

Ripe for Harvest Part 4

Partnering with the Lord in His Harvest Fields

Thesis: Our Triune God-- God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit-- is at work all around us. The fields are ripe for harvest (John 4:34-38). We are called to partner with the Lord in his harvest fields (Matthew 9:35-38). May we see what God sees, feel what the Lord feels, pray what the Lord leads us to pray, and go as he sends us in his anointing, empowering, and grace.

Text: John 4:34-38; Matthew 9:35-38

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor" (John 4:34-38).

1. **Jesus is at work in the world renewing, reconciling, and restoring all things to God.** This is the big picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ is doing.
2. **Jesus wants us to wake up and get in on what God is doing today.**
 - a. Every farmer knows that you sow first; then, in due time, like in four months, the crop becomes ripe and needs to be harvested.
 - b. **But, hear the word of the Lord to us today: Open your eyes and look at the fields. The fields are ripe for harvest... today!**
 - i. The Lord Jesus is already at work all around us building the kingdom of God and touching people.
 - ii. The Father is already drawing people to himself.
 - iii. The Holy Spirit is already convicting and wooing people to the kingdom of God.
 - iv. Others have already been used of the Lord to plant seeds of God's word, good news, love, and forgiveness in those around us.
 - v. People are hungry, searching, and looking for God. Some of them are looking in all the wrong places, but they are looking.
 - vi. *Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor" (John 4:37-38).*

vii. **Let's open our eyes and look at the fields. The fields are ripe for harvest... today!**

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:35-38).

There is a desperate need for laborers to partner with the Lord in his harvest fields. The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few.

We want to join Jesus on his mission in our spheres of influence, especially in the places where we spend the most of our time. Our desire is to be aware of what the Lord is doing around us in our neighborhood, workplaces, and third places*. As we see what the Lord sees, we move in his compassion and energy to bring wholeness and workability.

(*A third place can be a place where you spend most of your time after your home or your work-- like a coffee shop, a place you volunteer, a sports league, etc. Or, a third place can be a place which the Lord lays on your heart to bring wholeness and workability-- like a school partnership, a mentoring or tutoring relationship, a refugee community, Hurricane Harvey recovery and rebuilding (100,000 families are still dealing with the aftermath of the hurricane), a trailer park of undocumented people needing help, etc.)

What is the Lord saying to you regarding your spheres of influence or third places around you? What is the Lord saying about your neighborhood or your workplace? Are we listening to the Lord? Are we available to his promptings and leadership?

This morning, we will hear two stories of how people are listening to the Lord, paying attention to what the Lord is saying and doing, and stepping out in humble risking to love others well. As we hear these stories, may we have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to us. May we be inspired and stirred in fresh ways to join Jesus on his mission around us.

Tammi Van Drunen, Greeley, Colorado: practicing mission as a stay-at-home mom

When I first heard Tammi's story, I was moved to tears. It is inspiring to see Tammi and her family partnering with Jesus in their neighborhood in a practical way.

Let's give our attention to Tammi as she shares. (Play video.)

Carol Monahan: touching her neighbors with the love of Jesus

I am inspired by what Carol Monahan is doing in her neighborhood. I am excited that we get to hear her story. And, I want others to hear about what she is doing. I believe that the Lord will speak to some of us about what the Lord would have us to do in our neighborhoods as we hear Carol share her story. The point is not to do what Carol is doing. Rather, may we consider what God is saying to us and consider how to partner with the Lord like Carol is doing. May we be stirred with possibilities. I believe the Lord will use Carol's testimony to confirm how he has been speaking to some of us and to inspire us to get in action.

I have asked Carol to share:

1. What she is doing in her neighborhood.
2. Why she is doing what she is doing in her neighborhood.
3. How the Lord has changed and blessed Carol as she partners with the Lord in her neighborhood.
4. How the Lord has touched, changed, and blessed others as she loves them and as they get together.

Reflection

1. What got stirred up as you listened to these stories?
2. What did you learn?
3. Where did you experience resistance?

Here is the key question: What is the Lord saying to you?

1. The Lord is calling **all of us** to partner with him where we live, work, and play-- **in our spheres of influence.**
2. The Lord is calling **all of us** to partner with him and others **to reach the world** with the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel of the kingdom of Good.
 - a. *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).*
3. **The Lord is calling his people of different ages into various harvest fields right now.**

- a. Neighborhoods
 - b. Schools
 - c. Workplaces (see Addendum A and B for an example)
 - d. Sectors of society
 - e. Social systems: breaking the power of injustices
 - f. Third places
 - g. Or, to serve with or **to partner with existing groups** like mentoring in schools, serving in prisons, caring for the hurting, etc.
 - h. Or, **to start new enterprises** like CrossWalk Center, which we heard about recently
 - i. Or, to serve here at Calvary in reaching and discipling the harvest which the Lord have given to us. (I will talk more about the need for laborers here at Calvary in a couple of weeks.)
4. **What is the Lord saying to you?**

Addendum A: The Perspective of a Missional Life (Faithwalking 101, pages 29-30)

We are saying that your mission and your life should be one integrated whole (Ephesians 1:22–23; Colossians 1:9–10 ... note “all” and “everything” in these passages). We are saying that joining God on mission is not an afterthought to “real life” or an add-on to Christian living. We are saying that it is the very heart of our discipleship.

