

The same questions kept returning until she plucked up the courage to face the answer. *No, I don't fully trust God.*

Startled, Victoria prayed again. *Father, all I ask is that I may follow you. Whatever happens to me in this business, let it be pleasing to you. Your will be done. Just help me learn to trust you more.*

She knew the answer now: *Don't join the super team.*

Epilogue: Victoria stayed on with the firm without joining Marco, and stuck to her own sales pitch. God blessed her business, and she was invited to remain with the branch.

End

Part II

- 1. *How does scripture speak into Victoria's situation? What principles can I learn from the case study for my personal growth?***
- 2. *How do they apply in my own situation? When my faith is tested, how do I respond?***
- 3. *What part does God play in my choices at work?***
- 4. *What specific marketplace experiences can I share to benefit my community?***

Case Study #3: *Peacemaker*

The document in Henry's hand was undeniable proof that Marsha had made yet another serious mistake. Her supervisors and coworkers had filed one report after another on her shoddy performance and poor work attitude. As managing partner in charge of human resources, Henry had to act. True, there was no evidence of criminal or malicious intent, but Marsha's presence in the company was causing growing anxiety and dampening morale. It would only be a matter of time before the problem worsened and affected store sales. And in Toronto's fiercely competitive retail business, the partners had every reason to want to deal with the issue swiftly and surely.

Henry was no stranger to managing people, having spent the better part of his career in Hong Kong's corporate personnel offices and seen his fair share of characters in the business sector. After immigrating to Canada with his family in the nineties, he operated a small restaurant for two years. It was hard work, and a vastly different challenge from the world of industrial relations and employment practices. Two years later, he started a partnership to sell small gifts. As business thrived, they opened new stores. It fell on Henry to take care of staffing, although at this point he was getting tired of managing people.

As he was about to call Marsha and settle the matter for good, Henry was overcome by a wave of unease. He looked up at the plaque on the wall bearing the company's management motto, "*Working Together in Harmony.*"

"How ironic," he thought. "But we don't live in a perfect world!" Henry recalled how he once found encouragement, as a manager of people, in these words: *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus.* (Philippians 2:4-5)

At that very moment, another scripture came to mind. *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to show mercy and to walk humbly with your God* (Micah 6:8). Silently, Henry prayed: "Yes, Lord, I hear you. But you'll have to tell me how to act justly, and to show mercy to Marsha. Please soften her heart as we meet, and calm her down."

Part I

- 1. *What was it that made Henry uneasy?***
- 2. *Up to this point, how do you think God was involved in the story?***
- 3. *How would you pray if you were Henry?***
- 4. *What would be the best way to write the ending of this story?***

Conclusion

By the time Marsha showed up in his office, Henry had resolved to listen to her side of the story before further action. Over the next sixty minutes, Marsha gave Henry a synopsis of her work life – the jobs she had held in Hong Kong, the relational issues she had with her previous employers and supervisors, her yearning for recognition and

success, and her own emotional struggles. She even admitted that her attitude left much to be desired.

Henry realized that he was looking at a very different Marsha from the person that everyone wanted to avoid. He knew that unless Marsha went through some deep character changes, she would end up with the same clashes wherever she worked.

“Marsha, I want you to understand that you would have been fired for cause at any company, anywhere. But we are prepared to offer you another chance. There will be disciplinary consequences, because we need to answer to the other staff. But if you’re willing to accept some coaching on workplace relations, and make a serious effort to change, we’d like you to consider staying on.”

Marsha remained stone-faced, apparently unmoved by her employer’s generosity. “I’ll think about it.”

Fifteen minutes after Marsha left, Henry received a call from her. “I...I...I want to thank you... for your kindness.” There was a long pause. Henry could hear that she was sobbing.

“Marsha, I want you to take your time,” Henry said.

“I...I....I’m....sorry.” Marsha was clearly having difficulty speaking.

Henry chose to remain silent. After a long wait, the woman regained her composure. “Thank you, Mr. Wong. What you said in the office pierced my heart. Nobody ever spoke to me like that. Thank you. I would like to accept your offer.”

“Good. We’ll see you in the morning and take it from there.”

