BUSINESS & FINANCE - GOD’S WAY
EUROPARTNERS YOUNG PROFESSIONALS TRAINING

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THE GOAL OF THIS BOOK IS TO COMMUNICATE SOME OF THE WISDOM GIVEN TO US IN THE BIBLE CONCERNING BUSINESS AND FINANCE. THE BIBLE HAS MUCH TO SAY ON THE PURPOSE OF DOING BUSINESS AS A CHRISTIAN, ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS WITH CO-WORKERS, CUSTOMERS, AND ADVISORS AND ABOUT OUR DEALING WITH MONEY.

WE WILL DISCUSS HOW THE CHRISTIAN IN BUSINESS IS CALLED TO BE RADICALLY DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS. PARTICIPANTS WILL BE GIVEN PRINCIPLES WHICH THEY WILL BE ABLE TO USE TO EVALUATE THE MANY DAILY DECISIONS AND CHALLENGES WHICH FACE TODAY’S MODERN YOUNG PROFESSIONAL.

YOU’VE TAKEN VALUABLE TIME OFF FROM YOUR BUSINESS OR PROFESSION, AND SOME OF YOU HAVE MADE SACRIFICES TO BE HERE—TO DRAW APART AND LEARN FROM GOD. WE PRAY THAT YOU WILL EXPERIENCE NEW INSIGHT INTO THE PURPOSE OF YOUR BUSINESS, ACCORDING TO GOD’S WORD, AND THAT YOU WILL COME AWAY WITH A SOLID BIBLICAL BASE FOR OPERATING YOUR BUSINESS AND MANAGING YOUR MONEY ON A DAILY BASIS.

AFTER THE SEMINAR YOU WILL HAVE LEARNED HOW TO TRANSLATE THE WISE BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES INTO YOUR DAILY PROFESSIONAL LIFE AND WILL HAVE GAINED PRECIOUS WISDOM ABOUT DOING BUSINESS AS A CHRISTIAN.

YOU WILL BE CONVINCED THAT THE BIBLE GIVES US ALL THE INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION YOU NEED TO WORK AS A CHRISTIAN IN THE MANY DIFFICULT SITUATIONS IN THE MARKETPLACE. MAKING DECISIONS WILL NOT BECOME EASIER BUT WILL BE TAKEN FROM GOD’S PERSPECTIVE, WITH FRESH INSIGHT INTO HIS WILL AND PURPOSE. THIS WILL CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO LEADING A BALANCED LIFE IN WHICH FAITH IN GOD BECOMES RELEVANT AND MEANINGFUL TO YOUR CAREER AND WORK. WHAT YOU GAIN FROM THIS TIME IS ONLY A BEGINNING, AND WE PRAY THAT YOU WILL CONTINUE TO BE OPEN TO THE WORD OF GOD AND HIS DIRECTION FOR YOU, YOUR FAMILY, AND YOUR BUSINESS.

THIS BOOK IS INTENDED TO INTRODUCE YOU TO THE PRINCIPLES OF OPERATING A BUSINESS AND HANDLING FINANCES, FOUNDED ON THE PRINCIPLES FOUND IN GOD’S WORD.

THE FOCUS OF THIS WORKSHOP WILL BE ON THE BASIC BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES THAT WE SHOULD BE APPLYING IN OUR BUSINESS. THESE PRINCIPLES ARE ESSENTIAL FOR US TO IMPLEMENT MINISTRY AND PENETRATE OUR CULTURE AS SALT AND LIGHT IN THE MARKETPLACE.

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INTRODUCTION

This study is intended to help you, as a young business leader or young professional, to achieve the following four objectives:

1. TO INTEGRATE PRINCIPLES FROM THE BIBLE INTO YOUR DAILY BUSINESS PRACTICES

God understands that business plays a big part in your life. You spend much of your time and energy at work. The Lord knows your professional life can be a challenge and even a source of conflict at times. Because the Lord loves and cares for you deeply, He wanted to prepare you for business. Therefore, God graciously provided His business principles in the Bible. They provide insights and principles - a roadmap to guide you in making wise decisions – these include areas such as business organisation, management, planning, marketing and human resources. Regardless of how different God’s thoughts and ways seem to be, the Word of God is as applicable to business today as it has ever been. Isaiah 40:8 reads “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”

2. TO GROW YOUR COMPANY PROFITABLY

Do the biblical principles of business actually work? Without question they do. However, doing business God’s way is not a shortcut to higher profits and fewer difficulties. If you implement biblical principles into your business, from time to time it may cost you money. For example, dishonesty is common, and anyone operating a business in a manner that glorifies Christ will face the challenge to compromise or lose money.

Nevertheless, profitability is an essential part of running a business. Christians need to reject the idea that there is something wrong with honestly making money. Deuteronomy 8:18 says: “You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day”. Since the Lord “gives us power to create wealth”, one of the objectives is to help you learn how to operate your business in a way that is profitable and creates wealth for all involved in the business. Note the purpose of wealth from the last verse, “to confirm His covenant”. I believe this is the enduring relationship with God in which we can enjoy all the promises of God, which never fail!

3. TO GROW IN CHRIST SO THAT YOU WILL BE MORE LIKE HIM AS A BUSINESS LEADER

Jesus is the most powerful leader in history. Becoming like Him is our and God’s goal for our life. He predestined us to be conformed to the image of his
Son. (Romans 8:29). This will enable you to be fully human in every part of your life – as a man or woman, a spouse, a parent, a neighbour – and as a business leader.

4. TO BE A MARKETPLACE AMBASSADOR OF CHRIST IN THE MARKETPLACE
As a Christian businessperson or young professional, you have the wonderful privilege of being an ambassador for Christ in the marketplace, representing the Kingdom of God.

“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Paul is saying that you are an ambassador for Christ. Therefore the right question to ask yourself is what kind of ambassador you are; good or bad? Influential or non-influential?

You are called to reflect Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God in the way you behave, speak and conduct your professional life, so that you honour and glorify God for who He is, thereby stimulating others to start asking questions about your roots and source.

SO, LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN...
Implementing biblical principles for operating a business is a journey that takes time. Those who have preceded you in this “Business By The Book” study have found it enormously helpful. But it is only the beginning of the journey. It is our hope that, if you are not already, you will become involved in a group of your business peers, maybe even by using this study. Participants of such a group can encourage and counsel one another as they study God’s business principles in more detail and discover how to apply them to real life situations.

You may be facing professional difficulties. It is important to recognise that there is hope! Don’t ever allow a sense of guilt or failure over past mistakes to overwhelm you; rather learn from the experience. The apostle Paul said it this way “forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal...” (Philippians 3:13-14).

STARTING AND RUNNING A BUSINESS
There are a range of legal entities that may be utilised to run a business.

Some engage in their business as a sole trader (or a sole practitioner for those engaged in delivering professional services), partnership (which is often defined as “two or more individuals carrying on in common with a view to profit”), a limited liability partnership (again, often the preserve of those engaged in professional practice), a limited company or a public limited company.

Your business activity may be one whereby you are applying your personal skills and earning an independent income. Often there is minimal trading - buying and selling goods or services - and overheads are generally limited to those costs attributable to your personal business activities. Income from this type of business will reflect your expertise and demand for the service coupled with your ability to charge what you perceive you are worth and how much your client or customer is willing to pay. Typically, there is minimal risk relating to these types of owner-managed businesses - the income derives from the demand for your services and your personal expertise. However, you may be engaged in employing others and selling their expertise while you still buy, sell and trade in goods and/or services.

Your business may be a first-generation business – you started it and you continue to manage it, or it may be a business that you have bought or have become the owner of as a result of a business passing from one generation to the next or from the founder(s) to the managers.

Whatever the legal entity and regardless of how you came into ownership, it is your hard work that has contributed to the development of the business; it may have been your capital and maybe you can even relate to the input of your own blood, sweat and tears.

OWNERSHIP

The Lord owns our possessions and our businesses. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.” (Psalm 24:1)

The Lord created all things, and He has delegated the responsibility to take care of it to us. God is still the owner of everything. You could say God is the shareholder and owner and you have been appointed CEO. As a shareholder gives responsibility for the company to his CEO, God also does with all His creation. Therefore, you should behave and act in the best interest of the shareholder and in alignment with the principles, rules and goals He has given you. There is much freedom, but there are also guiding principles you have to follow. Recognising God’s ownership is crucial in everything you do, whether you run a business or lead the life of a young professional.

OUR OWNERSHIP OR HIS LORDSHIP

As Christians we should acknowledge God’s ownership and effectively transfer ownership of our business or professional life to the Lord, as true disciples. “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33). Is that easy? Maybe, maybe not, but we must give up any claim to ownership. Sometimes the Lord will test our willingness to give up one of the very possessions that is most important to us.
The most vivid example of this in the Bible is when the Lord instructed Abraham to whom He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (Genesis 22:2). When Abraham obeyed, demonstrating his willingness to give up his most valuable possession, God responded with, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." (Genesis 22:12).

When we acknowledge God's ownership, every professional decision becomes a spiritual decision. We do have a large degree of freedom to make decisions, based on our experience, wisdom, counsel and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. No longer do we ask, "Lord, what do You want me to do with my business?" The question is restated, "Lord, what do You want me to do with Your business?" How is that for a pressure reliever? God is not distant, but wants to be intimately involved in your personal life and your professional life. He is an approachable shareholder, who loves to give his opinion, advice and direction, if you ask Him. It is to the glory of God that He owns the business and that we serve Him with our God-given talents and abilities. Realising that you are not alone in running your business or following your career, can take away much of the anxiety and burden of managing a business!

LET'S GET PRACTICAL

Consistently recognising God's ownership is difficult. It is easy to believe intellectually that God owns all you have and yet live as if it were not true. Here are a few practical suggestions to help us recognise God's ownership:

For the next 30 days, meditate on 1 Chronicles 29:11,12 when you wake up and just before you go to sleep. "Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all."

Be careful in the use of personal pronouns; consider substituting "the" or "the Lord's for "my," mine," and "ours."

Ask the Lord to make you aware of His ownership and help you to relinquish ownership. Pray about this over the next 30 days.

I shared at the beginning how I had not known that it was God who owned my business. Nevertheless, I had endeavoured to apply Scripture to my business practices and when I learned about God's ownership I spent time looking back over the previous 25 years and thank God that I had conducted my business affairs, at least financially, as though they had belonged to the Lord. I had prayed about the business, I had sought to be as godly as I could in all my business dealings but if I knew back then what I know today I would have approached a lot of business issues differently. How exciting that I am able to share these truths with you today while you remain in the business arena!

OUR PURPOSE IN BUSINESS

"What is the purpose of being in business?" The usual response of about 80 per cent of people asked, is "to make a profit", to which I respond that making a profit is but an outcome of running a business – the real purpose of a business is to meet (indeed, wherever possible, exceed) the needs of the customer. Profit is one of the outcomes of managing a successful business. If there is an over-emphasis on “making a profit” the business may run the risk of cutting corners, over-pricing and impairing the delivery of a quality service. The result? Maybe the customer looks elsewhere for alternative sources of supply. One good example is the restaurant trade. Restaurateurs know that they live or die by the quality of the food, service and restaurant ambience. There are plenty of restaurants around from which to choose and a successful restaurateur knows that he needs to have a good reputation if diners are to return and recommend the establishment to friends.

However, for the Christian owner there is a higher level of purpose - and that is to glorify God.

Business owners and managers should glorify God in their personal and business lives. I am always aware that as a Christian I represent Jesus Christ in all I do and how I say or do it. I am a marketplace ambassador of Christ. It is a sad fact that I have known a good number of Christians who have not been a good witness – I am always astounded when Christians blaspheme and seek to adopt business practices that are contrary to their faith. Faith is not just for Sundays – it is for life. We are Christ’s disciples and we must seek to conduct ourselves and manage His business in a Christ-like manner. Now I am not suggesting that I have always honoured Christ in the marketplace – far from it – but it is essential that we should get the basics of our lives in accordance with the standards required of a Christian. Proverbs 15:3 tells us that “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” It is important for every believer to know that God is with us, and that He is watching over us.

IS IT OKAY TO MAKE A PROFIT AS A CHRISTIAN?

It certainly is. Contrary to the opinion of some, there is no biblical admonition against making a profit. If a business cannot generate profit it will fail, and its ministry to the employees and customers will cease. Every Christian in business - employer and employee alike - should work
to profit, but never by sacrificing the other principles of a biblically-based business. For instance, an employer must not maximise profits by under-paying employees or by dishonestly representing products or services to customers.

There are many reasons why businesses fail to earn a profit. Sometimes businesses fail because of a bad economy – construction companies are often the first to suffer in a recession. So there may be other external circumstances – matters beyond the control of a business owner. A business may fail because of a high level of debt that is too great to service because of a lack of profit or poor cash flow, or maybe the line of credit from a lender or supplier is restricted or even withdrawn.

Some businesses fail because they are unable to compete. Some are disorganised. Some are unable to attract good employees. Some do not recognise changes in customer needs.

Wise businesspeople know that even a small change in the external business environment or a bad mistake on pricing or defective service can be the difference between making a profit and incurring a loss. It may have nothing to do with a lack of sales. Rather the profits may be eaten up by overheads or misspent money.

For many years as an adviser to businesses I counselled business owners to separate their business finances from their personal finances. It is important to resist the temptation to draw on business finances when times are good only to find there are inadequate capital resources when times are tough. It is a simple principle that I call the "Joseph" rule - leave profit and cash in the business for the lean times. It is important to manage the business so that it can provide for the owner’s needs. Whatever the legal entity the business owner[s] should receive a salary.

Another trap I have seen owners fall into, especially those new to business, is to buy a new or expensive car on finance. I have only bought a new car once and that was after I had been in business for eight years – and I did not sell it until it had over 100,000 miles on the clock. That was also the last car I bought on finance as I decided that I could save for my next car (a second-hand car with 8,000 miles on the clock) and pay cash - thus eliminating the monthly expense of the car repayment and the interest charge in my profit and loss account. Many people are driven by pride and greed to grow businesses much faster than they should. They are not content to be profitable – they want to get rich quickly. They expand too rapidly by going deeply into debt or faster than they can develop they should. They are not content to be profitable – they want to get rich quickly.

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The commitment to being profitable means wisely building a business with a solid financial foundation and not allowing greed and presumption to put employees, investors, customers or suppliers at undue risk. It is no sin to fail in business. However, seek to conduct your business in such a way that promotes financial stability.

SUPPORTING THE WORK OF CHRIST

There is no difference between those involved in Christian ministry and Christians in business. Because business is a ministry too. We are called to maintain the earth, being a marketplace ambassador, loving people and serving our customers, our stakeholders and our families. We are called to support creating wellbeing and a good life for everyone. Business can serve these goals, if business is and stays focused on people and God.

A healthy business generates resources and opportunities which serve the Church, the body of Christ. The local church and businesspeople need each other. This is not an accidental relationship - God designed it that way. Paul wrote to the Roman Church “since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly; if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving...or he who gives, with liberality” (Romans 12:6-8). Then to the Corinthian Church: “God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body just as He desired... The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Corinthians 12:18, 21).

The first part of this dependent relationship is obvious. Churches and ministries cannot exist without regular, generous giving. Fortunately, the need is not limited to their side of the equation; Christian businesspeople have needs too; to be seen as human beings and to have their personal needs and souls be taken care of. It is important for church leaders to realise that a business person is not an ATM machine or merely a source of resources for the Church. They are ordinary members to be taken care of and with their possibilities they will also be generous to the local Church just like everyone else.

Giving is one of the purposes of Christians in business; it is what God has called and gifted them to do. When business owners recognise that they are strategic in funding the work of Christ, their work takes on eternal significance, next to everything they do in their business out of love to Christ.

BEING A MARKETPLACE AMBASSADOR OF CHRIST

The Lord has given you a position of influence in the workplace in order to impact your co-workers, suppliers and even your competitors. The Lord has appointed you to represent Him and bring His principles, values, love and presence to your workplace. This is a platform for evangelism, for discipleship and for influencing those around you by serving others and then communicating His message through your words and actions. In this sense you are a marketplace ambassador of Christ.
BUILDING ON THE ROCK

What makes a solid foundation that will endure the ups and downs of the changing marketplace? Jesus said “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock”. [Matthew 7:24,25] No matter how hard you labour to build your business, if you are not building on the solid foundation of God’s Word, sooner or later the financial rains, floods and winds will expose the inferior foundation. Psalm 127:1,2 tell us, “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain”. This principle is also applicable to business. God’s principles of business are not offered “cafeteria style”. In other words, you cannot choose to implement those you like and ignore the others without suffering the consequences.

