Begin Well, End Well

By Terry Cassell

I'm sure at some point you've thought about why people make a big deal over New Year's Eve. We all understand it's because a new year means a new beginning—a fresh start. People recognize that a new year can be a turning point in their lives. This is why people make New Year's resolutions.

God likes fresh beginnings too. He likes new things. The Lord is talking about a new beginning for you!

"See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." (Isaiah 42:9)

If last year was hard for you, let's put it behind us and look to restore and refresh ourselves this coming year. This should not only be for our personal well-being, but for our calling in the workplace as well. Restoration means getting back something that you've lost. We aren't simply restoring what was lost, but starting afresh and going forward with something brand new!

We should believe in our hearts, "This year will be a fresh start for me—for my marriage, my relationships and my work—in the name of Jesus." Yes, your work too! Whether you are unfulfilled or underpaid or even feel unqualified, this year can be a turning point in your vocation.

There is a quote by John F. Kennedy that I enjoy: "All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first thousand days, nor in the life of this administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin."

Let us begin to understand that our vocation in life is to serve the Lord and be the best employees we can possibly be. Let us begin to believe that the Father is with us through every detail of our day, good and bad, whether at home or at work. Let us believe that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do even greater things than Jesus did.

It is time to re-envision who we are in the workplace; to see ourselves as people of talent. We are beloved sons and daughters of God with given talents. We may be a work in progress, yes, but God-given talent never stops growing and never ceases to refresh and renew.

"No one can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending." (Maria Robinson)

I have really begun to think about that statement. The conclusion is that we don't start over; rather, we begin again right where we are, making things better in our lives.

Our Father wants our undivided attention in spite of the distractions and temptations that lie in wait around the corner. He has to be our main focus. Working for our Father requires focus. Working for our Father comes with grace in our work so long as we remain intimate with him.

How we will end this year will be determined by how we started it. Do we want to become more intimate with the Father? We should— we work for him.

An author whose name escapes me once said, "We are not mere creatures of the creator or servants of an almighty deity. We are called to an intimate relationship with this infinite God as his children, made in his image."

Let us begin and end this year renewed, refreshed and restoring our workplaces with the God-given talents with which he has blessed us.

Happy New Year!

Terry Cassell is the president of Christians in Commerce.
He can be reached at cassell@cicintl.org.

President's Corner

"What does it mean to be a living sacrifice?" a woman asked her pastor.

Holding out a blank sheet of paper, the pastor replied, "It means signing your name at the bottom of a blank page and letting God fill it in as he wills."

When I think of a "living sacrifice", I think of lives continuous in action; moving from one task to another in a productive, fruitful manner; each relationship, each action, each opportunity, each success, and each failure, whether at home, school or work, done with Christ-like character.

"Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice" is the apostle Paul's way of saying, "Put your whole self in." (Romans 12:1) To be a Christian we must be all in. As my own pastor told me one day, "Mediocrities need not apply."

So, as we behold that blank sheet of paper, let us become "a pencil in God's hand," as Mother Teresa once said, allowing him to fill in the page as he wills.

Sign it. You are then a living sacrifice for our Father and for the work he has given to Christians in Commerce.

cassell@cicintl.org • (703) 205-5600

CWE Licensing Fee Increase
Workplace Stories Needed
2017 Annual Conference Dates Announced

page 2
page 4
page 6
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:2)

A recent newsletter reflection triggered my thoughts. The writer was talking about making a difference in the marketplace by listening to the Holy Spirit in all situations. One way to learn something is by putting it into practice. Another is by not practicing it and then dealing with the consequences. It was my own experience with the latter approach that came to mind when I read the reflection.

It involved a contract dispute in which my company was being sued for failure to deliver as promised. Our case rested heavily on the testimony of one employee. He had been directly involved with the transactions in question and was adamant that his recollections were correct. He also had a thorough knowledge of the rules involved in these kinds of transactions. My instinct was to support our employee. I believed that we were innocent.

The plaintiff was equally adamant and had a high-powered law firm pressing its case. Ultimately we settled (for what I considered an excessive amount) based on the fact that our key employee’s testimony was deemed false. I thought I had done the right thing in supporting him, but apparently I had been mistaken.

Now, years later, I set down my newsletter and began to reflect back on the situation. I asked God to show me what I could have done differently.

The insight I received was that I should have been more thorough when doing my due diligence to corroborate the employee’s testimony. I should have questioned others more closely who had knowledge of the situation in order to understand their recollection of the facts. I ought to have been more open to the possibility that we were wrong.

It struck me then, that sometimes when I ask God for direction, what I am really asking is for him to reinforce my own opinion rather than face a hard fact. False pride can keep me from accepting the truth.

Am I asking the Holy Spirit to bless my actions without being open to changing them? What are some choices I have made recently, and with what outcomes? Where have I done well and where can I do better?