For all of us, that starts with our family, and we want to be crystal clear on this. The family is our first mission field (Ephesians 5:21–6:4; Deuteronomy 6: 4–9). However, most of us spend 7–10 hours a day at work (Genesis 1:26–28, 2:15). The call to mission is also a call to serve as a catalyst to mobilize God’s people in the workplace—where you spend the largest number of your waking hours. I want to say that again in the context of a call to radical obedience. The call to mission is also the call for you to serve as a catalyst to mobilize God’s people in the workplace—where you spend the largest number of your waking hours.

One powerful example of this is the story of the Kirby Corporation as told by Jerry Gallion. The story is simple. A small group of believers was obedient to God to look for ways to integrate their faith into their work lives. As a result, specific changes took place in the system and were even solid enough to persist through a difficult merger. As a result of that, the workplace culture of the Kirby Corporation was dramatically changed. It shouldn’t be at all surprising that ministry and mission naturally followed. We will read one excerpt from his report that reflects more recent activity: *[Note: a longer version appears next as Addendum B]*

Little did we know that the mission trip experience with Hurricane Ivan was a mere dress rehearsal for what God had in store in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which devastated much of the U.S. Gulf Coast in August and September 2005. He had prepared both hearts and hands well. Some 700 Kirby families were in the direct path of each of these storms. As hordes of evacuees fled the ravages of first Katrina and then Rita toward Houston, scores of Kirby volunteers were heading in the opposite direction, into the devastated areas. Ten teams of missionaries spread out across the Gulf Coast from Port Arthur to Mobile, slogging from town to town, road to road, house to house, searching for their co-workers, rendering whatever assistance was needed as they went. Their efforts continued around the clock for many weeks until every co-worker and his or her family was accounted for. Hundreds of volunteers gladly sacrificed for the opportunity to give of themselves in this mission. As always, to God be the glory!

Addendum B: A Missional Story

[Note: This section is quoted from Faithwalking 101, pages 72-78. It is an example of living an integrated missional life in the workplace.]

Kirby Corporation is a publicly traded company based in Houston, Texas. Jerry Gallion is a Faithwalker and is the Senior Counsel for the company. He is joined by two other Faithwalkers, Bob Livingston and Julie Piling. The three of them have been instrumental as catalyst in the unfolding of this story.

What God is Doing Where I Work—The Kirby Corporation Experience *By Jerry Gallion*

All the glory to God for what we have to share with you here! The following is the journey involving God's use of many people from the viewpoint of only one. Clearly, God has been doing all the work and all the leading at Kirby!

What is Kirby Corporation and what is God doing there? Kirby Corporation's predecessor company, Kirby Petroleum Co., was founded in 1921 by John Henry Kirby, after whom Houston's Kirby Drive and other landmarks are named. Today Kirby Corporation is a publicly traded company, listed on the New York Stock Exchange, focused on marine transportation. The inland tank barge operation of Kirby's principal operating subsidiary, Kirby Inland Marine, LP, is the world's largest, with some 1,300 vessels moving oil and petrochemical products throughout the inland waterways of the United States.

How God got things started at Kirby. Some of the believers at Kirby are convinced that God laid claim to our workplace on a Friday evening over a decade ago at a Promise Keepers conference in the Houston Astrodome. As a marine transporter of oil and petrochemicals, Kirby maintains a Strike Team of professionals trained to respond to emergencies, to protect life, property and the environment, on short notice. Several members of that team were in the Astrodome that night, some with church groups, some with family members, some with friends. God's instrument that evening was the wife of one of those believers, who used the Kirby Strike Team's emergency pager system to direct those men to meet at a certain location in the Dome. While the details of that meeting are a faded memory, the commitment made by those men that evening is not—to work together, with God's help, to make the place we spend most of our waking hours a *better* place.

We started humbly, with a small Bible study group, three or four men, sometimes only two, using Promise Keepers workplace study materials as a guide. We met weekly at a nearby restaurant or at another company's cafeteria down the street. God grew the first group slowly, by invitation, by inquiry, by chance meeting in the elevator. The group's focus was simple and inward, humbly seeking daily His strength and guidance. We prayed for each other and for God to fill the "empty chair" that we kept at the table.