If you are faithful to conduct your business the Lord’s way, you please Him and place yourself in a position where He is more able to use you in the lives of others.

CASE STUDY 1. WILL’S DECISION

Will owned a large manufacturing company. Early one morning, Will was greeted at his office door by his plant manager, whose name was John. Without comment, John submitted his resignation, effective immediately. Will was devastated; for the past five years he had been grooming John to become president of his company. When he questioned John about his reasons for leaving, John refused to discuss them. Will just couldn’t understand it. He paid John more than anyone else in the company, including himself. But nothing would change John’s mind.

Will asked John to stay at least long enough to hire and train a new plant manager, but John angrily refused. Since John had been such a good friend, Will held a company going-away party and gave John a substantial severance bonus.

Three months later, John’s reasons for leaving became apparent: He had opened his own company and copied Will’s best-selling product. In time, John’s company grew, becoming Will’s leading competitor.

Nine years later, Will learned that there was a design problem with one of John’s new products and that several lawsuits were being filed against John’s company. Now Will had forgiven John years before and prayed for him on a regular basis.

He felt strongly that the Lord wanted him to reach out to John, so he bought one of John’s products, tested it, and discovered the problem. Then amazingly, he told his engineers to find a way to fix it. After making and testing the necessary modifications, Will called John and told him how to solve his problem.

Radical Christianity! That’s what some would say. Stupidity! That’s what others would say.

Only time will tell how John will respond to this act of unconditional Christ-like love. The results are not Will’s responsibility. His responsibility, like ours, is to do what the Lord wants him to do.

By now you may be thinking, where did Will learn to operate his business like this? Has he lost his mind? What about the bottom line? But Will’s radically different decisions are based on the principles found in the bestselling book of all time—the Bible.

DISCUSSION

1. What does this case say about:
   • Dealing with disappointments with people in business?
   • Treating your employees?
   • Treating your competitors?

2. What was Will’s motivation in taking his decisions?
CASE STUDY 2. CARLOS VILHALBA

No one knew Carlos was in deep financial trouble. His debt amounted to $900,000 which was eating up his business like a cancer.
He signed up for a financial seminar and at the end of the day went home shocked. He had never heard the word of God applied to his life and his business in such a relevant way. He realised that he was not being a good manager of the blessings God entrusted to him. He made a decision that he was going to change the way he managed his business.

In a restaurant, his friend tried to probe for the spiritual roots of the problem. He asked Carlos about his assets and liabilities. He owned a very large empty building in Guatemala City; and it was fully paid for but completely empty. Carlos said that this was a very special building; for him it was the fulfilment of a dream. Carlos explained that when he was a little boy his family was extremely poor. Carlos was a little Shoe Shiner with Big Dreams! When cleaning the shoes of a rich businessman, he would say to himself, 'Carlos, one day you too will have your own Factory!' That huge empty building was the fulfilment of his dream, that one day he will have his own Factory. There was only one problem. The building had been sitting empty for several years now and all of his attempts to start production in his Factory had failed.

The next day at the seminar was going to be a life changing experience for Carlos. The topic of the night was ownership and stewardship.
The trainer explained that God owns it all through passages like Psalm 24:1 or first Chronicles 29:11,12. Even though this may sound familiar, saying that God owns it all is much easier than living it and surrendering to God, allowing Him to be in control and trusting in His provisions. This is one of the hardest things to do in life; switching from acting like an owner to acting like a manager. This is one of the true signs of maturity in a Christian. Emotional detachment to finances is a critical step to make in our journey to financial healing.

Carlos went home that night, walked straight to his bedroom and fell on his knees before the Lord. He suddenly realised that he had surrendered everything to the Lord except one thing, his dream. He had dedicated his life, his home, his wife, his family and a lot of other things but Carlos was still holding on to the dream of being Factory owner. The emotional attachment to his dream was not allowing him to behave like an administrator of God’s possessions. Carlos fell to the ground and surrendered to God what he considered the most precious possession he had in life - his childhood dream.

The following week, Carlos called a meeting with all of his creditors explaining to them that he owned a very large building in Guatemala City. The building was completely empty and that he was ready to sell that building, which was valued at $1.1 million dollars. He told its creditors he was willing to give it to them in exchange for all his debts. They didn’t know what to say but after some deliberation they accepted the exchange and Carlos was set free from the bondage of debt.

Some months later, his country went through a major economic crisis which allowed Carlos not only to make money due to his good cash position, but also to purchase the business of some competitors. Carlos financial success did not lie in his ability to make smart financial decisions. He would say without reservation that the secret was the life changing experience in realising that he must behave each day as a trustee of God’s possessions, acting as an administrator and manager and that God must be the absolute owner of everything. Even to the point of owning his most cherished dreams!

DISCUSSION

Describe the business problem facing Carlos.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Describe the spiritual problems facing Carlos.

1.

2.

3.

4.
TRANSFERRING OWNERSHIP

Do you remember the last time that you signed over the deed or title of something that you owned? The last time you sold a car, you signed over the car title. When you sold your last house, you signed over the deed at closing. Have you ever sold a business or a commercial property? With a property we may do that quite casually and be glad to get rid of the debt and make some cash. Kent Humphreys tells of the time when, in 1997, he signed over ownership of the distribution firm which his family had owned for 38 years. “It took me about 45 minutes to sign papers on two or three long tables. The next day I was still CEO, but someone else owned the firm. I then had a stewardship position, I still felt responsible and wanted to succeed, but a huge burden was lifted from my shoulders. I was no longer ultimately responsible for the debt, the livelihood of four hundred families, and the final decision. I was accountable to the owner to run it properly.”

I remember a meeting of twelve business owners in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in which they signed over the deed to their businesses to Jesus Christ. It was a special privilege for me to be there. Four local pastors were also present. Each company owner read the deed and signed it. The pastors prayed for each business steward individually. Then we prayed, laid hands on the pastors, and commissioned them to be involved in the equipping of each CEO to run their business for Christ. Finally, the pastors prayed for the group of leaders as a whole that their actions would impact the companies, the city, and the nation. We had two witnesses sign each deed and took photos to help remind all involved.

These leaders were involved in the first three groups of Leading a Company for Christ in Malaysia. Each group met for three hours a week. Many of them will now help convene or facilitate another eight-week group or a group that will meet for the next year. Do you realize what an impact this will make on these business leaders? Just as I did in 1997, they assumed the role of CEO as stewards, no longer owners. Every decision must be made in the best interest of the owner, Jesus Christ. They must be obedient stewards and be honest and faithful CEO’s. However, Christ is the owner and He will make the final major decisions. That takes the pressure off. All we have to do is submit to His vision, mission, principles, and leadership.

If you feel led to do the same as these Malaysian leaders, just adapt the form below. You can also do this if you do not own a company yourself. In this case you have your career to surrender. I suggest that you have your spouse, pastor, fellow group members, and key employees attend the ceremony. Have witnesses sign the deed with you. Make sure that your peers hold you accountable.

DEDICATION OF BUSINESS

I ………………………… the legal owner/part-owner of ………………………………… solemnly declare before everyone present and before all Heaven and Earth that I on this day willingly deed the ownership of this company over to the Almighty God, the creator of all things.

I believe that God, my heavenly Father desires that all things be reconciled back to Him through His Son Jesus Christ. As of today, I acknowledge that God is the rightful owner of ………………………………… and I am merely His steward looking after His resources.

Therefore, I now repent of all the past wrong doings done by …………………………………; it’s owners, officers and employees and ask you God to forgive us and cleanse us by the blood of your son Jesus Christ. God, I ask you to redeem …………………………………, all its assets and reputation so that it can be used to bring glory and honour to your name.

I desire to be a Priest in this company and pledge to lead this company for Christ to the best of my ability. I will do everything in my capacity as ……………….. to honour you in all the practices and dealings of ………………………………….

I now dedicate …………………………………, all its assets to you for the advancement of your Kingdom.

Help me God to carry out all that I pledge to do, in Jesus name. Amen.

Signed by
…………………………… ……………………
(Name)   (Date)

Witnessed by:
…………………………… ……………………
(Name)   (Date)

…………………………… ……………………
(Name)   (Date)
DEDICATION OF CAREER

I ………………………… the legal owner of my career solemnly declare before everyone present and before all Heaven and Earth that I on this day willingly deed the ownership of this career over to the Almighty God, the creator of all things.

I believe that God, my heavenly Father desires that all things be reconciled back to Him through His Son Jesus Christ. As of today, I acknowledge that God is the rightful owner of my career and I am merely His steward looking after His resources.

Therefore, I now repent of all the past wrong doings in my career, and ask you God to forgive me and cleanse me by the blood of your son Jesus Christ. God, I ask you to redeem my career, possessions and reputation so that it can be used to bring glory and honour to your name.

I desire to be a Priest in my career and pledge to lead this my career for Christ to the best of my ability. I will do everything in my capacity to honour you in all the practices and dealings of my career.

I now dedicate my career, possessions and reputation to you for the advancement of your Kingdom.

Help me God to carry out all that I pledge to do, in Jesus name. Amen.

Signed by

…………………………… ……………………
(Name)   (Date)

Witnessed by:

…………………………… ……………………
{Name}   (Date)

…………………………… ……………………
{Name}   (Date)

…………………………… ……………………
{Name}   (Date)
God owns my business or career, and has called me to manage the business or career as His partner. In the development of the business or career, both God and I each have a unique role to play. He is working to realise His purposes through me. When Job lost everything, he looked at his wife and said: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:21).

How could Job respond that way to his situation? Because Job understood that he was only a manager of God’s plan, and that God was the true owner of all things under his care, even his own children. The biblical example of Job helps us understand a key principle of financial health, the concept of “stewardship.”

It is very important to realise that I can never do what only God can do. And also, that He will not do what I am supposed to do! I have heard it said that if I do everything ‘in the natural’ – God will do the supernatural!

GOD’S PART

What a privilege to be a co-worker with God in His enterprise! He is a pro-active God, taking full part in the affairs of man. He is not distant or far off but remains with us throughout our life with Him. Failing to realise God’s part and His wish to be allowed to do it, leads to a self-centred way of doing business, independent from Him.

One of the best things I ever did was to dedicate my business to God. I then discovered that I had a new source of assets, which enabled me to do things I would never have thought possible! So, what are some of God’s responsibilities which we can leave Him to get on with!

HE IS IN CONTROL

Besides being Creator and Owner, God is ultimately in control of every event. In Scripture, we read: "We adore you as being in control of everything" (1 Chronicles 29:11, TLB). "Whatever the Lord pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth" (Psalm 135:6). In the book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar stated: "I praised the Most High; I honoured and glorified Him who lives forever... He does as He pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back His hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'" (Daniel 4:34-35, NIV).

The Lord is also in control of difficult events. "I am the Lord, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these" (Isaiah 45:6-7).

It’s important for us to realize that our heavenly Father uses even seemingly devastating circumstances for ultimate good in the lives of the godly. "We know
that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). The Lord allows difficult circumstances to enter our lives for at least five reasons: (1) to develop our character, to conform to the image and likeness of Christ, (2) to accomplish His intentions, and (3) to lovingly discipline us when needed. (4) To test and to know where our heart is, and (5) for other reasons, we don’t know, to teach us a certain lesson. Ultimately, we don’t know the answer to every question, but we trust God and know He is trustworthy, faithful and always present and involved, although we cannot always explain it. In addition to this, we need to recognize that there is also brokenness and sin in the world.

HE IS OUR PROVIDER

The Lord promises to provide for our needs. “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things [food and clothing] shall be given to you” (Matthew 6:33, NIV). In seeking his Kingdom, by practising his will and following the principles God gave to us, we will find the right way to turn to God and receive his favour. In seeking the Kingdom, our needs and desires will change. David experienced this, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4) I take this to mean that God will put the right desires into my heart.

The same Lord who fed manna to the children of Israel during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, and who satisfied the hunger of 5,000 with only five loaves and two fish has promised to meet all of our needs. This is the same Lord who told Elijah, “I have commanded the ravens to provide for you…. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening” (1 Kings 17:4, 6).

He is our provider and will provide our needs. “My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus”. Philippians 4:19.

THE RESULT OF OUR WORK IS UP TO HIM

If we will succeed or fail, if we achieve our goals or not, in the end it is up to God. We have the responsibility to work with the right motivation and reasons. We also have the responsibility to work with all our strength, all our might and in an excellent way.

If we fail or we do not meet the expectations or our goals, we have the responsibility to check everything and see if we missed something, didn’t do something well or if we could do some things over. If we did everything we could we should then let it go and leave it to God.

If the results do not match the expected outcome we should always ask God why and what it is He want us to learn. When things go wrong or we do not succeed, we build experience and wisdom.

If the meet the expected outcome we should thank Him in the knowledge of 1 Chronicles 29:12. “Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.”

A nice summary of this can be found in Ecclesiastes 11:1-6.

“Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return. Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what disaster may come upon the land. If clouds are full of water, they pour rain on the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there it will lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.”

HE IS MY EMPLOYER

My skills and talents have come from the Lord and He has given me these gifts to do the work He has planned for me to do. “And every skilled person to whom the Lord has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work” (Exodus 36:1). As my employer He controls promotion and advancement, based on the way I faithfully carry out His directions. “No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: he brings one down, he exalts another” (Psalm 75:6-7). As my employer He is very concerned with my character and uses my work to build character. As the carpenter builds the building, so the building builds the carpenter! As his employee, I must work hard and effectively in carrying out His wishes. “Diligent hands will rule, but laziness ends in slave labour” (Proverbs 12:24).

GOD IS BOTH PREDICTABLE AND UNPREDICTABLE

God is totally predictable in His faithfulness to provide for our needs. What we can’t predict is how He will provide. He uses different and often surprising means to care for us. He might meet our current need through an increase in income or an unexpected gift. On the other hand, He might choose to provide an opportunity to stretch limited resources through money-saving purchases. Then again, He might meet our needs through some circumstance that we couldn’t even imagine right now. Regardless of how He chooses to provide for our needs, He is completely reliable.
Charles Allen tells a story that illustrates this. As World War II was drawing to a close, the Allied armies gathered up many orphans and placed them in camps where they were well-fed. But despite excellent care, the orphans were afraid and slept poorly.

Finally, a doctor came up with a solution. When the children were put to bed, he gave each of them a piece of bread to hold. Any hungry children could get more to eat, but when they were finished, they would still have this piece of bread just to hold—not to eat. This practice produced wonderful results. The children went to bed knowing instinctively they would have food to eat the next day, and that simple guarantee gave them restful sleep.

Similarly, the Lord has given us His guarantee—our “piece of bread”. As we cling to His promises of provision, we can relax and be content. “My God shall meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19, NIV).

**SUMMARY OF GOD’S PART**

The Lord did not design people to shoulder the responsibilities that only He can carry. Jesus said, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you…. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). Come to Me! God has assumed the burdens of ownership, control, and provision. For this reason, His yoke is easy and we can rest and enjoy the peace of God—if we only will.

For most of us, the primary problem is failing to consistently recognize God’s part. Our culture believes that God plays no part in financial matters, and you may have, in some measure, been influenced by that view.

Another reason for this difficulty is that God has chosen to be invisible. Anything that is “out of sight” tends to become “out of mind”. This easily gets you out of the habit of recognizing His ownership, control, and provision.

After learning God’s part, you might wonder whether He’s left any responsibilities for us. The simple answer is YES. The Lord has given us great responsibility.

**OUR PART**

The word that best describes our part is stewardship. A steward is a manager of someone else’s stuff. The Lord has given us the authority to be stewards. “You made him ruler over the works of your [the Lord’s] hands; you put everything under his feet” [Psalm 8:6, NIV].

Our responsibility is summed up in this verse: “It is required of stewards that one be found faithful” [1 Corinthians 4:2]. Before we can be faithful, however, we have to grasp what we’re required to do. Just as the purchaser of a complicated piece of machinery studies the manufacturer’s manual to learn how to operate it, we need to examine the Creator’s handbook—the Bible—to determine how He wants us to handle His possessions.