Epilogue: Marsha stayed on with the company for almost another year before returning to Hong Kong for her next career move. **End**

Part II

- 1. How does scripture speak into Henry’s situation? What principles can I learn from the case study for my personal growth?*
- 2. How do they apply in my own situation? When I face a dilemma, how do I respond?*
- 3. How is God involved in my daily work? What part does God play in the way I make decisions about workplace relations?*
- 4. What specific marketplace experiences can I share to benefit my community?*

Case Study #4: Career Move

Moving to Canada seven years ago meant leaving her family in Hong Kong, but it also brought independence for Jenna. Since then, she had enjoyed her privacy, paying for her own needs and making enough as an administration assistant to afford a car. Though there was nothing spectacular on her career horizon, she was happy in her low-profile job. She found time for ministry in her church, and four years ago volunteered to help in a support group for cancer patients. It did not take long before people were drawn to her caring personality. Just then, an unexpected lay-off cast a shadow over her future.

At first, Jenna was not worried at all. She could draw on employment insurance, and she kept herself busy working with the cancer support group. One day, another volunteer asked her to consider training as a personal support worker, or PSW. Jenna went into research mode, liked what she found, and decided to apply for aptitude tests and courses. She also submitted an application to the Ontario Government's Second Career program. The waiting began.

As days turned into weeks, Jenna started to think of the possible outcomes. She was well into her savings, but did not want to tell her family in Hong Kong about her situation. She knew they would send help as soon as she hinted at any need, but this was a safety net she would try not to use.

Three months before her EI ran out, Jenna was still waiting for funding from Second Career. She had been accepted into the PSW course, and it appeared to be a good choice for a new career. But paying for her own tuition was a bit risky. *God, is this the path you want me to take? Please give me a sign.* But as far as Jenna was concerned, God was not giving her any obvious indication one way or another. Meanwhile, the course was about to begin.

Part I

- 1. *What are the main issues that Jenna needs to consider?***
- 2. *Why do you think she hesitated to tell her family about her lay-off?***
- 3. *Up to this point, how do you think God is involved in the story?***
- 4. *How would you pray if you were Jenna?***
- 5. *What would be the best way to write the ending of this story?***

Conclusion

Finally, in February 2010, Jenna decided to pay for the PSW course out of her own pocket. On the very first day of classes, she ran into a fellow student who said she was thinking about withdrawing. To her own surprise, Jenna encouraged the woman to press on. Neither of them were one hundred per cent sure that they would eventually become PSWs, but that day they pledged to each other that they would at least give it a try.

Six months later they graduated together. Jenna enrolled in a three-month practicum without pay, getting up every morning at 4:30 to prepare herself and commute to work. She had her first contact with the aged and the sick, and committed herself to her tasks. Soon she was moved to a community help program for adults. It was here that she met her instructor, a Christian woman called Mona who greatly appreciated Jenna's efforts.

But the praise came with a stern reminder: "Don't ever depart from God and His Word, even when your work hours increase. I've been down that road. I became so busy at one point that I no longer reserved time and space for God." It took an accident to confine the instructor to bed rest – and to return to the Word.

Jenna took the encounter with Mona as another positive sign from the Lord that she was on the right track. "I had been praying that God would send people to assure me, if it was His will for me to be a PSW," she recalled.

Just as the practicum ended, Jenna received a check from the government reimbursing her in full for tuition. In her heart, she knew it was God at work.

End

Part II

- 1. How does scripture speak into Jenna's situation? What principles can I learn from the case study for my personal growth?*
- 2. How do they apply in my own situation? When I face a dilemma, how do I respond?*
- 3. How is God involved in my daily work? What part does God play in the way I make decisions about work and career?*
- 4. What specific marketplace experiences can I share to benefit my community?*

Case Study #9: Suddenly Unemployed

Ben knew something was not right, even though he could not put a finger on it. “Why have I been asked to a nine o’clock meeting on a Tuesday without an agenda?” At the back of his mind, he had a nagging feeling of foreboding. As he walked into his office, the opening lines of Psalm 46 resonated in his heart. It was part of his devotion for that day. He sat behind his desk, and prayed. “*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*”

The previous evening, his supervisor had asked him to report in early the next day. Ben had been fighting a running battle with Dino for years over editorial integrity of the publication, occasionally taking things up with the V.P. One thing was for sure. Dino wasn’t asking him in for morning coffee. Could it be to discuss the proposal that had been sitting on Dino’s desk for months? Could it be another one of his supervisor’s stupid ideas to cut costs? “*God is my refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*” The words were comforting. But trouble?

It was nine. Ben walked into Dino’s office. The human resources manager was there as well. Instantly he knew what the whole thing was about. “So this is it,” he thought.