Share with one another a mistake you’ve made and how it made a difference in your learning.
WEEK 2 • MEN’S REFLECTIONS

Personal Sacrifice
By Steve Becker

I know that there is nothing better than for people to be happy and to do good… and find satisfaction in all their toil – this is the gift of God. (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13)

The development of the “Working for Our Father” workshop was long, involved, and detailed. Some of the skills involved were a stretch for me. I’ve been grateful for the enthusiasm and appreciation expressed to me, but I can honestly say that the Father has paid me very well - not in dollars, but in grace. It has given me a whole new perspective.

PRAY:
Jesus Christ, you have set us free from our sinful ways. We join you now, by your grace and mercy, in your Father’s great project to restore all things.

REFLECT:
What would the Father say to me after he had spent a day with me at work? What would be on his mind? What would we talk about?

DISCUSS:
Share anything that came from your reflection. How can you see yourselves better working for your Father? How does this perspective change your own approach to work?

WEEK 3 • MEN’S REFLECTIONS

Making a Difference in the Workplace
By Steve Becker

For Christ’s love compels us… And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

Every one of us can make a difference in our workplace no matter our role, position, or skills. By being Christ, we should exhibit the characteristics of the very best workers in the world: loving where others hate; joy-filled during challenges; cool in conflicts and fostering reconciliation; persevering through difficulties; kind to all regardless of function or status; big-hearted in all situations and willing to help out; people of integrity and honesty; calm, never forceful and always in control of our passions.

These are the characteristics that the Holy Spirit wishes to form in us. They are called the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

PRAY:
Come, Holy Spirit, I open my life to you even more today. Draw me into this great love that you share with the Father and Son. Let it grow in me in new ways, especially (name the specific aspect of the fruit of the Spirit you’d like to grow in).

REFLECT:
Spend time in the Father’s presence. Ask him to show you any resistance you might have to releasing the power of the Spirit in your life. Ask him to speak to you. Listen.

DISCUSS:
As we say in the new workshop, “Wouldn’t we like to work with people like this? Wouldn’t we like to be people like this? Aren’t these the type of people everyone is willing to join with and make a difference?”

God’s love should compel us. The real challenge is to choose not to live for myself but for him who died for me. We are faced with these choices every day and they are custom made for us.

Good intentions, personal talents, and hard work won’t make them a reality. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit and our willingness to yield our lives to him.
Holding Each Other Accountable

By Steve Becker

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

It’s been exciting to hear the enthusiasm of members about how they can turn outward and reach others using the new “Working for Our Father” workshop. Most often, the idea has been to draw together a small group and conduct it over a four-week period. The program is designed to be portable and flexible.

The beauty of this approach is that you create a four-week habit of getting together and discussing important issues. Ideally, you will have effectively formed a new Challenge Group.

Luke Cahill has worked side-by-side with me on the development of the workshop. Luke is a market researcher in his early thirties. By his own admission, this project has transformed his faith and enthusiasm to impact his generation.

One of our early “test” locations was in Minneapolis. We had forty-six participants, eight of whom were friends of Luke’s. He had reached out to twenty. They were clearly representative, in their own ways, of the people we want to reach. Luke has now started his own Challenge Group of five young men, most whom attended the workshop.

Six years ago, I started a Challenge Group with men mostly in their twenties and thirties; “manly men” with their own backstories. We meet every Monday morning at a restaurant, back in the corner. It’s been great to talk about stuff that matters and watch these guys develop. We hold each other accountable for living our lives faithfully, 24/7, 365 days a year.

At the end of our conversation, we ask for everyone’s prayer needs. These men always take this question seriously and it’s one of the more moving aspects of our meetings. As we leave, everyone stands outside the door and embraces one another. This has been a spontaneous thing, and it is a real blessing to watch. We’ve become brothers through all we’ve been through. I wish the same for Luke’s group.

PRAY:

Lord, how can I serve you by bringing your call to work for our Father to others? I am willing. Open doors for me. Guide me. I am available for you.

REFLECT:

Who do you know that would benefit from the love and support of other Christians? Who has God put into your path? Ask the Lord to speak to you and bring people to mind. Take time and listen.

DISCUSS:

How can you take the call to be Christ in the workplace to others? How can you lead or support the effort in your own chapter or personal situation? Who do you know that you can walk along side and support?

WORKPLACE STORIES NEEDED

This year we want to put a special emphasis on expanding the contributions to our Workday Reflection emails. We are especially looking for personal stories related to fulfilling our mission in the workplace.

Don’t worry if writing is not your talent!

We will edit all submissions as needed. If you don’t know where to begin, simply tell us your story over the phone or via email, and we will take care of the rest.

We are also looking for individuals in the local chapters who are willing to be Workday Reflection stringers/ghost writers for others in their chapters, who have inspiring stories to tell.