As we begin to study our responsibilities, it’s important to remember that God loves and cares for us deeply. He is a God of mercy and grace. He has given us these principles because He wants the best for us. Most people discover areas in which they have not been faithful. Don’t become discouraged. Simply seek to apply faithfully what you learn.

Now, let’s examine two important elements of our responsibility.

**BE FAITHFUL WITH WHAT WE ARE GIVEN**

We are to be faithful regardless of how much God entrusts to us—whether it’s a fortune or a handful of coins. The parable of the talents (a talent was a sum of money) illustrates this. “It will be like a man on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent” (Matthew 25:14-15, NIV).

When the owner returned, he held each one responsible for faithfully managing his money. The owner praised the faithful servant who received five talents: “Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Matthew 25:21).

Interestingly, the servant who had been given two talents received the identical reward as the one who had been given five [see Matthew 25:23]. The Lord rewards faithfulness, regardless of the amount over which we are responsible.

We are required to be faithful whether we are given much or little. As someone
once said, “It’s not what I would do if a million euros were my lot; it’s what I am doing with the ten euros I’ve got.”

CARRY OUT THE OWNERS INSTRUCTIONS

We have been given an extensive and exhaustive set of principles, rules and laws to follow. ‘All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.’ (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). This means we have to read, study and learn what the Lord has to say about conducting our business His way from His Word.

The key word is faithfulness – faithful in carrying out His instructions. One of the most sobering principles (and sometimes frightening to me) is the fact that the extent to which the Lord will trust me with more responsibility and even with what God called ‘the true riches’ are dependent on the extent to which I am faithful. “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will give you property of your own?” (Luke 16:10-12). It is like we are constantly being watched and our performance evaluated! If we are seen to be faithful (not successful, or efficient ... ) then we will be given more responsibility and more resources!

HOW GOD GUIDES

He guides us by using six beacons. If all these six beacons speak the same message you can go ahead freely, remembering that there is no good and wrong in every decision you make if you do it seriously and intentionally with the Lord. Due to Romans 8:28 we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him.

These six beacons are prayer, the Bible, inner peace, our reasoning capability, counsellors and circumstances.

1. THE BIBLE
The Bible provides the greatest test of them all. Nothing should be in conflict with what is laid down in God’s Word. His Word provides a test that is objective and pure. This does not refer to any text or verse in particular, but to the principles that run through the Bible. We realise that each Bible text can be used separately (see for instance 2 Timothy 3:16–17). But because the Bible does not always give ready-made answers to dilemmas of everyday life, it is important that the following five beacons are aligned with the Bible.

2. PRAYER
When we seek out God’s help in making the right decision, it is important that we enter into prayer. Praying does not mean only asking God for help, but also means listening to God. What thoughts do we receive while we are praying? Some people even receive dreams, words and images. When entering into prayer it is important not to focus on the problem or the difficult issue that we face, but to first focus on God.

3. PEACE WITH GOD IN OUR CONSCIENCE
Do we feel at peace with the thoughts and signs that we receive, or is there confusion or doubt? Be wary of attributing your own desires to God. Test your conscience. The church father Augustine once called this ‘a kind of silent clamour of truth ringing inside’.

4. COMMON SENSE, RATIO AND LOGIC
God created us and gave us abilities to think and use our common sense (2 Timothy 2:7). So, the decision we make must match common sense, ratio and logic.

If we abandon common sense then we get ourselves in absurd situations. John Wesley, the father of Methodism, said that God usually guided him by presenting reasons to his mind for acting in a certain way.

5. COUNSELLORS, WISE, GODLY PEOPLE
These are spiritual counsellors who have wisdom and insight. These people can, at times, be annoying and say critical things; they hold a mirror to our lives, sometimes able to look straight into our hearts and point out our ‘false’ motives. It is good to surround yourself with these kinds of people, mature Christians, who are wise and have proven their walk with God. Make sure that you have a number of these people in your council, on your board, in your circle of friends and also among your work colleagues. Do not forget your partner, if you have one. Your partner knows you well and often accounts for 50% of God’s wisdom in your life.

6. CIRCUMSTANCES AND EVENTS
Do circumstances and events confirm our choices? We read that Joseph and Moses arrived at Pharaoh’s court through a series of different events and were given the opportunity there to learn much and be a blessing to those around them. We also read that certain doors were closed to Paul and others were opened to him.
OUR JOINT MISSION

The purpose of a business is to glorify God. The purpose of a Christian in business is to let people see the way we do business, how we react in the many different, difficult circumstances in business, how we make the many tough decisions we need to take, how we react under adversity; and the result should be that God will be lifted up, glorified. It’s all about His reputation in the marketplace! “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).

The way in which this purpose can be carried out was explained by Jesus, who described His mission – to serve and set people free. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

As we are followers of Jesus, our mission, therefore, is exactly the same. This consists of two components. On the one hand serving people with goods and services which meet genuine needs and on the other hand, giving our life to show people how Jesus can set them free to live a life which is pleasing to God and which will help them to be all God wants them to be.

In business terms, we can explain this as adding value for the Owner and Stakeholders!

“The only justifiable goal of an organization is the creation of added value. That could be by creating something which was not there before, or if it was, to make it better, cheaper or more accessible. A successful company is one which continually adds value. When a business stops creating added value, it will cease to exist.” Charles Handy

You want to add value for all the company’s ‘stakeholders’- all who have a vested interest in the growth of the business. Who are your stakeholders?

- Employees
- Customers
- Suppliers
- Community
- Owners (shareholders)

A company or career which glorifies God adds financial, material, ethical and spiritual value for all interested parties.

As a delegated manager of God’s company, you should realise that fundamentally, God is the major ‘shareholder and owner of the enterprise’ in your business or career. He works actively in your business or career, He is the goal of all that is undertaken and the Source of all that you need and He is the Sustainer!

As Owner, God wants your life to pursue eternal goals, adding true value. Have you set ethical goals or even spiritual goals for your company or career?
GOD’S RESULT AREAS

The Owner is looking for performance and wants results in six areas, or functions of doing business. Results in these six functions will all work together to ensure that God is glorified through all that you undertake!

An overview of the six areas in which God is looking for results, with 2 Corinthians 9:10 as a metaphor, using the analogy of an agricultural enterprise.

“Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many thanks to God.” [2 Corinthians 9:10-12]

1. Profit – capital (Seed)
2. Provision of needs (Bread for food)
3. Products (store of seed to sell)
4. Integrity (harvest of righteousness)
5. Investing in God’s Kingdom (your generosity)
6. Illumination (resulting in thanksgiving to God)

1. MAKING A PROFIT WHICH WILL SUSTAIN THE BUSINESS AND PROVIDE CONTINUITY AND A RETURN FOR THE STAKEHOLDERS

“You shall remember the Lord your God For it is He who gives you power to create wealth that he may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers as at this day...” [Deuteronomy 8:18]

Making a profit is not the goal of a company but it is essential for the continuity and health of a business. Are the administrative procedures effective and do you receive timely information about the profitability of your products and projects?

2. DELIVERING A PRODUCT OR SERVICE WHICH GLORIFIES GOD

“They knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made aprons. And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins and clothed them” (Genesis 3:7,21). Probably, this is the first product man made as recorded in the Bible. God seriously improved their product and showed them how to make fur coats! People evaluate us partly from the way they experience our products or services; their quality, effectiveness, value. What is their experience with your products? How can this be improved?

3. PROVIDING THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE DEPENDENT UPON THE COMPANY FOR THEIR LIVELIHOOD

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant whom his master has set over his household to give them their food at the proper time?”[Matthew 24:45] God uses the company to meet the needs of its ‘stakeholders’. Does your company its employees well and according to their contribution? Does your company pay employees and suppliers on time and fully?

4. ILLUMINATING, SHEDDING LIGHT ON GOD WHO OWNS, SUSTAINS AND PROVIDES FOR THE BUSINESS, SO THAT PEOPLE MAY SEE HIM AS HE REALLY IS

“… to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” [Acts 26:18].

What activities can you develop to tell people around the company about who God is?

5. DOING BUSINESS IN INTEGRITY – THAT ALL YOUR BUSINESS TRANSACTIONS TRULY REFLECT YOUR FAITH.

“Do all things without questioning that you may be blameless and innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world holding fast the word of life”[Philippians 2:14].

The Biblical term ‘discipleship’ means to be a learner. Everyone in and around a business can start learning about what God has to say about making decisions according to biblical principles and how God can lead them with His wisdom. How are you communicating biblical principles in your management? Do you have a Code of Ethics based on biblical principles to help you?

6. GLORIFYING GOD BY INVESTING PART OF THE PROCEEDS FROM THE BUSINESS IN KINGDOM BUSINESS.

“Honour the Lord with your wealth and with the best part of everything your land produces. Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with the finest wine.” [Proverbs 3:9,10]

How can you use the profits and infrastructure of the business for the Kingdom of God? How can you do this if you make more money in your career than you need for daily living?
A SELF ASSESSMENT

As a leader you should recognise that what the people in the company need most is your personal holiness. This means being set apart for everything that God wants to accomplish through your business or career. As Owner, God is not an absent, disinterested shareholder! He is an active co-worker, fully involved in every aspect of your business or career. All of His activity is directed through you!

Can you identify and see the activity of God in and through you and your life in business?

CONCLUSIONS

Here are six major decisions that can start a movement of God in your career and business.

1. Dedicate your business or career to the Lord
2. Understand that your job is your ministry
3. Incorporate intercession into your company
4. Learn to hear the voice of the Lord in the marketplace
5. Embrace God’s vision for your company or career
6. Transform your environment

DISCUSSION

• Discuss lessons learned from Graham Power. How did Graham explain these lessons learned?

1. The company belonging to God
2. The company as your mission field
3. Prayer in business
4. Source of assets
5. Directing resources to meeting needs, material, spiritual, social

• Discuss in what way the decisions of Graham Power affect each of the six result areas.

1. Profit
2. Provision
3. Product
4. Illumination
5. Integrity
6. Investment
INTRODUCTION TO BUSINESS EXCELLENCE

In this study we visit Mark Mitchell’s car dealerships which are based in north Cheshire. As you will see, Mark operates dealerships for Lexus, Skoda and Mazda and has built up a business that has gained many business awards that recognise the excellence of the service offered by the Mitchell Group.

In some respects, Mark’s story is a familiar one – an early grounding in business at home from selling hamsters accompanied by a playground marketplace teeming with potential customers. With production overheads covered by his parents in the form of electricity, Mark embarked on a hobby that was to give him the drive and motivation to develop his entrepreneurial genes. The result today is a trio of dealerships which the three car manufacturers point to as being leaders in their field.

In one year, just after the technical ending of the 2008-2009 recession when many businesses were struggling, Mark’s dealerships managed to gain 2,000 new customers. Mark also tells us that he acquires ideas and inspiration from an in-depth study of the strategies companies who achieve a listing in the Sunday Times “100 best companies to work for” ranking employers. So, what can we learn from him and his business practices?

BACKGROUND TO THE MITCHELL GROUP

With £100 share capital and a £10,000 overdraft, the company opened for business in February 1990 at a new Elf Oil service station in Warrington. Mark and founder employee Neil Crowden developed three further locations over the subsequent three years and purchased the company’s first freehold service station in 1993.

A keen interest in four-wheel drive vehicles led to the clear focus on specialist vehicles in the mid-1990s. Personal recommendation and close attention to detail fuelled the significant growth of the business, resulting in national recognition and appointment as a Mitsubishi dealer in 1997.

Years later a desire to acquire a premium brand prompted timely discussions with Lexus GB that resulted in the company being appointed a dealer for Chester and the North Wales market. In February 2001, the company opened one of the UK’s largest car retail facility on four and a half acres at Cheshire Oaks.

Skoda joined the company’s portfolio of dealerships in September 2001 and was followed by Mazda joining the Mitchell Group. The company now employs over 100 staff and enjoys a multi-million-pound turnover.
IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE

Mark is totally committed to improving customer service. This involves ensuring that the customer experience from beginning to end is an exceptional one. As you drive towards the Mitchell Group dealerships you will find all 300 or so cars gleaming and parked in perfectly formed lines. From initial enquiry via delivery to their after sales commitment, the customer experience is exemplary from beginning to end.

You may recall Mark uses the concept of kaizen. Kaizen is Japanese for ‘improvement’, or ‘change for the better’. The application of kaizen in the marketplace leads business managers to continually improve all functions with the involvement of all employees. By improving standardised activities and processes, kaizen aims to eliminate waste and inefficiency. One devotee of kaizen is Horst Schulze, the founder of the Ritz Carlton global hotel chain. During the years when Horst was establishing the hotel chain he was totally committed to building the business so that there would be zero process defects. The result? A hotel chain that is regarded as the best chain in the world.

In most cases the ideas emanating from the application of kaizen do not represent major changes – they are generally ideas for incremental improvement; evolution as opposed to revolution. While a western philosophy is ‘if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it’ the kaizen philosophy is to ‘do it better, make it better, improve it even if it isn’t broken, because if we don’t, we can’t compete with those who do.’

Who can help you improve? Ask those involved with the business. Start with customers; hotels do this all the time with their bedroom questionnaires. What is the most personal approach – can you seek feedback personally? Remember to thank customers for their willingness to help you and take due note of their feedback. Ask yourself the tough questions – what isn’t working? How can we improve? Ask your staff – where can we improve? Observe others. What do other businesses do better or differently?

How can you improve customer retention? How else can you serve customers? Do your customers recommend you more than the industry average? What else can you give customers that costs you little but gives them added value?

Could you write to your customers and thank them for their business? If your letter is a standard one, remember Mark’s approach is to personalise the letter with a personal PS.

Look at your systems and processes in other areas of your business – what is broken or doesn’t work as well as you would like? What goes on in your business that results in inefficiency or in costs that sap profitability.

Technology. Would a hardware or software upgrade bring value to staff and customers – and how? How can technology improve efficiency? Do staff need additional IT training?

People are often one of the most important assets of the business. Employees appreciate being valued and consulted with as well as being well remunerated. Mark talked about the activities that are organised by the Mitchell Group; did his example give you any ideas for social activities?

Mark makes himself personally available to his staff so that they can approach him with any issues they may have. How accessible are you? Do you have an open door policy?

How can your staff improve? Do you have regular appraisals? Do employees know what is expected of them? Do they know how they are going to develop and progress within the organisation?

Do you ever take your staff offsite for a team meeting? Going offsite and setting time aside from the normal daily routine provides an opportunity for staff to engage with improving the business. But remember when problem solving, it is always important to focus on fixing processes rather than people. Invariably it is usually the lack of systems or their failure rather than the people. All too often managers focus on ‘dealing with so and so’ - an approach which often results in people feeling put out or put on. Ask questions such as: “How can we improve? What could we do differently?”

Mark has built his three dealerships, so they are recognised as being industry leaders – all three car manufacturers regard the Mitchell Group as a centre of excellence. Customers attest to their satisfaction by returning time and time again. Staff value being a Mitchell Group employee – as Mark tells it, “we are an employer of choice”. How has this happened? There is no simple answer, but any answer must surely include the owner’s commitment to continuous improvement. It also includes Mark’s drive to be the best. Yes, Mark is driven but he is also highly regarded by everyone in the company as he moves from one employee to another and from one situation to another. But at the end of the day, as he returns home he is first and foremost dad and husband. The business has its boundaries and he keeps to those boundaries.
YOU AND THE BUSINESS

What does your work-life balance look like? Notwithstanding the reality that many business owners and professionals have always worked long hour, the demand for income today and savings for tomorrow serves to increase household financial pressures. The work-life balance is eroded with a greater devotion to work and less to home and family. Work is so capable of absorbing hours and with it the balance that is so necessary to maintain and build relationships and for the business owner or manager to set personal time aside. Care needs to be taken and discipline exercised if work is not to become all too consuming. Maybe you think it’s already too late? Then maybe it is time for your work to pay you back time, not just money.

Also think about your body and mind. Excess of anything leads to consequences. Stress. Weight increase/decrease. Character changes. A lack of time set aside for exercise. Relationships deteriorate. Marriages fail – spouses may no longer understand each other as once they used to. Present at home but absent in mind? It is all too easy for the mind to be consumed with work. It is so easy for the mind to default to thinking about business when you are not working.