Dino spoke first, “Ben, there’s no easy way to say this.”

“Just go ahead,” Ben responded, looking straight into Dino’s blue eyes.

“We’ve decided to close your section. Your services are no longer required as of today. Brenda will explain the package we’ve prepared for you.”

Now it was the HR manager’s turn. “We thank you for your eleven years with the company. Please be assured that this is not a result of your standard of work, which has always been of the highest quality. The sole reason for the termination is that we’re restructuring the whole department. Please review these documents and indicate your acceptance by signing where indicated,” Brenda said in her customary voice, devoid of emotion.

Ben picked up the paperwork and began flipping through the pages. His heart was racing. He wanted to lash back. “These ungrateful people,” he thought. “I gave you the best years of my life, and we end up in this spot.” As the shock began to wear off, Ben fought for words to express his disbelief and disgust, which was quickly turning into bitterness and anger. But strangely enough, he didn’t have his usual turn of phrase with him. Instead, these words kept playing through his head: “*God is my refuge and strength.*”

It was Brenda who started speaking again. “The severance package will be paid to you by installment. I urge you to accept this very generous offer.”

“I’ll take time to think it over, thank you,” said Ben. “I’ll likely review it with my lawyer. Now if you’ll excuse me while I say goodbye to Greg and the team.”

After twenty minutes, Ben was in the parking lot and on the phone asking for an employment lawyer. The next day he found himself facing a chubby man who quickly reviewed his severance package and offered his advice.

“You do have a case. I would write them a letter and demand to be reinstated. I would demand full compensation. They’re a big corporation, and they can be more generous, which of course they’re not prepared to be. They would probably pass the case

to their lawyers, but I believe we can win,” said the lawyer, a cheerful redhead named Gordon. He went on to explain that he would take action on the basis of a contingency fee, meaning he would take a share of what they won, rather than charging by the hour.

“Okay, let’s sign the contract and write them that letter,” Ben said.

“Not just yet,” Gordon said. “Why don’t you take my contract, go home and sleep on it? Call me in the morning when you’re ready. You can then sign and fax me the paperwork. But don’t do it now. But if you decide not to take action, you’ll need to pay \$500 for the initial consultation.”

Ben left the office wondering if he should have signed it there and then. But as he drove home, he became increasingly unsettled. *Should I take legal action?* Winning the case would mean additional compensation amounting to four or five months’ pay. Of course the contingency fee would come out of that, leaving him with limited financial gain. But it wasn’t really the money. It was more about getting back at the company for having disposed of him so unceremoniously. The downside, of course, was that the case might drag on for months, with no guarantee of success (despite the lawyer’s very guarded optimism).

Part I

- 1. *What are the main issues?***
- 2. *Why is Ben having second thoughts about legal action?***
- 3. *How is God involved in the story? What biblical principles are raised?***
- 4. *What would be the best way to write the ending of this story?***

Conclusion

Ben spent the rest of the evening pondering whether or not to give Gordon the green light. The next morning, he still had not made up his mind as he sat down for a coffee with his Bible. *How wonderful it is when I don't have to go to work!* But he felt a twinge of unease – even anger – at the thought of his lay-off. *What should I do?* Somehow he turned to Philippians and started reading, slowly taking in the apostle Paul's joyful and triumphant words in the midst of terrible trial. *Lord, give me peace. Give me wisdom.*

Twenty minutes later he came to Philippians 4:8-9. *"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."*

The God of peace will be with you. A wave of comfort and assurance coursed through Ben as he meditated on the words. *Paul in prison facing the ultimate trial, yet mindful of people under his charge and of God's calling in his life. This is no positive thinking! It's the Spirit of God giving me assurance. It's the promise of God to be with me. Instead of just giving me peace and sending me on my way, He's offering to enter my life! Yes, I should move on.*

By the time Ben finished his coffee, he had made up his mind. He reached for his phone. "Gordon? Good morning. I've decided not to proceed with the action. Thanks for your time, and for advising me to wait. I'll be sending a check to cover consultation charges."

End

Part II

- 1. How does scripture speak into the situation? What principles can I learn from the case study for my personal growth?*
- 2. How do they apply in my marketplace – my line of work or profession? When I feel I have not been fairly treated, how do I respond?*
- 3. How is God involved in my daily work? What part does God play in restoring, sustaining and improving relationships in my marketplace?*
- 4. What specific marketplace experiences can I share to benefit my community?*