How God shaped things at Kirby. Although the group's expectations were limited, God, as He always does, had much bigger plans. The Promise Keepers materials we used emphasized our roles as "salt and light" in the workplace. He changed our focus to a more outward one, and we prayed for the Holy Spirit to make us just that—salt and light—in everyday interactions with our co-workers. An epiphany, a real turning point, for this writer came when a new member joined the group, transferred from a subsidiary company office in another city. I provided services to him in his new job, and he was profuse in his gratitude for those services and his praise of the quality of my work. Through his words, God made it unmistakable: This is how He wanted us **all** to treat our co-workers. God used this brother as a bold example to us of how, as our working witness, we must always be "building others up." At about the same time, a colleague shared the lesson plan she had prepared for her Sunday School class, focused on Colossians 3:23–24: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

God used this sister to bring us this command of the Lord. We prayerfully embraced it as a watchword, and soon, more and more folks were attracted by this "fragrance," including the group's first corporate officer, a sales vice president. Some brothers were transferred to other sites and started new groups of believers there. The Lord expanded the scope of our concerns and prayers to focus on more than our immediate friends and families. He cast our net to cover our co-workers, our supervisors, our company leaders.

How God challenged us for growth. We thought our horizons had broadened, but, as always, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8–9). The master vinedresser had bigger plans, plans to "prune" us to bear more fruit.

In 1999, Kirby merged with its largest local competitor, Hollywood Marine, Inc. At the time, it was the merger of No. 1 and No. 3 in the inland tank barge industry, a major event in the evolution of the company. The merger brought about a clash of cultures—that of an old public company with that of a strong private company. This was no "Pac-Man" acquisition. This was a true integration at all levels of the corporation. As a consequence, for a while, there were two ways of doing everything, and, of course, each way was "the right way," according to half of those involved. At an individual level, fears of job loss or demotion abounded. Clashes of wills were everywhere. Competition among factions and individuals, jockeying for position and precedence, dominated the internal interactions. In the minds of many, there was uncertainty, conflict, even chaos, everywhere. This turmoil had a profound effect on our budding groups of believers.

The fears and uncertainty affected many of them directly. We prayed for God's peace and strength to continue "working as for the Lord." Simply put, He did *not* disappoint.

Instead, He attracted and steered many believers to us, literally doubling our number in six months after the merger, including the addition of three more vice presidents from both “sides” of the merger. New groups of believers formed independently and linked together. He shifted our focus more and more outward. We prayed for wisdom and compassion for our corporate leaders. We prayed for patience and understanding for our co-workers. We fervently prayed that He would *really* make us salt and light—models for all our co-workers, from the coffee girl to the CEO. His response was simply *amazing!*

In just a few short months, He took the “starch” out of ***everything!***

- Adversarial became collegial
- Competitive became cooperative
- Self-preservation became teamwork
- Officers at different company sites made meeting rooms available for Bible study, prayer, and discussion
- Believers and seekers came out of the woodwork
- Daily circulation of praise reports and prayer requests became routine throughout the company, lifting up friends, family, co-workers—even our customers and government regulators
- Unofficial but company-sponsored outreach to co-workers suffering loss—death in the family, fire, accident—became a regular thing;
- Company-sponsored charitable and community service and outreach programs erupted
- Company-wide praise, worship and discussion sessions began to happen.

Is our God amazing or what? A watershed event in the course of these developments occurred on the morning of September 11, 2001, less than 2 years after a contentious merger, when Kirby’s President and CEO called together all of the employees at our corporate headquarters and asked each of us to go home and pray.

Fruit from Faithfulness. There are some obvious “pieces of fruit” that the Lord has brought forth in our workplace:

Intercessory Prayer Team: Some time ago, God put it on the hearts of a couple of our number to be more intentional about our “corporate” prayer life. We began to see even more clearly that ***everything*** hinges on prayer. The health and well-being of our co-workers, families, friends, vendors, customers,

regulators, and corporate leaders, our ability to be what he calls us to be in our workplace and world, even our company's success...*hinges on prayer!*

So these folks obediently put together a company-wide intercessory prayer team—with a weekly conference prayer call that anyone in the company can call into to lift up everything to the Lord. Even crewmembers on our vessels call in! One wonderful woman keeps track of prayer requests and praise reports on a spreadsheet that is distributed by email each week. We are *not* surprised that Kirby had record earnings in the past two years!