Does any of this sound familiar? What changes do you need to make? How many times have you tried before but failed? You may want to ‘look into your House of Support’ in the booklet from last year. Chapter 4, my life house, from the booklet ‘Discover your calling and destiny as a leader’.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Mark Mitchell highlights the accountability partners he has in his life and the value he places on their friendship and counsel. If work-life balance is an area you feel needs to be addressed and you don’t believe you can make it on your own, ask yourself to whom are you accountable.

Being in business can be a lonely journey: concern about losing customers, margins under pressure, cashflow going in the wrong direction; bad debts; bank pressure; technology problems; staff or contractor problems; staff with problems and so on. Similarly if you are a young professional: the challenges and stress factors in your daily job can become a burden.

There are too many challenges and problems for you to bear the burdens of business alone. You might be helping and encouraging others, listening to their problems and giving your wisdom and understanding, but what about you? Who is there that you can turn to? Not everyone has the staff around them that Mark Mitchell does. However, even though he has over 100 staff, the business has no HR manager. Mark makes himself available to his staff, to listen to their problems and to let the staff know he cares. So, who listens to you? Who do you know that can give support and wise counsel?

Being in business can be an isolating experience. You network with so many people, but you might still feel lonely. It is an often quoted saying that life is too short to make all the mistakes. Find others who can help you, give you counsel or just be a sounding board.

Where to start? At home! Your spouse is or should be someone who you should turn to. Someone who can at least listen to you. And if you have no spouse, your closest friend may take this place.

Work has the ability to drive a wedge between couples – it also has the ability to draw them together. It provides your home a financial support system and should be used as a platform for deepening the marital bonds, not loosening them. “But...” - please no buts! Home and family are important – yes, you go to work to find fulfillment, but you also go to earn money to maintain the household and bring security. Security of your spouse and children – not just financially but also emotionally - is an awesome responsibility.


“Accountability breeds response-ability” is a famous quote by Stephen R. Covey. Consider starting a CBMC business and life support group.

WHAT ARE YOU MONITORING?

It is important to identify what you are managing in the business. Mark Mitchell’s business is not a small one, yet he manages to monitor the key numbers that really make a difference to his business.

When Mark visits his dealerships, typically, his first three visits are often to the service reception desks where he enquires how many service hours remained unsold that day. The staff know that this is part of Mark’s daily routine and know that this is an area he is expecting them to monitor and manage.

During his three quarterly staff dealerships meetings the assembled team
listens avidly to the reports on a wide range of numbers including new cars sold, used cars sold, service hours sold, individual mechanic performances, sales of parts, sales of tyres and so on. The business thrives on setting targets and celebrating performance.

You can manage any business by managing five or fewer numbers – the key is to determine which numbers to manage, who has responsibility for each number and what action is planned to move the numbers in the required direction. It is important not to only focus on any numbers that appear in the balance sheet or profit and loss account. Often the best numbers to manage are those that drive the key numbers in those two financial statements.

Mark personally focuses on managing daily the bank balance, debtors and stock levels, but he also monitors and keeps in close contact with the staff and ensures they are all managing their numbers.

Why is this important? Financial statements are limited as they only summarize the results for a specific period. It is the daily, weekly and monthly management of the business Key Performance Indicators (KPI) numbers that lead to a profitable enterprise.

Think about what is still missing. Could you develop a KPI plan and monitor something that is missing from your business? For example, a hotel with 10 rooms could potentially sell 3,600 room nights in a year. If they focus on managing the gap between room nights sold and the 3,600, they could develop a range of strategies to sell the unsold nights that if not sold are lost forever. Similarly, if a restaurant has 15 tables they might be expected to turn over one and a half times in an evening. Thus, the restaurant has the potential for serving 22 covers a night and if the restaurant is open six days a week for 52 weeks the potential number of covers is then 6,864. As with the hotel owner, the restaurant owner can then focus on what to do to reduce the number of unsold covers. Having decided which numbers you are going to manage make sure that your targets and actual numbers are clearly visible. Keep them posted and updated on a big chart on the wall. This reminds you about what is important. It also reminds everyone in your team what you are monitoring and managing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did you find most interesting in watching the story of Mark and the Mitchell Group?
2. How could the staff management in your company be improved?
3. What are the KPIs in your company and how often are they being monitored?
4. How many hours do you work each week?
5. What would you like to stop doing?
6. What could you do to improve customer service?
7. Do you have an accountability partner? Would you join an accountability group or network?
8. What do you think about Mark’s application of his faith in the business?
9. How do you view Mark’s decision to not open for business on Sundays?
10. How do you feel about applying a portion of profit to good causes?
11. What does success look like?
12. How do you celebrate success?
13. What does “business excellence” convey to you in the context of your work?
14. How do you keep in contact with customers?
15. Do you know what your competitors are doing?
For years, people have been talking about the need for companies to strive for a triple bottom line, sometimes called the “three pillars of sustainability” or “components of sustainable development,” as mentioned in a UN resolution of 2005. I read in the Economist, “…companies should be preparing three different (and quite separate) bottom lines. One is the traditional measure of corporate profit—the “bottom line” of the profit and loss account. The second is the bottom line of a company’s “people account”—a measure in some shape or form of how socially responsible an organization has been throughout its operations. The third is the bottom line of the company’s “planet” account—a measure of how environmentally responsible it has been.”

We have suggested here that the purpose of work and, by extension, the organizations in which we do that work, is to bring glory to God by producing more flourishing in his creation.

From the very beginning (Gen 1:28), we were told that our job description was to fill the earth with God’s images and subdue it. Theologian Wayne Grudem writes that the Hebrew word translated subdue in Gen. 1:28 means “to make the earth useful for human beings’ benefit and enjoyment.”

For humans to truly flourish, they need their physical, social, and spiritual needs met. However, in man’s fall from grace, our ability to meet these three needs was severely handicapped.
- Our relationship with the Creator God was broken, affecting our spiritual well-being.
- Our relationship with one another was broken, making it difficult to embrace the social interdependence we were designed to enjoy.
- And finally, providing for our physical needs became more difficult because of our broken relationship with the creation (Gen. 3:17-19).

It is only through the redemptive work of Christ on our behalf that these relationships are repaired and we are once again equipped to fulfil our original calling.

Therefore, as believers, we should see the triple bottom line differently—through the lens of biblical redemption. We would suggest that as believers, we are called to work for a somewhat different triple bottom line: one that produces economic (physical), social, and spiritual returns. This is true for each of us individually and it should be true of the organizations that God has given some of us the privilege of building, growing, and operating.

As Christians, we need to be about providing examples in our economy that go beyond the financial bottom line—yes. But we also need to be about glorifying God and serving the common good; a new and improved “triple bottom line.”
THREE BOTTOM LINES

As we learned earlier, there are three bottom lines in business: economic, social, and spiritual.

ECONOMIC BOTTOM LINE

In the ‘parable of the talents’, Jesus commended the two men who made profits from their trading. “The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’” (Matthew 25:20,21)

If a business cannot produce a profit, it will not be able to grow, hire employees, or pay vendors, and ultimately it will fail. Every follower of Christ in business should work to generate profits, but never by compromising God’s way of operating a business. For example, never improve the financial bottom line by marketing dishonestly or taking unfair advantage of employees.

There are many reasons why businesses are unprofitable - fierce competition, lack of skilled employees, onerous government regulations, insufficient capital, ineffective administration, changes in the business climate; the list goes on and on.

Other businesses never reach their potential because they are saddled with too much debt, or they try to grow faster than they can develop competent leadership. Some companies suffer because an owner’s compensation and lifestyle are more than the business can afford.

A commitment to operating a profitable business begins by carefully building a solid financial foundation. “Steady plodding brings prosperity.” (Proverbs 21:5, TLB)

SOCIAL BOTTOM LINE

The social bottom line occurs when the business leverages its financial resources and influence to meet social needs. Assess the needs of your community or the world. Is there a creative way your company can help solve problems and be a blessing to others?

First Southern Bancorp’s home office is located in Stanford, Kentucky, a small rural community. As in many cities, the downtown area was declining rapidly because it was losing business to large retailers on the outskirts of town. The leadership of the bank became committed to revitalizing Stanford. They started by buying a vacant building next to their bank and completely restoring it. They became the catalyst for a stunning transformation of their town that took place over the next three decades. New retail businesses, a world-class restaurant, and a growing number of renovated buildings anchor the quaint downtown.

Tourists are discovering Stanford, and the area is thriving. Ask the Lord to reveal to you how your business can develop a healthy social bottom line.

SPIRITUAL BOTTOM LINE

The spiritual bottom line takes place when a portion of the business’s profits are given to help fund the work of God, and people use their business platform to influence others for Christ.

Generosity should characterize Christians in business. Often, the Lord has entrusted them with the spiritual gift of giving. When business men and women understand that they are strategic in funding the work of Christ, their work takes on eternal significance. The Lord also has given you an opportunity to influence your employees or co-workers, vendors, customers, and competitors living for Christ in your company. Someone recently described businesspeople as the “new clergy” because fewer and fewer people are attending church.

Think of your business as a platform for serving and caring for others through your words and actions. As you genuinely love others in the workplace, you will have opportunities to introduce them to the Saviour and help them grow in their faith.

YOUR BUSINESS AS YOUR PULPIT

In his book God Owns My Business, Stanley Tam writes, “Although I believe in the application of good principles in business, I place far more confidence in the conviction that I have a call from God. I am convinced that His purpose for me is in the business world. My business is my pulpit.”

God strategically places His children everywhere. Many believe that only the missionary or pastor is truly spiritual, but this is not true. Your work is your ministry. The businessperson or young professional is in a position to influence people for Christ who would rarely consider attending a church.

Robert Gilmour “R.G.” LeTourneau was 14 years old when he dropped out of the sixth grade. A decade later, he and his wife were broke and heavily in debt from a failed automobile dealership. His sister, a missionary, challenged him to make a real difference for Christ. LeTourneau was confused and felt guilty because he thought that he would have to become a missionary and give up what he wanted to do – move dirt. Finally, he yielded his will to the Lord and prayed, “Lord, if you’ll help me, I’ll do anything you want me to do.” LeTourneau knew his prayer was answered because he was overcome with joy. The next day, he met with his pastor to seek direction. After praying together for some time, the pastor finally said, “R.G., the Lord needs preachers and missionaries, but God needs businessmen too.” LeTourneau was stunned. If God needed businessmen, he could easily find a better one than a dirt mover buried under a mountain of debt.
Finally, he reasoned, “Well, if that’s what God wants me to be, I’ll be His businessman.” From that day on, he was in business with God. LeTourneau began to tinker with earth-moving machinery and proved to be extraordinarily innovative. He started manufacturing heavy construction machinery, and the company became enormously successful. In 1935, at the suggestion of his wife, they decided to give 90 percent of the company’s profits to the Lord. LeTourneau explained this decision: “It’s not how much of my money I give to God, but how much of God’s money I keep for myself.” During World War II, his company built 70 percent of all earth-moving equipment used by the Allies. He registered more than 300 patents, and there is not a piece of heavy construction equipment manufactured today that did not find its origin on R.G. LeTourneau’s drawing table.

CASE STUDY – PETE OCHS

Pete Ochs, the founder of Capital III, is an entrepreneur with manufacturing, real estate, energy, and education companies in the US and Latin America. Pete named the company Capital III because of his conviction that businesses should have a triple bottom line: economic, social, and spiritual. The economic bottom line is created by operating a profitable enterprise. The social bottom line occurs when the business leverages its financial resources to creatively meet social needs. And the spiritual bottom line materializes when the company intentionally uses its platform to influence its employees, vendors, and customers for Christ.

Pete realized that the glue to ensure the businesses would remain focused on accomplishing the triple bottom line were Capital III’s Vision, Mission, and Values:

Our Vision is to help change the world through entrepreneurship. Our Mission is to be an absolutely trusted business. Our Values are to honour God by serving people, pursuing excellence, and stewarding resources.

In 2009, Capital III bought a bankrupt manufacturing business located in a small rural community. Their biggest dilemma was how to hire enough workers in a town with a very small labour force. To compound the problem, they needed employees that would work a completely flexible schedule - from 20 to 40 hours a week - depending entirely on the volume of business.

Pete and his leadership team prayed and sought the Lord’s direction. They were led to try something completely out of the box. They approached the local state-operated correctional facility about utilizing the prison population as the labour force. Inmates were earning only about 70 cents an hour, and Capital III could pay them a starting salary of about $10 an hour. Approximately thirty percent of their wage would be used to reimburse the state for their room and board. The rest they could spend, save, or send to help support their families.

This creative solution has accomplished all three bottom lines:

Economic: Because the labour force is flexible, the company is able to control and reduce its labour costs, meet the just-in-time demands of its customers, and reduce inventories, all of which contribute to the profitability of the business. The company also doesn’t need to compensate the work force with paid vacation time! Inmates can earn up to $100 per day, compared to $7 while working for the state.

Social: The state and taxpayers benefit because a portion of what the prisoners earn defrays the cost of room and board. Prisoners are motivated to behave well while in prison, because anyone involved with a disciplinary problem is not eligible to work for Capital III. The prisoners also learn marketable skills that will help them earn a living once they are released from prison. Interestingly, the inmates have chosen to send a majority of what they receive in salary to help support their families.

Spiritual: Capital III is committed to treating the work force with respect and to help them in practical ways. They are helping to build a spiritual life centre at the prison, in which life skill classes and Bible studies are conducted. Capital III also has been instrumental in starting a seminary inside the prison. The business also provides periodic meals and get-togethers for the workers and their families. Every two weeks, Capital III provides motivational and inspirational programmes for its workers. In short, the workers have been valued and loved. This has influenced many to consider Christ as their Saviour.

Pete Ochs has a big vision. He is praying for the Lord to replicate this model of valuing people and creating economic, social, and spiritual capital in businesses across America and around the world.

Peter & Cathy Ochs are generous people and run a generous business. Peter says that generosity can be best described using an acronym L-I-F-E. Using Labour – Influence – Finances – Experience to benefit others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is the triple bottom line demonstrated in the Capital III?

2. Discuss the four areas of generosity. L-I-F-E. How can these be applied in your business?
CASE STUDY: GARY & CATH GRANT

Watch the video: 9’50

Gary Grant calls himself “The Entertainer.” He is managing director and founder of this chain of stores across the UK. The chain of stores is called “The Entertainer”. And is UK’s largest independent toy retailer; operating 149 stores with revenues of over GBP 140 million, employing between 1500 and 2000 people, depending on the season. Gary Grant left school with one O-level, in maths, and opened his first toy shop at the age of 23. He had been sacked from his job in a bike shop and with his wife, Cath, managed to borrow enough money to buy a failing toy shop in Amersham. Gary found Christ in 1991. He had been invited to a men’s breakfast at his local church on a Saturday. Nothing specific happened, but “it all fell into place”. By the end of that weekend, his life was “turned completely upside down”. He describes himself as a “charismatic evangelical” and admits his business is run on Biblical principles. “You cannot be a Christian on Sundays without this filtering through to the week ahead.

He also decided not to stock some toys, including Harry Potter and Halloween merchandise. “I have to feel comfortable with what we sell” Gary says. On The Entertainer’s website, the ‘Playground Rules’ set out the company vision and values: “We want all our products to inspire and delight children. If we wouldn’t be happy for our own children to play with a product, then you won’t find it on our shelves.” A verse in the Bible says, ‘avoid every appearance of evil’. Gary says, “I know I can trust God with the money. I have to do what I feel comfortable doing because I am accountable for my life. My Christian faith is not a rule book forced upon me. It’s all about choices,” he says.

“Faith is a living, daily thing. Considering ‘What does God want me to do?’ is as important Monday to Friday as on a Sunday.”

Looking back to when he became a Christian at 33, Gary says, ‘Why didn’t somebody tell me about Jesus earlier?’

CLOSED ON SUNDAYS
Gary will not allow his stores to open on Sundays because of his faith. He said: “We don’t trade on Sundays, any Sundays of the year, and as Christmas Eve 2017 falls on a Sunday, we will be closed for what will be the second largest trading day of the year. As a Christian, I believe in families. And just being around for our children and our grandchildren, being able to have one day that we can meet together, we can eat together and stay together as a family, I think is very important. I know that if I do what I do with the right motive with the right intention, that I can rely on the fact that God will honour that.

