

*Encourage each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your hearts to the Lord. Always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:19-20*

Workplaces can be varied affairs. For many, work means being part of a much larger enterprise, joining in with the morning rush and clocking in at an office or factory floor as you toil with many others. For others, work means running a small enterprise all on your own or along with just two or three colleagues. In both situations, the challenge is to make sure that you live in such a way as to advance God's Kingdom in everything and to make your deeds shine so that all will see them and give praise to our Father. In the case of the small business owner, though, that can seem to be even harder when you are naturally more isolated from people.

It's clear from Scripture that we aren't meant to undertake journeys all on our own. It's all too easy to lose sight of the bigger vision of what we should be accomplishing, to get into situations of unwelcome compromise and (perhaps most of all) to become discouraged when challenging mountains come across our path. We become easy targets for the enemy. One of the strongest ways of overcoming this is by forging togetherness, as Ecclesiastes 4:12 recognises: *A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.* There's also the well known encouragement in Hebrews 10:25 – *Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.*

As a small business owner in Port Elizabeth, I have found that this is advice that doesn't only apply to a church setting: it's invaluable to apply it to work situations as well. As everyone knows, it can be tough going out there and despondency and despair can threaten to derail even the most resilient of us. However, when we actively forge bonds with fellow believers and take to heart Scripture's commands to encourage each other, this challenge can be overcome.

Practically speaking, this means deliberately developing actual contact and interaction with like-minded fellow believers. It's not enough just to join a WhatsApp group, even if that is an easy option! Rather, try at least three avenues: firstly, find a wise mentor; secondly, join some focused groups of believers, such as a regular prayer group or Harvest's E-Round Table; thirdly, create environments where you come across other believers regularly – for example, a shared office space. And then, when you have created those bonds, take your role seriously in encouraging others. So often, it's in lifting up others that we are lifted up ourselves.

A final thought on this: Jesus said that the world would know we were His disciples by our love for each other. If the world sees our real bonds of togetherness and our encouragement of each other, not only will we be lifting each other up but we will lift Him up as well. Why would we ever want to act in isolation?