To serve in this capacity, or to share your story, please contact the CIC offices by calling (703) 205-5600 or send an email to info@cicintl.org.
Personal Sacrifice  
By Kathleen Shaffer

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. (Romans 12:3)

Working part time as an office manager for the local Pregnancy Resource Center, located in the middle of our downtown, I often see clients from very diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, some even to the point of homelessness.

One morning a homeless family arrived on our doorstep. I became extremely uncomfortable and uneasy as I spoke with them to discern their immediate needs. The men in the group were rough and spoke very disrespectfully to me and the staff. I was reminded by my inner spirit that these are God’s children and I was to show his love and compassion to them immediately. But I hesitated, I resisted, and I was disobedient as I hurriedly tried to complete their evaluation and send them on their way.

Fast forward two years. This family again walks into our office. The young mother is now attending college, the father is attending a trade school, and their baby girl is beautiful, happy and healthy. I felt such joy, followed by immediate remorse for my past judgment upon them. I repeatedly commended their parenting skills and their dedication to push through the difficulties they encountered in an effort to clear my own conscience. I also had to humble myself and ask forgiveness from God for my previous behavior.

In my mind, we had a close, honest and open relationship. So, when I received an email from him informing me that he was going to purchase property with another realtor, I was hurt by the impersonal nature of his communication. I immediately called to discuss with him further about this unexpected decision.

When asked why he was letting me go as his realtor, he said it was just a lack of communication. I pushed him for a more in-depth answer and realized that he felt I did not keep him well informed of my actions on his behalf.

Well, my pride took over very quickly! I proceeded to explain to him all the benefits I was offering and that he should appreciate how I was working tirelessly for him and his family.

But, then the Holy Spirit reminded me that my client’s perception needed to be acknowledged. I stepped back for a moment and realized that I had not made a concerted effort to contact him often enough and engage in conversation, which would have helped him feel connected and well served. I had essentially dropped the ball.

Through the Holy Spirit, I was able to humble myself, admit my fault, and seek forgiveness. The client did move on to another agent, but I came away smarter and wiser having learned how I could improve my communication and strengthen my other client relationships.

PRAY:

Dear Lord, thank you for showing me that accepting my faults and admitting my mistakes is always a good way to reflect your love, truth and goodness.

REFLECT:

When have I acted without compassion or patience toward those I may have deemed unworthy?

DISCUSS:

What can you do differently to use sober judgment in these situations in the future?
The Fruits of Our Relationships as Sisters

By Kathleen Shaffer

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

I am walking through a time in my life where I see many friends and family members suffering with illness of one kind or another. Just this month alone, I have had four very dear friends diagnosed with cancer. It is a very sad and sobering time for me. How can I support them? How can I encourage them? How do I make them laugh and find a small bit of joy in all of this?

At the Pregnancy Resource Center, our staff and volunteers are mostly women. The cancer diagnosis of our executive director has caused us to draw closer to one another and to take more time in prayer together, listen to worship music and enjoy long, heartfelt hugs with each other during the day. Isn’t that just how it goes? When trouble comes, if we allow ourselves to let go of our fears and become vulnerable, we will be reminded how wonderful it is to be part of God’s community; a place where he created us to live as sisters and experience joy even in the midst of dreadful circumstances.

The Holy Spirit continues to remind me daily, sometimes hourly, to stay focused on the positive and to rejoice in the good days. It has caused me to remember the power I have within me to intercede for these sisters of mine. I know in my heart they will be healed.

At times, our prayers may appear small and insignificant, but don’t forget that there are mighty angels who battle on our behalf and engage in spiritual warfare to destroy anything that is against the will of our loving God. We will not fear! We will walk tall and strong and stand together in the battle. And in doing so, we will deepen our affection for our sisters, family and friends whom we journey with in this earthly home.

Thank you, dear Lord, for your continued assurance that you are with us in battle to protect us.

Has my heart been troubled lately by something that has caused me to fear the unknown?

How have your sisters come together to help you find your way out of the valley and into their loving arms?

Kathleen Shaffer (Gilroy/Morgan Hill Women’s Chapter) lives and works in Gilroy, CA as an office manager for a pregnancy medical clinic. She also works part time as a realtor. She and her husband Steve lead a 12-step recovery program at their church and volunteer with the seniors of their community. They have been married thirty-eight years and have two grown children and three grandsons. Kathleen can be reached at kathleen@kathleenshaffer.com.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

SAVE THE DATE

2017 Annual Conference

OCTOBER 20–21, 2017

DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Golf Resort Palm Springs Area, Cathedral City, CA

More information to follow. Mark your calendars!