In 1995, when Sunday trading became legal, God challenged me: ‘Are you going to give up Sunday trading?’ Keeping the Sabbath holy is one of the 10 commandments, so I felt that I shouldn’t be opening the doors on a Sunday. For many of our 1,700 staff, they say that the fact that they can have a day off with the family on a Sunday is really important to them, regardless of what they believe.” Mr Grant estimated his stores could take around 1.5 percent of their annual turnover if they opened on Christmas Eve.

Mr Grant said: “People have said: ‘What, even with Christmas Eve being a Sunday, you’re closed?’ And I say, ‘well, what’s the difference? The principle is a day of rest. A good number of the staff, from now until Christmas, may well be working six days a week, and long days. They have given their all, and they need a break. And on a seven day cycle, that’s what Sundays are.”

“This business will never open on a Sunday whilst I’m a shareholder... If this business ever needs for its survival to trade on a Sunday, it’s up for sale,” said Gary Grant, the founder.

PRAYER IN BUSINESS
Most businessmen pray for their rivals to come a cropper – not hold a prayer meeting when they do. But when a major retailer, Woolworths, went bust in 2009 there was little celebration at the headquarters of toy retailer The Entertainer, which stood to cash in on its demise. Instead, owner Gary Grant called in the local vicar.

“Last year I prayed more about my business than I have ever done and in October, for the first time, I felt God say to me ‘you need to call the staff together,’” he says. “I said ‘God, you’re mad, I’m not doing that’ – because you can have a personal conversation with God – I got to work on Monday morning and I heard God ask me again, ‘are you going to call the staff together?’” He emailed workers inviting them to a “time of reflection.” “Ye of little faith,” he joked. “I thought six or so would come along and sit with me and pray for Woolworths and the 28,000 people potentially losing their jobs. I got six chairs out and went to get more and when I came back there were 30 people in the room. It was very moving.”

In February 2018, the giant toy retailer, and Gary Grant’s main competitor Toys R Us went into administration in the UK. Gary says the real loss in Toys R Us going into administration is the personal one for the workers.

He said: “I am praying that those people are able to find new employment, I hope that they finish well with their current employment. What we don’t need is getting into debt in between jobs... so I really pray that these people can transition from this current role into a new role.”

GIVING IN BUSINESS
As well as giving away 10% of profits, The Entertainer staff are encouraged to join a payroll giving scheme to give to a charity of their choice.
The Entertainer has the highest employee uptake of Payroll Giving on the high street with 50% of his employees giving. He says: "We encourage our staff to be generous and offer a Payroll Giving scheme to make it really easy. Staff just select a charity of their choice, tell us how much every month and it’s all done for them. It’s a really easy tax-efficient way of giving. I would encourage employers to lead from the front, to promote it, and you’ll be staggered just how many staff will thank you for making Payroll Giving such an easy thing to do."

Also, the company’s Pennies scheme means customers can round up their purchase price to give to charity. In 2016, The Entertainer staff and customers donated £1.6 million to children’s charities. Customers are prompted by the card machine, website or app checkout to donate a few pennies. It’s a yes or no choice, and neither Pennies nor the chosen charity receive any personal data. It is a good example of how technology is making giving easier.

“Working with Pennies has been a dream,” says Gary, “this has exponentially increased the amount of money we are capable of collecting... to give to charities.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What were the major factors which contributed to Gary finding Christ?

2. What changed in their lives after Gary & Cath became Christians?

3. Discuss generosity in business.

4. What was Gary & Cathy’s dream?

5. What kind of legacy would you dream of leaving?
Debt is discouraged throughout the Bible. Read the first portion of Romans 13:8 from several Bible translations: “Owe no man anything” (KJV). “Let no debt remain outstanding” (NIV). “Pay all your debts” (TLB). “Owe nothing to anyone” (NASB). “Keep out of debt and owe no man anything” (AMP).

In Proverbs 22:7, we learn why the Lord discourages debt: “The borrower is servant to the lender” (TLB). When we are in debt, we are servants—some Bible translations use the word slaves—to our lenders. The more business or personal debt we have, the more of a slave we become. We lose the freedom to decide where to spend some of the cash because it’s already obligated to lenders.

In the Old Testament, debt was considered a curse and being free of debt was one of the promised rewards for obedience. I believe this reflects the heart of God concerning debt.

“If you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God. You will lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow” (Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 12).

On the other hand, debt was one of the curses inflicted for disobedience. “If you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you. The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him” (Deuteronomy 28:15, 43-44).

Many people think borrowing is inevitable and haven’t developed a strategy for their businesses and lives to become debt-free. And as we all have seen, the more debt businesses are encumbered with, the more vulnerable they are to an economic downturn.

BORROWING

The Bible is silent about when we can borrow money for a business. Here is the rule of thumb I recommend:

Borrow as little as possible and pay it off as quickly as possible!

Generally, there are three stages of business borrowing.

STAGE 1: THE OWNER OF THE BUSINESS MUST GUARANTEE THE BUSINESS DEBT
When you are launching a business or if it is not financially strong, lenders generally require you to personally guarantee its debt. When you personally
endorse a debt, you pledge all of your assets as collateral. Many people personally guarantee business debts and don’t realize that as long as the debt exists, everything they own is at risk. Proverbs 22:26-27 paints this word picture: “Do not be one who shakes hands in pledge or puts up security for debts; if you lack the means to pay, your very bed will be snatched from under you.”

**STAGE 2: THE BUSINESS IS STRONG ENOUGH TO BORROW WITHOUT THE OWNER’S GUARANTEE**

We want to challenge you to work toward eliminating the need to personally guarantee business debts. When communicating with a lender, make certain the lender understands that the only security for the debt is the business and anything else you are pledging as collateral. You have the option of paying the debt in one of two ways: (1) in cash or (2) with the business and the assets you have pledged as collateral. The lender has a decision to make. Do I feel good enough about the business and collateral to loan the money? This eliminates the need to risk all of your other assets. You are no longer slave to the lender.

**STAGE 3: THE BUSINESS IS STRONG ENOUGH TO BORROW WITHOUT GUARANTEING THE LOAN**

An example of this type of loan would be a well-established investment company that buys an apartment complex and invests enough cash in it that a lender feels comfortable with the complex being the only security. This is the ideal way to borrow. You pledge the money you invested and the asset itself without risking the business or your other financial assets.

**AVOID LONGTERM DEBT**

“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a remission of debts” (Deuteronomy 15:1). In an era of 30-year mortgages, avoiding long-term debt sounds almost impossible. Long-term debt, however, is a relatively new idea. Our grandfathers, even many of our fathers, would have considered loans that extended for three or four decades to be unthinkable. Develop a plan to become debt free within a relatively short period of time.

1. **BORROWING CAN HAMPER CREATIVITY**

David Kemp and Bill Geary started an office supply business from scratch. They felt the Lord leading them to grow the new business without borrowing. This forced them to be creative. Instead of going into the retail market, they decided to serve the business community, choosing only those customers who committed to pay within 15 days of purchase. They used technology to streamline customer ordering and reduce their staffing requirements. They carried only a small inventory of frequently ordered items and their wholesale supplier made daily deliveries of other items their customers ordered. Dozens of such creative decisions allowed Dewey and Bill to build a thriving business without credit. Evaluate your business. What creative changes could you make to operate without debt?

2. **BORROWING CAN DELAY NECESSARY DECISIONS**

Often a business that is in financial trouble because of poor management or other problems will sustain itself by borrowing instead of resolving the real problems. God’s Word says, “The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, but the naive go on, and are punished for it” (Proverbs 22:3). The use of borrowed money can provide a false sense of security that allows a correctable situation to grow into an out-of-control problem. Although Eastern Airlines was regularly losing money in the late ’70s, the appreciating value of equipment and other assets enabled the management to borrow more and more money to sustain operations. If credit had not been available, the company would have been forced to face reality and reduce overhead or close its doors. Instead, the borrowing continued into the next decade until a speculator bought the company, cut it into pieces, and sold off the pieces. Thousands of employees lost their jobs and disrupted their families’ lives. When borrowing delays the pain of necessary budget decisions, it usually results in a much greater pain.

There are many factors that determine the appropriate limitation of debt for your business. Here are several general considerations.

1. **Your personal tolerance to debt should be balanced with responsibilities to others**

Individuals vary greatly in their level of comfort with business debt and the question of how much is too much. But as a steward who is responsible for God’s business, it’s not only about your personal risk tolerance. If you are responsible for a family or for employees, you have to balance your risk tolerance with your responsibilities as God’s steward.

2. **What is at risk?**

How is your debt collateralized? If you are unable to repay the debt, what are you going to lose? Will it be the new piece of equipment? Or, will it be everything?

The decision to borrow is often based on the presumption that our business will be profitable or our job will continue in the future. James 4:13-14 cautions us against presumption: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow...”
HOW TO GET OUT OF DEBT

Here are four steps for getting out of debt. The goal is D-Day - Debtless Day - when your business or you personally become completely free of debt. When mountain climbers scale a steep face of rock, they often use a technique called “tying the knots.” They will climb about ten feet, hammer a spike securely in the rock, and tie their supporting rope to the spike. They do this as a safety precaution. If they slip and fall, they will fall no farther than ten feet and are usually unharmed. However, if the climbers don’t tie the knots, a slip can mean serious injury or even death.

The concept of tying the knots is applicable to business and personal debt. When you pay off the debt on an asset, tie the knot! Try not to encumber the free and clear asset in case a financial slip occurs.

1. PRAY

In 2 Kings 4:1-7, a widow was threatened with losing her children to her creditor, and she appealed to the prophet Elisha for help. He told her to borrow lots of empty jars from her neighbours. Then the Lord supernaturally multiplied her only possession, a very small amount of oil, and all the jars were filled. She sold the oil and paid her debts to free her children.

The same God who provided supernaturally for the widow is interested in you becoming free from debt. The first and most important step is to pray. Seek the Lord’s help and guidance in your journey toward Debt Free Day! He can act immediately, as in the case of the widow, or slowly over time. In either case, prayer is essential.

As businesses begin to accelerate debt repayment, the Lord is blessing their faithfulness. Even if you can afford only a small monthly prepayment of your debt, do it. The Lord can multiply your efforts.

2. ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

Ask these two questions about every spending category in your business or personal life: Do we need this? If so, can we do it less expensively? The more profitable the business, the quicker you can pay off the debt. Or, in your personal life, the more money is available, the quicker you can pay off the debt.

Then examine every asset in your company or personal belongings to determine if there is anything you could sell to pay down debt more quickly.

3. SNOWBALL YOUR DEBT

Snowball your way out of debt, and here’s how. In addition to making the minimum payments on all your debts, focus on paying off the smallest debt first. The reason I recommend paying off the debt with the lowest balance first is simple; getting out of debt can be challenging, and we all need to be encouraged by seeing the balance go down and finally disappear.

After the first debt is paid off, apply its payment toward the next smallest one. After the second debt is paid off, apply what you were paying on the first and second toward the third smallest. That’s the snowball in action.

This can be exciting as you see the balance really start to drop. So... where do you start? List your debts in order with the smallest remaining balance first. If you are disciplined and already making progress on paying off debt, you may choose to focus on paying off the higher-interest-rate debts first, even if the balances are larger.

One important step toward your company or personal life becoming debt free is to stop borrowing more money as soon as practical. If your business depends on credit, ask the Lord for His creativity, direction, and wisdom to eliminate the necessity of continued borrowing.

4. DO NOT GIVE UP!

On October 29, 1941, Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England, gave a school commencement address. World War II was devastating Europe, and England’s very fate as a nation was in doubt. Churchill stood and said, “Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense.”

So, I want to encourage you to never give up in your effort to get out of debt. It may require hard work and sacrifice, but the freedom is worth the struggle. Remember, it’s on God’s heart for you and your business to become debt free.

BANKRUPTCY

In bankruptcy, a court of law declares a person or business unable to pay its debts. Depending on the type of bankruptcy, the court may allow the debtor to develop a plan to repay the creditors or the court will distribute the debtor’s property among the creditors as payment for the debts.

Should a godly person declare bankruptcy? The answer is generally no. Psalm 37:21 tells us, “The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives.” However, in our opinion, bankruptcy is permissible under two circumstances:

- If a creditor forces a person into bankruptcy, or
- If the debtor’s (or his family’s) emotional health is at stake due to an inability to cope with the extreme financial pressure.
After bankruptcy, seek counsel from an attorney to determine how it is legally permissible to repay the debt. Make every effort to repay the debt. For a large debt, this may be a long-term goal that is largely dependent on the Lord’s supernatural provision of resources.

EXTENDING CREDIT

You don’t have to be a banker to be in the lending business. Unless you are paid in full every time you consummate a sale, you become a lender and have to deal with credit in the form of accounts receivable. Too many businesses are damaged or fail because of lax lending or credit policies.

There is nothing biblically wrong with extending credit to qualified customers. As we have already learned, God promised Old Testament believers that they would be blessed if they obeyed His commandments. One of those blessings had to do with lending. “The Lord will bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow” (Deuteronomy 28:12).

Just because lending is a part of “the blessing” doesn’t mean we can simply forge ahead without considering how to extend credit in a way that is both honouring to God and consistent with biblical principles. You must answer the questions: To whom we extend credit, how much credit, and what do we do about collections and accounts receivable?

Maintaining a healthy level of cash in the business to be able to meet all obligations like payroll, bank overdraft, suppliers etc. is extremely important. I remember the CEO of ICI, one of the largest chemical companies at the end of the last century saying, “turnover is vanity, profit is sanity, but cash is reality!”

Doing business by biblical principles requires that we manage our credit in such a way that we keep bad debts at a minimum. Most companies sue others or turn them over to collection without giving it a second thought. For them, it is simply a part of doing business. We are not to operate like that. We are to conduct business by a higher standard. Remember, our purpose in business is to glorify God and to sincerely care about customers even if we don’t know them personally.

It is imperative that you establish a well-conceived policy for extending credit. Manage your receivables to keep bad debts at a minimum. If you have a customer with an outstanding balance extending beyond 30 or 60 days, communicate, communicate, communicate! They may be using your credit to fund other needs in their company.

Become a student of the customers who owe you money. What are vendors or others in the marketplace saying that might indicate your delinquent payers are in trouble?

If customers are unable or unwilling to pay, talk with them to discuss the matter. Then listen. Although you may be frustrated or even angry, remember that your purposes in business include glorifying God and influencing people for Christ. Many businesses routinely sue those who are delinquent without making an effort to preserve the relationship. However, we are not to conduct business like that; we are to genuinely care for others, even if we ultimately turn the debt over to collections.

Follow these two simple principles:
- Limit your lending to those who are faithful in repaying
- Do not extend credit to those who will be damaged by it

COLLECTING DEBTS

Unless you are paid in full every time you sell your products or services, you are in the lending business. In particular, wholesalers, contractors, distributors and professional service providers usually have to deal with credit in the form of their debtors.

What happens when people don’t pay? You will discover that if you live by God’s principles, your ability to collect a delinquent debt is limited because many common means of collection are unscriptural. It is important, therefore, that you determine how much you can afford to lose before extending credit to others.

Since collecting bad debts can be such an unpleasant part of business, some owners don’t want to know what their employees or collection agencies are doing to handle it. The solution is not that simple, however; owners and CEOs are responsible for everything that goes on in the company. You cannot divorce yourself from what others do on your behalf. Any individual or agency that represents your business makes an impact on your reputation and your witness to the world. It is your responsibility to ensure that your agents [attorneys, collectors, and negotiators] represent not only your financial interests but your values as well.
LITIGATION WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS

Tens of thousands of lawsuits are filed each day in the United States. Unfortunately, many of these suits pit Christian against Christian. Many factors contribute to this flood of lawsuits, including an avalanche of new laws and, most disturbingly, people becoming less and less forgiving. The court system uses an adversarial judicial process that frequently creates animosities and fractures relationships between parties. Instead of trying to heal the wounds, the system provides a legal solution but leaves the problems of unforgiveness and anger untouched.

ANALYZE YOUR MOTIVES

If you sincerely believe that everything you have belongs to God and that you are just a manager for Him, then you must make every decision with that in mind. If the motive behind your system of collections is greed, anger, or resentment, then it is your money you’re collecting, not God’s. You have a right to the money that is owed to you, but if you are willing to violate the principles God has established for recovering that money, your loss is much more than a financial one.

THE PROCESS

The Bible stresses that the goal should be reconciliation. “If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother” (Matthew 5:23-24).

Scripture states that when Christians are at odds with each other, they should try not to settle their disputes through the courts. “Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbour, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life? If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?” (1 Corinthians 6:1-7).