Mission Trips: In the Fall of 2004, the brutal impact of Hurricane Ivan was felt on the Alabama/Florida coast. As it happens, that area of the country is home to many of Kirby's vessel crewmembers, and many suffered great loss from the storm. Before the hurricane warnings were even lifted from the area, a small group of Kirby believers were praying for their brothers and sisters in that area and had an idea (any guesses where the idea came from?). They should go on a mission trip—to the Alabama coast and Florida panhandle! So in a matter of hours, with authorization from our Operations Vice President, they recruited other volunteers, hired some motor homes for lodging, assembled the company's emergency response trucks, complete with magnetic signs reading "KIRBY DISASTER RELIEF;" and headed East from Houston with a convoy.

When they got to Alabama, two guys with GPS units located the homes of our fellow employees (some in very remote areas) and triaged their damages and needs, relaying the information back to the main body by radio. For the next week, they labored, cutting up fallen trees, patching roofs, hauling drinking water and food, and ministering to their coworkers and their families. It's difficult for me to adequately describe this outreach, but the slide show that they shared with us all at the very next company-wide praise and worship service spoke volumes in pictures of satisfied exhaustion and joyful gratitude.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: Little did we know that the mission trip experience with Hurricane Ivan was a mere dress rehearsal for what God had in store in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which devastated much of the U.S. Gulf Coast in August and September 2005. He had prepared both hearts and hands well. Some 700 Kirby families were in the direct path of each of these storms. As hordes of evacuees fled the ravages of first Katrina and then Rita toward Houston, scores of Kirby volunteers were heading in the opposite direction, into the devastated areas. Ten teams of missionaries spread out across the Gulf Coast from Port Arthur to Mobile, slogging from town to town, road to road, house to house, searching for their co-workers, rendering whatever assistance was needed as they went. Their efforts continued around the clock for many weeks until every co-worker and his or her family was accounted for. Hundreds of volunteers gladly sacrificed for the opportunity to give of themselves in this mission. As always, to God be the glory!

Is there a living Body of Christ at KC? Absolutely, and we thank God for it! It is imperfect, as we all are, and it's not totally organized or coordinated, but it is made up of disciples who humbly trust His leading. He has created an atmosphere, a culture, where faith can grow *and* work. It's not a "company-sanctioned" thing, it's a God-sanctioned thing! It's not orchestrated by men and women, but by the Lord himself!

We only hope that some of the salt and light at work at Kirby can serve as an example, as a catalyst, for your workplace. We'd be honored to share and help you in any way we can. **Praise be to God!**

A Few Final Thoughts: When it first became clear what God was doing at Kirby, others in our city's marketplace asked, "Is there a starter kit for this kind of *church*?" If what we have shared here touches you, encourages you or reinforces something the Lord has already stirred up in you, you're probably wondering how you can make this happen where you work. Well, *you* can't; only the Lord can. Besides, every workplace is different, with different circumstances and different people. There isn't "one way" or "one method" that we can share with you. But, reflecting on our experience at Kirby, there are three keys, three truths that He has convinced us of that fit every workplace situation. In fact, they fit every situation, period:

Prayer: It all begins and ends with prayer. Without our connection to the Lord and His will, we cannot be who He wants us to be. This is just as true in the workplace as it is anywhere else.

Obedience: This is all He asks of us: obedience to His Word in our words and actions; obedience to His will, learned through prayer; and obedience to His model, Jesus Christ.

Relationships: It's all about relationships—with Him and with others. Just like in your faith walk outside the workplace, your relationship with Him comes through the study of His Word and through prayer—this is your foundation. So we encourage you to focus on developing and deepening relationships with other believers where you work. This comes from spending time together, getting to know each other, especially through Bible study and prayer. You need each other for support and encouragement and for accountability. We have seen this blossom in our company, with believers openly expressing to co-workers that they have been covered with prayer in their day-to-day work. Your relationships with others in your workplace, especially non-believers and seekers, are the key to your influence on them for the Kingdom. Jesus told us, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

Pastor Rick Warren wrote, "The Great Commission is all about making friends. Now I know Jesus said, 'Therefore, go and make disciples...' (Matthew 28:19), but Jesus himself showed that you can't make a disciple until you first make a friend. 'I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me' (John 15:15)."

So why is it so hard for some to be salt and light in their workplaces? Perhaps it is because we tend to compartmentalize our faith, living it out on Sunday and Wednesday night, but putting it on the shelf Monday through Friday! None of those three keys mentioned above—Prayer, Obedience, and Relationships—is unique to **just one part** of your life, your walk. Living out your faith **every day** in all that you do **at work** is what you're **commanded** to do. In your attitude—be cheerful and humble. In your words—speak as if Christ were present (He is,

you know). In how you treat your co-workers (your boss, your peers, those in other departments or outside the company, the folks in the lowest positions in the company) do as Paul counseled the Philippians: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).

His fragrance will follow you around ... “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ...” (2 Corinthians 2:14–15).