Watch our 2016 Annual Conference Highlights video on our CIC YouTube Channel
UPCOMING EVENTS

MEN’S CHALLENGE WEEKENDS

Mission Viejo
January 13-15, 2017

Orange County
January 13-15, 2017

Salinas Valley
January 27-29, 2017

Greater Phoenix Area
March 17-19, 2017

Salinas Valley
April 21-23, 2017

Salinas Valley
November 17-19, 2017

WOMEN’S CHALLENGE WEEKENDS

Santa Cruz
March 12-14, 2017

Fresno
April 28-30, 2017

Gilroy-Morgan Hill
May 5-7, 2017

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Annual Conference: Palm Springs Area
October 20-21, 2017

NEW, IMPACTFUL WORKSHOP INTRODUCED

The new Working for Our Father workshop was introduced at the 2016 Annual Conference. Several of the videos were played both at the leaders’ workshop as well as the general sessions. The workshop is designed to assist baptized Christians in integrating their work life into their Christian faith.

Written and produced to impact all age groups, particularly the next generation (25 to 45 year-olds), this series utilizes professionally developed, engaging videos that have captured the imagination of attendees, opening up to them a world of possibilities in working for their Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Working for Our Father shows how Christians can align their careers with God’s mission. It can be jointly presented to men and women. It can also be done in either one four-hour session or over four separate gatherings.

There are four presentations:

• Accepting the Father’s Gift of Work
• Triumphing Over Toil, Trials, and Temptations
• Aligning Your Career to God’s Mission
• Operating in the Fruit of the Spirit

A personal sharing precedes each of four presentations. This is a personal story that illustrates the theme of the presentation.

Engaging videos are direct and to the point. They use music, dramatic visuals, and animated text to underscore a Christian perspective on work. The program emphasizes the core messages and content of the calling to be Christ in the workplace.

Personal Reflections follow the videos and last five minutes. The participants are asked to remain seated and quietly follow the suggested exercise. During this time they should prayerfully consider what they heard while listening for the Lord to show them how it applies to them personally.

A personal and practical application is encouraged through a facilitated discussion group. The first question comes out of the reflection and encourages individuals to engage and apply the content with others. The facilitators assigned to each group are there to ensure participants apply the content to their situations and listen.

The last discussion ends with video and reflection inviting attendees to be open to more of the Holy Spirit being released in their lives. This approach is done with respect to the individual and in whatever way they are most comfortable.

Information and materials can be obtained from the CIC Home Office.

View the preview video at https://vimeo.com/195507168

Please send your events and stories to:

Terry Cassell
Fax: 703 205-0485
cassell@cicintl.org

7515 Lee Highway,
Falls Church, VA 22042
“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”
Galatians 2:20

CHRISTIANS IN COMMERCE PRAYER

Father,
You are my Lord and Creator.
You entrust me with a place of stewardship in your creation.
Fill me with your Holy Spirit:
That he may teach me to pray and live in Christ and as Christ;
That he may teach me love for family, friends and all people.
   A love that is selfless, humble, and wise;
That he may teach me stewardship of the talents, time, money and possessions you have given me.
   A stewardship that serves, is generous, and brings honor to your name;
That he may teach me faithfulness to your call to Christians in Commerce.
   A call that unites us and builds your Kingdom in the marketplace.
Through Jesus Christ who is Lord.
   Amen

VISION:     Being Christ in the workplace
MISSION:    To encourage and equip Christians to be God’s presence in the workplace by the power of the Holy Spirit, exercising faith, integrity, and excellence
VALUES:    Christians in Commerce is an ecumenical organization committed to:
   • Growing and being transformed in Jesus Christ
   • Manifesting the gifts of the Holy Spirit
   • Building strong brotherhood and sisterhood
   • Serving God and expanding his Kingdom in all aspects of our lives

The Challenge Newsletter is published monthly by Christians In Commerce International (CIC). All material in the Challenge Newsletter is copyrighted by Christians In Commerce International and should not be copied without explicit prior written permission. All scripture taken from the Holy Bible: New International Version ©1978 by the New York International Bible Society, used by permission.

Founders
Louis Grams
John Mooney
Cyril Rose

Board of Directors
Terry Cassell (President)
Kirby Falkenberg (Chairman)
Stevan Becker
Art Klaum
Rich Preuss
Dan Trevino

CIC Office
Terry Cassell, President
Jon Cassady, Operations Manager
Therese McNichol, Director of Administration
Theresee Rosenthal, Administrative Assistant
Emily Hunt, Administrative Assistant

Challenge Newsletter Staff
Managing Editor: Therese McNichol
Editorial Board: Stevan Becker, Theresee Rosenthal
Design/printing: Andy Grams Design Solutions

For further information about CIC call or write:
Christians in Commerce
7515 Lee Highway,
Falls Church, VA 22042
Phone: 703 205-5600
Toll Free: 877 205-5600
Fax: 703 205-0485
info@cicintl.org