Instead of initiating a lawsuit, a three-step procedure for Christians to resolve their differences is set forth in Matthew 18:15-17: “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

So with that in mind, how should Christians approach collecting a debt from another Christian? That process could be expressed in modern culture this way.

- Go in private. Contact the debtor yourself (or in the case of a large company, through your representative) to work out a payment plan. There may be extenuating circumstances that limit your debtor’s ability to pay. Offer them a chance to discuss their difficulties.
- Go with one or two others. If that fails, try to get them to meet with a Christian debt counsellor to work out an arrangement.
- Go before the church. If your debtor doesn’t seem to be willing to work with you, see if he or she would be willing to submit to Christian arbitration. If the debtor is unwilling to try to resolve the matter, you have the option of a collection agency or the courts. In the case of a collection agency, we recommend selecting one that practices similar values as your business.

The greatest benefit of following this procedure is not simply reaching a fair settlement of the dispute but practicing forgiveness and demonstrating love.

COLLECTING FROM THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW CHRIST

We recommend that a similar process of collecting past-due bills be used with those who do not know Christ. In a one-on-one contact in which you show respect for the person, attempt to work out a payment plan. If this fails, encourage the person to meet with a debt or business counsellor. If that also fails, you have the option of a collection agency or the courts.

Make every decision in light of your primary function—to glorify God. If you are a business owner, carefully consider the following verse before you make a decision to sue anyone over a personal loss. “Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back” (Luke 6:30).

When you work for a public company, you have the legal fiduciary responsibility to act for the benefit of the stockholders. You may not have as much freedom to forgive debts. However, you can still model the love of Christ by your respectful and reasonable communication with those who are past due.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree with the statement that it should be a person’s goal to become debt free as soon as possible? Why? Why not?

2. Share with one another how you can borrow by minimising risks in your area.

3. Share ways in which you can maintain a healthy cash flow in your business or personal life.
Life is full of choices – how we spend our time, how we manage our resources, and what goals and activities we choose to pursue. The decisions we make reflect our values and priorities and have a ripple effect in other areas of our life. Experience has taught us that today’s decisions have lifetime implications. I believe the longer range your perspective, the better your decision-making, and in life, there are no independent decisions. Using biblical principles, a comprehensive financial planning approach clarifies decision making and focuses on leaving a legacy of financial, social, and spiritual capital. The objective is to ensure that your decisions accurately reflect your values and help you achieve your financial goals.

Combining vision and action, a financial plan includes everything from short-term cash flow planning based on the “five uses of money” to long-term retirement planning, from minimizing debt proactively to understanding the tax consequences of various decisions, from funding retirement or your child’s education to determining how much insurance you might need. By understanding how all the components integrate with each other, we can work toward sound decisions, wise stewardship, and a road map to your desired destination: an enriched life.

THE FINANCIAL PLAN

The purpose of a financial plan is to set you on a path to achieving your financial goals. There are no independent financial decisions and there is a greater ability to make wise choices when we are able to see with a long-term perspective. A well-crafted, integrated plan is a road map showing an efficient way to get to your desired destination.

When making our financial plan, we must always use these five guiding principles which are essential to healthy financial planning. A good friend, Ron Blue, was invited to testify before a Congressional sub-committee during an economic crisis. The question asked was, “Mr. Blue, what advice would you give the American family?” Ron Blue answered, “there are 5 basic principles for financial health.” The senator chairing the meeting said, “these would work at any income level and during any economic situation!” “Yes,” replied Ron, “even for the US government!” Here are the five principles.

FIVE KEY PRINCIPLES

1. SPEND LESS THAN YOU EARN BECAUSE EVERY SUCCESS IN YOUR FINANCIAL LIFE DEPENDS ON THIS HABIT

Ultimately, if we do not live within our means, we will not accomplish our desires and plans in other areas of our financial life. The difference between in-
come and expenditure is margin. Margin is an essential factor and without this, it is impossible to achieve any financial goals and to move into any of the other principles. Without margin we cannot avoid debt, give, or accumulate for the unexpected that will come. And our goals cannot be met. If we do not follow this first principle, we will never have the flexibility or freedom to pursue the goals and objectives that God gives to us. The opposite is also true: Following this first principle will give the flexibility and freedom to pursue the goals and objectives that God gives to us.

Often, when facing a tight budget, people immediately seek to add more income. Perhaps they take a second job. Maybe a spouse goes back to work. Maybe borrow. Ultimately, it may make sense for you to add income in order to accomplish your goals, but I believe that respecting the pay check you have now and living within this financial constraint is the first step toward accomplishing any long-term financial desire or goal.

2. AVOID DEBT BECAUSE DEBT ALWAYS MORTGAGES THE FUTURE
Have you ever pondered the reality that any debt we have puts a burden on our future. Debt always mortgages the future. The Bible states it very simply in Proverbs 22:7: “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender.”

Being in debt puts us in a position of servitude. It mortgages our tomorrow and it means that we have an obligation to serve the lender first—before we save our money or give it or choose to spend it on family memories. Debt payments demand first priority, no matter what. Scripture goes so far as to make debt repayment a moral issue. Psalm 37:21 says, “The wicked man borrows and does not repay, but the righteous one is gracious and giving.”

Both re-paying debts and being “gracious and giving” are upright practices in the eyes of the Lord, but I would speak from experience in saying that being a gracious giver is a lot more fulfilling than being a faithful debt repayer!

3. GIVE GENTLY BECAUSE GIVING BREAKS THE POWER OF MONEY
There is a freedom in giving money away that exists nowhere else in a person’s financial experience. My favourite analogy for this freedom is the image of an open hand. When I hold my hand open, with my financial resources available to God at all times for His purposes, I experience freedom. I know that He can take away from my hand and that He can add to my hand, but something about the process of giving provides freedom to trust Him more fully. Jesus used the analogy of treasure when He taught about giving. He said, “Don’t collect for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But collect for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don’t break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt. 6:19–21)

Jesus had the distinct advantage of knowing first-hand the difference between Earth and eternity. He witnessed the entropy and decay on planet Earth and knew the contrasting glory and longevity of heaven. He urged His followers to lay up heavenly treasures by putting their financial resources into eternal accounts. In the process, He knew that their hearts would then become captivated and motivated by eternal purposes. The “treasure principle” says that our hearts and our money are inextricably linked—our hearts always follow our money.

If our hearts follow our money, then we can break the power that money holds over our hearts by giving it away. Giving sends a powerful message that we believe in God’s goodness, we trust God’s ownership, and we are about God’s agenda. And, when we give, we deeply experience the reality of His goodness, His ownership, and His agenda in our lives.

4. PLAN FOR FINANCIAL MARGIN BECAUSE THE UNEXPECTED WILL OCCUR
The last two wise financial principles are tied very strongly to the first one: “spend less than you earn.” They work together like dominoes. If I spend less than I earn, I will have flexibility and I can decide what to do with the extra. Then, if I decide to use some of the extra to build margin into my finances, I will be able to effectively deal with unexpected expenses. And, even better, I can then begin to save the extra for long-term financial goals, allowing me to pursue God-given desires and priorities in my future.

Jesus said, “You will have suffering in this world” (John 16:33). Suffering, including financial suffering, is part and parcel to being human. Accordingly, we must prepare for the unexpected by having short-term, emergency savings and by having long-term, goal-focused savings. Solomon talked about the ant, reminding us that, “Without leader, administrator, or ruler, it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest” (Prov. 6:7–8). Accordingly, we must prepare for the unexpected by having short-term, emergency savings and by having long-term, goal-focused savings. Solomon talked about the ant, reminding us that, “Without leader, administrator, or ruler, it prepares its provisions in summer; it gathers its food during harvest” (Prov. 6:7–8).

Jesus talked about planning for the future and counting the cost when He said, “For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn’t first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?” (Luke 14:28).

Financial wisdom says that we need to have accessible savings, allowing us to deal with short-term trouble and helping us grow toward long-term goals.

5. SET LONG-TERM GOALS BECAUSE THERE IS ALWAYS A TRADE-OFF BETWEEN THE SHORT TERM AND THE LONG TERM
Finances always involve a trade-off between the short term and the long term. If we don’t have long-term goals, we simply won’t know how to prioritize our spending and saving in the short term. Because money is a tool to accomplish other goals and objectives, setting goals gives us clarity about how to use our “tool”—money—toward our savings, debt repayment, budgeting, or giving. Also, having written goals means that we are far more likely to continue to be financially disciplined and to create good financial habits. Habits take hold be-
cause we have a strong “why” motivating our habits. Goals provide the why—the necessary motivation. In some ways, written goals close the loop with all of the otherwise financial habits. Knowing why we are doing something via a written goal helps us to have a starting point, it helps us to stay the course, and it lets us know when we are done and can look to other, new goals.

Proverbs 29:18 (NASB) says, “Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained.” Writing goals is a way that we clarify the vision that God has given us for our lives. Pursuing them provides us with a pathway and helps us to make more confident decisions today.

And, better still, as followers of Christ, we are privileged to be able to set goals with God’s input and vision. Ephesians 2:10, one of my favourite verses, says, “For we are His creation, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.” God has prepared works for us to do already. When we ask Him to speak into our goals, He can move us into those works and allow us the privilege of completing them.

HOW GOD USES MONEY

I believe God uses money in three ways. God uses money as a tool, a test, and a testimony. As a tool to assess our capacity to use money well. In Matthew 25, God gives large amounts of money to three stewards who are expected to do business with what they have been entrusted with. To those who used the money well, according to the master’s wishes, the master complemented them. The reward of good stewardship was more stewardship! “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.” [Matthew 25:23] The reward was also the “the joy of the master.”

As a test to assess our faithfulness in using the money in the right way. Especially with the little we are entrusted with. Luke 16:10 “One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. The extent to which we will be trusted with what Jesus called “the true riches” is to a large extent determined by how well we use the money entrusted to us. Luke 16:11 “If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?” And the extent to which we will be given more money to manage is also determined by how faithful we are in managing Gods money as a trusted steward. Luke 16:12 “And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?”

As a testimony to those around us as they see God working through our lives as we trust Him in our financial decisions. It is a great testimony to our Lord when we live a life of contentment and thankfulness despite the difficult circumstances, and when we are generous and sharing what we have to alleviate needs of others.

SETTING GOALS

It is, of course, essential to know in which direction we are heading! Knowing where you are going will help to take the best short-term decisions. If you don’t know this, then you will be led in all directions! See this classic Monty Python Clip at the Silly Olympic Games on “The Hundred Meters for people with no sense of direction.” Imagine a sprinter preparing to run a 100-meter race. When the gun fires, all of the runners dash for the finish line except him. He runs hard but without direction, not knowing where the tape is. We can’t imagine an athlete being so foolish. After all, the placement of the finish line determines everything about the race. Yet many of us run our financial lives without any idea of where our finish lines are. Lacking clearly defined goals, the years pass without the type of meaningful progress we desire because we don’t know what we are trying to accomplish.

Without goals, our financial decisions are dictated by other people, unchecked emotions, and perceived urgency, all of which obstruct wise decision-making. Most of us are satisfied with simply accumulating as much as we can, which is the world’s way of thinking. Since the longing for more is insatiable, we never experience financial freedom. When we choose to set financial objectives, our choices become purposeful, and we stay focused on what is most important. But just developing goals is not enough.

A study of Harvard students in 1979 revealed that 3% had written goals and plans. 13% had goals but no written plans and 87% had neither. Ten years later, in 1989, the study showed that the 13% who had goals were earning twice as much as those with no goals. But the 3% who had both goals and written plans, were earning ten times as much.

Ron Blue has three convictions:
1. Goals setting is the beginning of meaningful life planning. Until you have this you have not started to plan your life.
2. A goal is not a goal until it is measurable, it is at best a good intention
3. Only a Christian has the ability to set faith goals and ask, “God what do you want me to achieve?” This is a way to experience the hand of God in my financial situation.

So, what do we understand by “Faith goals”? A faith goal is a statement: “I believe that God would have me to... whatever it is” I need to believe in my whole heart that I need to take this and internalise it. I need to believe
1. that they give direction and purpose.
2. passionately that they help crystallise thinking.
3. goals provide personal motivation, and 4. that God will direct my steps

God’s Word has a lot to say about goals setting and the process. “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).

Setting goals gets me moving and God can direct my steps. “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us…” (Ephesians 3:20).

This is all part of the faith process. My goal setting comes from God, I seek His will and His wisdom, I start to move, and He can direct my steps. “The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit. Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:1-3).

**LIFE PLANNING**

It starts with God at the centre and my relationship with Him. Our challenge is to maintain balance in the various areas of life. Often, we get out of balance in our vocation, our work, as we strive to produce more wealth at the cost of our relationship with God, family, and other meaningful relationships. Then the process of financial planning helps us to step back and assess our God-given goals and priorities, managing our finances in a way which relieves financial pressure and provides peace of mind. By balancing our lives through financial planning, we are able to focus on Life Impact to develop social and spiritual capital in our lives and those around us.

An exclusive focus on money can so easily bring us off-balance. Remember, Jesus unmasked a power behind money which He called Mammon, and this power uses money to disturb our lives, and take us away from God.

When Michelangelo started on sculpturing David, he started with a block of rough marble, but he saw in this lump of stone, a beautiful figure – hidden. To realize this, he needed to chip away and remove the parts which did not fit. This is the process of discipleship. God is the Sculptor - what He is looking to make is a person who prospers – socially, physically, spiritually so that God can use us to achieve His goals.

- That we should become like Christ
- That we should love Him with all our heart
- That we should love our neighbour, enjoying meaningful relationships
- That we should enjoy creation
- That we should lead others to Jesus

To this end, it is important that, in our life and financial planning, we build wealth, not riches – there is a difference!

Riches in a Biblical sense is money accumulated and Solomon said that this would never satisfy. “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?” (Ecclesiastes 5:10,11).

Wealth on the other hand, is money put to use for a purpose. “You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may confirm his covenant that He swore to your fathers, as it is this day” (Deuteronomy 8:18). The purpose for which God gives us the ability to create wealth is to establish Gods covenant. This covenant establishes the relationship between God and man, interpersonal relationships and the covenant with the resources which the earth provides.

Therefore, the goal of life planning and therefore financial planning is to build capital in all areas of life.

- Physical capital to enjoy strength and good health
- Emotional capital to enjoy inner, mental strength to cope with tough situations
- Relational capital to enjoy friendship and mutual help
- Time capital to enjoy work, relaxation and relationships
- Material capital to enjoy material things, beauty and resources
- Spiritual capital to enjoy Gods presence and activity

From experience, I know just how much the pursuit of financial capital can come at the expense of one or more of the above life capitals. The art is to keep a life in balance with God at the centre directing each area of my life.

In looking at the following diagram “Life Overview”, we see a life planning process. The circle reminds us all of life is about balance. God is at the centre. Money can be used as a tool in all of these arenas to achieve God’s goals and purposes. Financial planning is all about the managing of income and cash flow, but that is only one piece of life. In our next illustration we will simplify the areas of life capital in which to practice planning.

Financial Capital includes money and material assets such as land, shares, and jewellery. Financial Capital built will be for nothing if the other forms of capital are not taken care of.

Spiritual Capital manifests itself in the understanding of Biblical absolutes, how to come to Christ, God’s character, how to walk by faith and trust God, Biblical principles of money management, child rearing, and marriage relationships. Social Capital is a resource base that allows one to relate to society including all the character qualities necessary for effective and productive interaction in society. Morality is a critical component to Social Capital and includes ethics, right conduct, and distinguishing right from wrong.
Financial planning allows us to step back and assess our God-given goals and priorities, ultimately managing our finances in a manner that relieves financial pressure and provides peace of mind. By embracing our three pillars—Income, Margin, and Giving—financial planning enables us to live out our purpose in alignment with God’s desires for our lives.

The Balanced Life

Financial Planning

Life Impact

The Balanced Life

Notes
Having a financial plan de-clutters our financial picture. Knowing our priorities and our long-term goals lessens the confusion of daily financial decisions. We are free to be unique.

In short, there are only two key truths that lead to long-term financial freedom. From a spiritual angle, you must recognize that God owns it all so that you are free from grasping and anxiety. From a practical angle, you must spend less than you earn and do it for a long time. Without a commitment to these two things, you will never be financially free.

