

Holding the High Ground at Work



PASTORS AND MISSIONARIES ARE WORKPLACE Christians, too. That said, there was still something different about Dr. William Wallace. He saw himself as a working Christian first.

At the outset of World War II the Japanese army swept through China, devouring huge parts of that country and leaving death and destruction in its wake. Because of the unspeakable cruelty of the Japanese, most Westerners evacuated China.

Not Bill Wallace. Wallace was a surgeon at Stout Memorial Hospital in Wuchow, China, as well as the temporary hospital administrator.

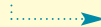
He and his hospital staff endured bombings and strafings while working under strained conditions, treating not the dramatically increasing numbers of sick and wounded, including soldiers. Finally, on the eve of the Japanese capture of Wuchow, Wallace loaded equipment and staff members onto barges, then floated the hospital along the waterways of China. Finally reaching safe haven, Wallace and his team set up a temporary hospital in Poseh. There one of the Chinese nurses recounted an incident to newly arrived American nurse Lucy Wright:

"It was at Fok Luk that I saw Dr. Wallace refuse his rice allowance and give it to a nurse who was desperately ill with fever. [...] That same night] I saw him behind a cook's tent we had rigged up. He was eating grains of burned rice, hardly palatable, that had been thrown away. When he realized I had seen him, he was terribly embarrassed." The nurse continued, "No, he wasn't

ashamed of eating that food. No one else would have had it, as hungry as we were. I think he was embarrassed because he did not want me to know how hungry he was. We Chinese are not used to seeing Americans or Europeans do things like this. We know the missionaries love us, but there was always a difference. They lived their way and we lived ours, but Dr. Wallace didn't know about the difference. He was one of us. He accepted our portion—all of it."

(Author's note: Wallace survived the Japanese invasion, but in 1951 he was imprisoned by the Chinese Communists. Despite threats and bullying, the Communists weren't able to find one person willing to speak out against Wallace. When he was murdered in the prison, the Chinese buried him without a service and with no marker for his grave. The Chinese people he had served so faithfully risked, ignoring the retaliation of the Communists, constructed a monument to the fallen doctor to mark his grave, inscribing his favorite verse on the marker: "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.")

In your group, discuss the characteristics of Dr. Wallace the Chinese nurse saw as important, and describe why you think they mattered to her. She describes a difference between him and the other missionaries she has seen. What is that difference, and what importance does it have for Christians in the workplace?



Scripture Passage

Ruth 1:1–4:22

Study

Think about your coworkers, customers, vendors and investors. In the spaces below, write the names of those you think fit into these categories:

Obviously Christian —

Obviously not a Christian —

Not sure —

What are some of the ways you identified the people who were obviously Christians?

In which category would your coworkers, customers, vendors and investors place you? Why?

At first glance the story of Ruth would seem like an unusual one to illustrate workplace truths. In fact, its most often described as a love story. But embedded in the details of this account are characteristics each of us can find useful as we strive to understand how to serve Christ faithfully at work.

Read the four chapters that make up the Book of Ruth. Be sure you don't miss the fact that Ruth is a Moabite woman, not an Israelite.

Describe the characteristics of Ruth evident in these passages.

1:16-17

2:2-3

2:7

2:10

2:17

2:18

3:10-11

What characteristics of Boaz emerge from the following passages?

2:4

2:5

2:8-9

2:14

2:15-16

3:15-18

From these lists of traits and your observations of Dr. Wallace, which might be useful in winning the high ground in the workplace? Why?

Loyal. Diligent. Competent. Faithful. Attentive to detail. Humble. Looking out for others. We see all of these and more in the tale of Ruth and Boaz. And we see many of these traits reflected in the life of Dr. Wallace. How many of these traits are visible to coworkers, customers, vendors and investors who have contact with you?

Would your work relationships describe you as loyal? In a time where job spans are shorter and shorter, what are some of the ways a Christian might establish a firm witness?

Discuss how job-hopping might inhibit a person's witness. What options exist to counter this?

Why would diligence, attention to detail, and competence offer Christian workers an opportunity to hold the high ground in conversations about ethics, faith and values with people in their working lives?

What role does humility play in getting people to pay attention to what we have to say?

Would people affiliated with you in your career describe you as faithful? If so, faithful to what? How might our behavior toward our duties, our employer, and our coworkers, give us the right to speak to them about our faithfulness to God?

Far too many followers of Christ speak before they've established their reputations. "Work first, talk later" is an excellent strategy for being heard when we share our views on faith, and our testimony to the work of Christ in our lives.

Interested in learning more about how to talk about God on the job. Visit our website at www.marketplacenetWORK.com for ideas and articles on this topic and many more. You might also want to check out our book Talking About God in the 21st Century Marketplace. It can also be ordered through our website.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- Winning the high ground at work is much more involved than merely doing the right thing.
- The high ground at work is being ethical and having enough respect that others want to listen when you speak.
- Qualities that make us good workers also bring us respect in other areas of our lives. Competency, integrity, diligence, and loyalty are all building blocks for the right to be heard on matters of faith.
- Like Boaz, noticing the details in the lives of those we contact in our jobs can give us the opportunity to have meaningful relationships with them. Its in the context of relationship that most opportunities to talk seriously about God arise.
- A Christian who is faithful to Scripture but aloof to the world around him or her produces little fruit of eternal value.
- The workplace is more than merely a place to earn a living.
- The people we contact at work are the neighbors Jesus describes in His story of the Good Samaritan. We must care about them, and look for ways to share our faith with them in ways that are gracious and compassionate.