There are four truths that make it wise for us to plan rather than respond. They are:

- We all have limited resources
- There are always more ways to spend money than money available to spend
- Today’s decisions impact our future. A dollar spent now cannot be used tomorrow for something different
- The longer term your perspective, the better your decisions will be

Before we get started, let me communicate something clearly to you: Money is symptomatic and emblematic. Every financial decision you make reveals something about your priorities. Accumulating wealth is never a valid end in itself. Therefore, the process of financial planning will drive you to discover your priorities and your values. Financial planning is a gift that will help you to see where your life is in balance and where it is out of balance with your desires and goals. With every financial decision you make, ask yourself: what am I really trying to accomplish? If you take away the dollar layer and get to the underlying purpose, you’ll learn so much! Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there shall your heart be also.” [Matthew 6:21]

Spend some time thinking about your money and your priorities. If your bank statement were the place that revealed your heart, what would it show? What would you want it to show?

**THE ELEVEN BUCKETS**

This tool, created and taught by Ron Blue, founder of Kingdom Advisors, depicts the eleven ways that people can use money - five short term and six long term. It also shows a five-step process for setting and attaining financial goals. Two things determine how your money is allocated among the buckets: your commitments and your priorities.

Commitments come with various family situations and often arise out of past financial decisions. The money you put toward debt has to do with past spending decisions. The money you pay for food, clothing, and daily needs arises from your unique family situation. In both cases, you have levels of commitment. Additionally, your priorities will determine how you allocate your money. If you
prioritize certain lifestyle desires, you will have less money for saving or giving. If you prioritize giving, you will have less money to pay down mortgage debt or to save and invest. Life continually demands that we assess our priorities and make adjustments to our spending decisions accordingly. Having clarity about your priorities and having ongoing reinforcement for the values you hold dear will allow you to make financial decisions that are in line with your priorities. Scripture gives many guidelines about these areas of money management. However, it gives very few commands. Determining your flow of priorities and your commitments best happens as you spend time alone with God and together with your spouse asking for His direction and guidance. He has entrusted His resources to you, therefore He will speak to you about their use in your life.

Here are a few principles about using the buckets.

- First of all, remember that each bucket is legitimate in God’s eyes. He owns it all, and these five buckets are all of the places you can put His money. So, every spending decision is a Spiritual decision.
- Secondly, remember that there is no such thing as an independent financial decision. Once you put money into one bucket, you’ve also affected the level of money in the other four buckets.
- Thirdly, the longer term your perspective, the better your financial decision today. Saving and investing will yield rewards later in life; giving will yield rewards in eternity. So, taking the long view allows your money to be much more productive, in your own life and in others.
PHASE 1: SUMMARISE YOUR PRESENT POSITION
Did you know that there are only five places your money can go? All of your income can be divided among five key areas: giving, taxes, savings/investments, debt, and lifestyle. Of the five short-term uses of money, two are productive in nature and three are consumptive.

Paying off short-term consumer debt which normally carries a high interest rate can free up cash for both short-term needs and long-term goals. This should be a priority – become free from consumer debt as soon as possible! This frees you up to use your money as you want, not as how the creditor determines! Paying taxes is for most people automatic. For the business owner or free-lancer, it is absolutely essential, but often overlooked, to set aside and reserve the taxes to be paid regularly. Therefore, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matthew 22:17)

Giving monthly should also be a priority and a percentage of income. Personally, I believe a tenth is a good starting point. “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper” (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Lastly, develop margin for saving and investing. The first priority for saving will be for emergencies and to reserve for short term larger expenses like car repairs or holidays. “Precious treasure and oil are in a wise man’s dwelling, but a foolish man devours it” (Proverbs 21:20).

Both saving and giving will yield a harvest later on; taxes, debt, and lifestyle represent areas where your money is consumed by the spending decision. When you know your spending level in these five areas, you can control spending so that your cash flow margin (saving and investing bucket) grows.

PHASE 2: ESTABLISH YOUR LONG-TERM GOALS
There are basically only six broad areas in which you can set your long-term goals:
- Lifestyle desires, such as a special vacation, second home, things of beauty, collections or home improvements. Remember, the Lord wants us to enjoy good things!
- Family needs like buying a home, or helping your (grand-) children to buy a home; special needs for handicapped children, or being able to help parents in times of need.
- Financial independence, which would enable you to retire from paid work at a certain age, to be able to volunteer work for charitable causes. This means that your resources will eventually generate enough income to fund all of your short-term objectives, excluding savings. (If “enough” has been saved, you will no longer need short-term savings.)
- Freedom from debt, paying of business borrowings or mortgages.
- Charitable giving such as major donations or setting up a trust fund.
- Business goals such as starting a new business with saved capital or helping others to start a business with venture capital or loans.

As you can see, some of these buckets apply only in certain situations. The process of goal setting will help you determine your “finish lines” so that you will know how much is enough for your financial future.

PHASE 3: PRIORITISE GOALS
Having written down your goals, which ones are the most important for you? Which do you want to tackle first?

PHASE 4: CREATE MARGIN
In order to create margin, we use a spending plan to make sure that each month we are spending less than we earn. This means sitting down (together with your partner), analysing your spending pattern and habits, reflecting on your spending priorities and then making a plan to allocate the available money over the different categories. This plan can be adjusted as necessary.

PHASE 5: CONTROL CASH FLOW
This phase is to control cash flow according to your plan. Am I on track with my spending? Or maybe overspending in a particular area? Am I reserving enough for savings and long-term goals?

As you move into the in-depth process of creating a plan for yourself, please remember several things:
- Process: This is a process, and it will take time. Count on spending time on some basics: committed spousal communication, prayer about God’s direction for you, and an ongoing assessment of your financial situation. Don’t expect perfection and don’t expect a quick fix. You will learn so much about yourself by digging into the process, and you will find that the reward is great!
- Interdependence: Remember that there are no independent financial decisions. As you decide to put your resources in one bucket, you’ve effectively decided NOT to put them in the other buckets. This is the reality of money management.
- Perspective: Also, remember that the longer term your perspective, the better the financial decision will be. A close friend once defined financial maturity as, “being able to give up today’s desires for future benefits”. If you make a choice to delay gratification today on behalf of a future need or priority, you’ve probably made a wise financial decision.
- Goals and Priorities: Finally, remember that decisions determine destiny.
Every choice you make in the present will determine, in part, your financial destiny. Therefore, your key to successful financial planning is knowing where you are going (your goals) and knowing how you plan to arrive there (your plan). Money is just a resource that will facilitate the accomplishments of your desires and goals.

**LIVE, GIVE, OWE AND GROW**

I have found that one of the most helpful diagrams when it comes understanding the flow of money is the “Live, Give, Owe, Grow” pie chart.

As you can see, all of your income is divided among five key areas: living, giving, owing (debt and taxes), and growing.

It is fairly simple to look at last year’s numbers and fill in the blanks for how much owing (both debt and taxes), growing, and giving you did. What remains in your income is what you have left to live on. Knowing this, you are motivated to spend differently so that you have a circle that reflects the priorities of your heart!

For as complicated as money may seem, it only has four potential uses:
1. We can live on it
2. We can give it away
3. We can pay what we owe in debt or taxes
4. We can make it grow through saving

Since we control our money and not the other way around, which of these uses is most important to you? Which do you want to see as a smaller portion of your plan? The Live, Give, Owe, Grow exercise puts you in control. Let me explain how this works.

**LIVE**

This is often the largest portion of someone’s personal pie chart at least at the start. Housing, food, utilities, entertainment, etc. would all be included here. The societal default is that higher income increases one’s standard of living. Others ask themselves if an increase in standard of living is necessary and instead set boundaries to their living expenses. In other words, just because income increases, it doesn’t mean it should be spent on lifestyle.

**GIVE**

It’s helpful to me when doing this exercise, to separate “productive” uses of money and “consumptive” uses. What has lasting value and what is just “consumed”? Giving, to me, is the ultimate productive use because of its eternal impact. Serving people and furthering God’s truth have eternal value. Giving also breaks the power of mammon, bringing money into the Kingdom of God under His control.

**OWE**

Financially successful people minimize or avoid the use of consumer debt. Paying interest to someone else is not in their plan. Debt can increase risk because of the obligation it causes. Proverbs 22:7 says, “The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is slave to the lender.” Borrowing is not wrong, however, it’s not always wise because it presumes upon the future. When borrowing takes place, it should include a way to pay it back, such as with a mortgage when the property serves as collateral.

Taxes are symptomatic of God’s provision as they increase based on a rise in income. “And Jesus said to them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’” (Mark 12:17). We are to pay our fair share of taxes, which means not cheating the system, nor paying more than what we are prescribed.
GROW
To meet long-term goals, we need to set aside a portion of our earnings. Proverbs 6:6–8 instructs us to save, “Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest.” How we save and invest for the future should be mapped out based on short and long-term priorities. Therefore, this is best addressed through a comprehensive financial plan, which can provide context for sound decisions today based on an uncertain future. “Growing” can be viewed as a productive use of money because it allows for future flexibility and freedom. Increasing the “grow” portion is encouraged. However, you might also consider tapering off this allocation as savings becomes reasonably adequate. You must ask the question, “How much is enough?” I suggest reading the Parable of the Rich Landowner in Luke 12:13–34 to see how a complete focus on accumulating more is harmful.

Make your own chart and see where you stand. Decide which portions need to be increased or decreased for the coming year and plan the action steps to make this happen. After one year, adjust your chart based on your money usage and continue to repeat the process.

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?
Answering the question “How Much Is Enough?” will lead to contentment, confidence and better communication. A simple, but true answer to our question is this: God will always give you enough to do His will. He always pays for what He orders! “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work…” (2 Corinthians 9:8)

God’s grace is given to us so that we have sufficient for our lives… enough for all we need to live a godly life, a joyful life, and to have enough to do good things and be generous!

I recently read a short article from a young professional lady, Renate Rijberg. She says, “In recent weeks I discussed the issue of finances with people around me. During a dinner with family, at work, and in a relaxed evening with friends, I asked a few questions, kept my ears open and noticed what people had to say. First of all, I was amazed at the taboo hanging around the topic of money. It is always a bit vague. Telling your salary is ‘not-done’, the state of your bank account is very private. We only tell others when we have made a bargain buy or bought a mega-expensive product.”

 “…and truth be known, I feel the same. The more I earn, the more I need to make ends meet. You constantly strive to earn more, to give your family more, taking a

vacation at least twice a year, live in a beautiful house with a large garden, ride a nice car, have enough savings in the bank and, if possible share with everyone”.

Money is playing such a huge role in our society, that it seems like you don’t count any more if you don’t have ‘enough’ money. And even if you do have all the things I just mentioned, then the question remains if all this satisfies you.”

The answer to the question of ‘how much is enough?” can be found in prayer with God and with your partner. The answer will depend on factors such as family circumstances and responsibilities, work responsibilities and Gods specific calling on your life. The key in getting started is to learn to be content with what God is giving me right now – no matter what the circumstances are in which I am living.

The most general answer to our question of “How much is enough?” is ... more! We never seem to have enough. However, we should believe the words of Hebrews 13:5 “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for He has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” God has placed us in the position in which we are right now ... and we can learn to be content in the economic position in which we are placed.

CLOSING THE CIRCLE
Practically speaking this means to ‘close the circle’. On the basis that God owns it all... I have to ask tough questions. “Lord, what do you want me to do with your money?” “Lord, how much of your money should I spend on myself?”

Once I have made my spending plan and my income has been apportioned into the various categories according to my priorities, closing the circle means to stop spending any more in all those categories.

We will be tempted, to expand our lifestyle and spend more on living! Outside pressure such as advertising and peer pressure and inside pressure such as greed of emotional insecurity will tempt us to spend more on our lifestyle which is ever expanding and needs ever increasing financing! With a fixed income stream, the first area of our spending plan to be reduced or stopped will be giving. Then, there will be automatically less for future growth. There will be pressure to borrow to finance the expanding lifestyle and even great temptation to cheat on our taxes in order to gain more money to spend.
Really, financial success is so simple. Spend less than you earn over a long period of time and you will be financially successful! Sounds simple, but not so easy to put into practice! When my circle is closed, then I can start asking the Lord for overflow! Overflow can be achieved in two ways. First of all, by earning more. Secondly, by reducing my spending. Earning more is generally much more difficult to achieve than spending less! If my circle is closed, then any income which I do not need for the five areas flows over and can be utilised for my long-term goals.
KEY COMPETENCE 1: 
THE TREASURE COMPETENCE

Begin with the end in mind is one of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People in the famous Stephen Covey’s bestseller. In its most basic form, it refers to always having the image of the end of your life as your frame of reference to evaluate everything else. It’s about starting things with a clear idea of your destination, so that the steps you take are always in the right direction. If you have to be busy, at least you should be doing what’s important to you.
With this “end” in mind we are able to better understand where we are now, and what steps are taking us in the right direction, and which ones are not. We thus obtain a frame of reference by which we can stay connected to what really matters to us.

Covey says that people from all walks of life often find themselves struggling to achieve “a higher income, more recognition or a certain degree of professional competence, only to find that their drive to achieve their goal has blinded them to the things that really mattered most and are now gone”. Even though we may be very busy, and very efficient, we’ll only be truly effective when we consider the end.

The great reformer Martin Luther said, “There are only two days on my calendar. Today and that day!” Of course, he was referring to the great day of Christ’s return. He constantly taught people to look at what they do today in the light of that day! We should learn to take every decision today in the light of eternity! What effect will my decision today have on eternity?

Randy Alcorn says that all of life is a treasure hunt. A treasure hunt for a perfect person and a perfect place. The perfect person, is of course, Jesus Himself and the perfect place is heaven. The first competence to be developed is the treasure competence – the ability put these words of Jesus into practice. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21) Notice that Jesus said, “lay up for yourselves...”. Managing our money God’s way will enable us to keep our hearts where they belong... with Jesus... and our focus on where it should be... on heaven.

It is an important principle in making financial decisions that where you put your money, your heart will follow. I know that when you are investing in stocks and shares, your attention, your interest, your time is directed to following the progress of your investments. I found myself watching the market rates with unhealthy regularity!
Also, if you want to have a heart for evangelism or missions – start investing in evangelism and mission work! Your heart follows your money! Conversely, if your financial decisions are directed towards consumer goods, then you will develop a consumer mind-set!

Jesus met up with a rich, young ruler. Probably a member of the Sanhedrin. He wanted to know how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to keep the commandments. And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.” When Jesus heard this, He said to him, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich and left ... His possessions and wealth were keeping him from Jesus. He did not understand the treasure principle.

Rembrandt painted a wonderful picture of The Rich Fool in 1627.

Note how the words attributed to the rich man focus entirely on himself. He utters a monologue that repeatedly uses the first person singular in just three verses—“I” six times and “my” five times, in addition to speaking to his “soul.” The man’s deliberations demonstrate his [fatal] error. He takes no account of others, and, most importantly, takes no account of God. He decides to build new storage facilities, not just for the bumper crop, but for all his “goods” as well. These possessions, he thinks, will ensure his well-being for “many years.” That decision earns him the title “fool” from God (12:20; cf. Psalm 14:1)—in the only instance of God being a (direct) character in a parable of Jesus.

Rich towards God means: “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be arrogant, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

So, beginning with the end in mind means to walk with God in financial discipleship, using the resources He has entrusted me with.

1. **FOR HIS WORK = TO RECONCILE ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF**
   “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19,20).

2. **IN HIS WAY = TO BE OBEDIENT TO THE WORD**
   “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16).

3. **FOR HIS OUTCOME = CHRIST-LIKENESS**
   Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:28).

The Treasure Competence means to decide – “I am to be a pipeline of God’s grace, financially, relationally, spiritually, etc.” Treasure that is transferred to the Kingdom has the power to accomplish Kingdom work, to change the heart of the giver, and provide us with eternal rewards.
KEY COMPETENCE 2: DEVELOP THE RIGHT WORLDVIEW

When I believe that God owns my resources, every spending decision becomes a spiritual decision, and my financial choices are a reflection of my spiritual beliefs. One of two viewpoints will drive my value system: “I own it” or “God owns it.” If I own it, I will define my own values. If God owns it, there are biblical values that define how I use my money.

Our beliefs – the way we look at the world – our worldview, determines our behaviour and this will determine the outcome and the choices we make to fix it! If my worldview is that I spend ‘because I’m worth it’, I live for today, want to keep up with friends, and my identity is determined by my possessions. My thinking is that I go with the flow, do as everyone else is doing. My behaviour is that I spend too much, have no budget, don’t know where money goes and have no criteria for making financial decisions.

I attempt to fix this by spending less money, trying to live on a budget, track spending and to make better decisions. However, because of my worldview and my beliefs, the results will be that in my current situation, I am always out of money, constantly in debt, live from month to month and experience friction over money with my partner. I try to fix this and the results are either to fear or flight, to borrow more, ask relatives for money or even cheat.

The correct way of making financial decisions is to allow our thinking to be determined, not by what everyone else does, but by allowing God to transform our thinking. Romans 12:2 says, “Don’t copy the behaviours and customs of the world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”

Then my decisions will be based on what God wants me to do and the results will be good and pleasing to God!

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THE THREE CIRCLES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>World view</th>
<th>Current behaviour</th>
<th>Current situation</th>
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<td>Go with the flow</td>
<td>• Spend too much</td>
<td>• Spend less money</td>
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<td>• Live for today</td>
<td>• Live on a budget</td>
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<td>• Keep up with friends</td>
<td>• Tracking spending</td>
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<td>• Possessions = identity</td>
<td>• Make better decisions</td>
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<th>Think</th>
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<td>Don’t copy the behaviours and customs of the world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think</td>
<td>Then you will know what God wants you to do</td>
<td>You will know how good and pleasing his will really is</td>
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KEY COMPETENCE 3: CONTENTMENT

Contentment is not the fulfilment of our desires, but the appreciation of what God has given us and the freedom to share these with others. We live in a culture of discontent, dissatisfaction, which is maintained because it is necessary for our economy. We live in a dissatisfied culture with discontented people. And we have to admit that we are all smitten by the bug, because the spirit of our culture, the spirit of dissatisfaction affects us all.

Problems associated with a lack of contentment are uncertainty, asking ourselves ‘will I [ever] have enough?’ We miss satisfaction because the newness of things wears out so quickly, and the ‘next best thing’ appears so quickly on our radar. Our internal sinful nature of greed focuses on material things which can so easily become idols. Seeing what other people have can give rise to envy and jealousy. Overconsumption leads to a state of continued dissatisfaction because we are always on a journey for more and better, therefore never finding rest. The problem in not being able to answer our question was tackled by Prof. Dr. Thomas Sedlacek, in his book: Economics of Good and Evil, “The more we have, the more we want. Why? Perhaps we thought [and this sounds truly intuitive] that the more we have, the less we will need. We thought that consumption leads to saturation of our needs. But the opposite has proven to be true. The more we have, the more additional things we need. Every new satisfied want will beget a new one and will leave us wanting. For consumption is like a drug.” If the question of enough is not answered, we will always be left wanting, according to Sedlacek, becoming victims to ‘affluenza’, the sickness of our times, for which the cure is the answer to our question.

Anselm Grün is a Franciscan monk, and director a very large group of enterprises, employing over 600 people in southern Germany. He leads these enterprises according to Franciscan rules and in his 2015 book “Of Greed and Desire” he agrees with Sedlacek, arguing that the attitude of never having enough leads to a very unrestful behaviour, ‘a nomadic existence’ and continual dissatisfaction. “When we desire possessions, we are looking for rest which we never find because we ultimately discover that the possessions are possessing us and lead us into more needs.”

The pulling power of our desire for more is very strong - that very thing which we think will give us freedom ultimately leads us into captivity. This thought was captured succinctly by E.F. Schumacher in his seminal book “Small is Beautiful.” He states, “The cultivation and expansion of needs is the antithesis of wisdom. It is also the antithesis of freedom and peace. Every increase of needs tends to increase one’s dependence on outside forces over which one cannot have control, and therefore increases existential fear. Only by a reduction of needs can one promote a genuine reduction in those tensions which are the ultimate causes of strife and war.”

Listening to Sedlacek, Grün and Schumacher, we can conclude that the answer lies in our ability to limit our needs and desires, to develop a sober lifestyle of sufficiency in which we can be content and thankful for all that God has given us to enjoy. If we do not pursue such a path, then we become subject to inward desires and outside forces which control us, resulting in loss of freedom.

Looking at the sociological and psychological consequences of our all-consuming epidemic, Tim Kasser and Robert Putman argue, “It’s a particular strand of overconsumption, where we purchase things, not to fulfil our basic needs, but when we use stuff to fill some voids about our lives and make social statements about ourselves. Our obsessive relationship with material things is actually jeopardising our relationships, which have proven over and over to be the biggest determining factor in our happiness once our basic needs are met.”
Tim Kasser identified a connection between an excessively materialistic outlook and increased levels of anxiety and depression, while Robert Putman argues we're paying the ultimate price for our consumeristic tendencies with the loss of friendships, neighbourly support and robust communities. Together they suggest we are witnessing nothing short of the collapse of social fabric across society.

"Beyond a minimum threshold of poverty, money doesn't buy happiness. Wealth may seem like a solution to your problems, but often it simply replaces the ones it solves. As pay checks increase, lifestyles usually match those increases. This results in the same financial worries and budgeting problems, just with more stuff. A preoccupation with owning things is a poor attempt to fill a vacuum. Occasionally stuff can fill that vacuum. Buying that new computer or fancy car might temporarily shrink the hole. But quickly you adapt to the new upgrades and the hole grows, enslaving you to earn higher and higher pay checks with no way out."

Answering the question, How much is enough? can be an antidote to over consumption – thinking and meditating on this question can lead us to consider what 'the good life' means for me personally. It can put a stop to an ever-increasing spiral of consumption, which Sedlacek calls a drug and which Schumacher states leaves us in the hands of outside forces over which we have no control.

I have learned that contentment has nothing to do with money. It's a learned response. The apostle Paul taught this very clearly: "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." [Philippians 4:11-12]. How can we achieve this state of contentment which is independent of circumstances? The answer was given by Paul in our Bible passage for today in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." I like what Major Ian Thomas, founder and director of the Torchbearers ministry, says: "All you need is what you have; what you have is what He is; you cannot have more; and you do not need to have less."

No financial principle can have a greater impact on you or free you up more than this truth: Money is not the key to contentment! Contentment has everything to do with your relationship with God and nothing to do with your money. Once you are free from the love of money and the pursuit of it, you can have a lot or a little and be content all the same. At that point you have learned the secret to contentment.

Peace of mind comes from having an eternal perspective, making decisions based on Biblical wisdom and counsel. Financial contentment has less to do with money and more to do with our attitudes, belief systems, and decisions. Financial contentment brings peace of mind. The way to contentment is to express thankfulness for what you already have, striving to live a simple lifestyle in humility and keeping free from greed, envy and materialism. Contentment allows us to say 'no' to buying more stuff - I have enough!

**KEY COMPETENCE 4: DELAYED GRATIFICATION**

This is the ability to forego spending something today, in order to build up savings for the future. In the 1960s, a Stanford professor named Walter Mischel began conducting a series of important psychological studies.

During his experiments, Mischel and his team tested hundreds of children — most of them around the ages of 4 and 5 years old — and revealed what is now believed to be one of the most important characteristics for success in health, work, and life.

The experiment began by bringing each child into a private room, sitting them down in a chair, and placing a marshmallow on the table in front of them. At this point, the researcher offered a deal to the child. The researcher told the child that he was going to leave the room and that if the child did not eat the marshmallow while he was away, then they would be rewarded with a second marshmallow. However, if the child decided to eat the first one before the researcher came back, then they would not get a second marshmallow. So the choice was simple: one treat right now or two treats later. The researcher left the room for 15 minutes. As you can imagine, the footage of the children waiting alone in the room was rather entertaining. Some kids jumped up and ate the first marshmallow as soon as the researcher closed the door. Others wiggled and bounced and scooted in their chairs as they tried to restrain themselves, but eventually gave in to temptation a few minutes later. And finally, a few of the children did manage to wait the entire time.

The children who were willing to delay gratification and waited to receive the second marshmallow ended up having higher SAT scores, lower levels of substance abuse, lower likelihood of obesity, better responses to stress, better social skills as reported by their parents, and generally better scores in a range of other life measures. The researchers followed each child for more than 40 years and over and over again, the group who waited patiently for the second marshmallow succeed in whatever capacity they were measuring. In other words, this series of experiments proved that the ability to delay gratification was critical for success in life.
The video “The Marshmallow Test” can be seen in a TED talk:

In an article in Christianity Today back in 1996, titled “Why Not Now?”, renowned Christian author Phillip Yancey writes about the virtue of “deferred gratification”. He begins by referring to Dostoevsky and “The Gambler”:

Dostoevsky believed the Russian national character contained a flaw that would keep his country from ever blending successfully with Europe, a flaw that came out most prominently at the gambling tables. “Roulette is simply made for Russians,” one of Dostoevsky’s characters declares in The Gambler, explaining that Russians are suckers for schemes “allowing one to get rich suddenly in two hours, and without work.” The same character proclaims, nevertheless, “I would much rather spend my whole life in a Kirghiz nomad’s tent . . . than worship the German idol,” that is, “the German method of saving money by honest work.”

This passage from The Gambler has become a textbook example used to illustrate a principle of economics: the shorter the “time horizon” of a society, the more likely that society will fail to progress economically. The Dutch, Swiss, Germans, and the Japanese have succeeded spectacularly by setting aside savings, thus creating a pool of capital that can be used for future generations. Short-sighted societies spend all their capital at once, leaving nothing for the future. When I read Dostoevsky’s The Gambler not long ago, I kept thinking of Europeans, not just Americans or Russians.

Nowadays the urge for instant gratification is not a feature of the Russian or American societies only, it is a worldwide phenomenon. We want everything right here and right now. We live in the midst of a fast-moving culture, where everybody is used to instant messaging, mobile communications and being flexible in the face of rapidly changing circumstances. Long-term planning, patience and perseverance may seem like virtues from a long forgotten past. Therefore, even for Christians it may not be so obvious that this live-for-the-moment mentality stands in great contrast to the Gospel worldview, which thrives on perseverance, hope and looking forward to getting one’s rest and rewards in the future complete establishment of the Kingdom of Christ. Delayed gratification is an essential competence for saving and growing character.

**KEY COMPETENCE 5: GROW IN GENEROSITY**

Generosity is the acid test of discipleship. It is said that you are never more like Christ than when you are giving. Generosity is powered by understanding the Lordship of Christ over every area of my life, including money and possessions.

If I am not generous, then this means I have not understood my position and calling as a steward of Gods resources and I have not understood the Lordship of Christ.

Jesus was very clear, “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33). Renouncing all means being willing to give all, when required.

If you have not renounced all, you probably do not believe that what you have is God’s, and not yours.

Therefore, if you are not generous, you probably have not understood that all you have is God’s, and not yours. It is God’s property, and His money.

Jesus was very clear, “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33). Renouncing all means being willing to give all, when required.

Whole life generosity begins by realising that all of my life is lived in relationship to God. It is centred around the cross of Christ who loved us and gave His life for us. The realisation that Christ gave everything for us, the realisation that He spent His life in order to set us free, gives rise to thankfulness and gratitude and we realise then that all we have received is really a gift from God. Out of a thankfulness for what God has done for us we want to release all that we have to God for the blessing of other people. So whole life generosity is an overflowing life which is released to God for the blessing of others.
The practice of generosity protects us from the deadly effects of greed. Israel’s Jordan River remains a source of life as it flows into the Sea of Galilee and then travels to the Dead Sea. In all likelihood, Paul witnessed first-hand the Sea of Galilee’s generous irrigation as well as abundant fishing resources. In contrast, the Dead Sea has no outlet, greedily robbing the arid region of moisture. Both man and animal refuse to drink from its acrid waters. It contains no life of any sort, except a few kinds of microbes -- sea fish placed into its waters die rapidly. Greed causes our lives to also become foul before God. But a life that flows abundantly shares all that God has given us. When we give, we truly prosper and are refreshed (Proverbs 11:24–25).

It is easy to say that life is a gift but often hard to live that way. Drawn into the day-to-day, absorbed, sometimes drowning in our own routines, we forget that God’s gift to us is each breath we take. Yet when we open our eyes (and our hearts), we realize that we have been blessed so that we can be a blessing to others. Live the generous life. Give radically; share your blessings.

### GIVING IS INVESTING IN GOD’S INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO

If our money and possessions belong to God, then the Owner will want to invest in His goals. These can be defined using the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

The Great Commandment [Matthew 22] tells us to love God with everything we have and then others as ourselves. This gives us the first two investment funds in our portfolio. Worship and fellowship. Then the Great Commission tells us to go and make disciples in all nations, teaching and baptising.

1. **TREASURY FUND, SUPPORTING WORSHIP IN CHURCH**
   “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts” [Malachi 3:10,11].

2. **SERVICE FUND, HELPING THE POOR AND NEEDY**
   “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with money bags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”[Luke 12:33,34].

3. **GLOBAL FUND, FUNDING GLOBAL EVANGELISM**
   “The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings” [Luke 16:9,10].

4. **GROWTH FUND, MAKING GROWTH IN LEARNING POSSIBLE**
   “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’ (John 8:32).

5. **MUTUAL FUND, STIMULATING FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER BELIEVERS IN THE BODY INTO WHICH WE ARE BAPTISED.**
   “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” [1 Thessalonians 5:11].
THE CHALLENGE OF GIVING AND RECEIVING BY FAITH

I believe that God wants to challenge us to enter into a partnership of giving and receiving with Him. David stated that all the gifts brought to the temple, was only possible because God gave these in the first place. We are given in order to be able to give. “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

I believe that God is inviting us to participate in the challenge of giving and receiving and that the process works in basically six stages.

1. From our bank account, we give tithes and offerings into Kingdom funds.

2. This is credited to our Heavenly account, becoming ‘for ourselves, treasures in heaven’. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19,20).

3. Now, Gods resources are unlimited, and He does not work with a certain percentage age of interest like a worldly bank but instead multiplies our deposits, just like the seed which is sown in a field multiplies. This is how Gods economy works! "Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit” (Philippians 4:17).

4. God now wants to release an overflow so that we have all we need and can be a blessing to others! "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need” (Malachi 3:10).

5. We need to obtain this by faith, giving priority to seeking the Kingdom’s interests first. ‘But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

6. There can only be a release of overflow if our financial circle is closed. God does not release overflow to spend on financing an ever-increasing lifestyle. Our personal, financial circle must be closed. "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

7. Overflow will then take place and we can be a blessing to others. “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

CYCLE OF GIVING AND RECEIVING IN FAITH

Debit

Credit

Multiplication
Philip. 4:17

Heavenly account deposits
Mat 6:19-20

Obtain by faith...
priority for the Kingdom!
Mat 6:33

God wants to release overflow...
Mat 3:10

Tithes & offerings

Worldly bank account

Overflow for the Kingdom - to bless others

Developing key financial competencies
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What steps can you practically take to develop the 5 competencies?
1. Treasure competence
2. Develop the right world view
3. Contentment
4. Delayed Gratification
5. Generosity
EUROPARTNERS IS A MOVEMENT OF BUSINESS LEADERS AND (YOUNG) PROFESSIONALS WHO DESIRE TO HELP THEIR FRIENDS AND PEERS TO CONNECT TO JESUS CHRIST

OUR DREAM
It is our dream that all business leaders, owners and (young) professionals accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Moreover, that they will reflect Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God in the way they behave, speak and do business, so that all people will honour and glorify God for who He is.

OUR STRATEGY
We mobilize and train Christian business leaders, owners and (young) professionals to be an ambassador of Christ in their everyday life. We do this according to 2 Corinthians 5:20: “As Christian businesspeople we are marketplace ambassadors of Christ. God is making His appeal through us; to beg the world on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God.”

OUR ACTIVITIES
- Resources and training programs to help businesspeople and (young) professionals grow spiritually and reflect the Kingdom in the way they do business.
- An Annual Conference where businesspeople, (young) professionals and ministry leaders can meet for friendship and encouragement. It is a place of inspiration, reflection and training.
- The Young Professionals Academy to equip and inspire young professionals to become a marketplace ambassador and a ministry leader in their nation. With mid-weeks or weekend meetings, trainings and a mentoring program.
- Personal support and coaching of business leaders and their teams on spiritual growth and achieving their goals in the best possible way.
- CBMC training and support to start a national CBMC ministry based on teams, prayer, leadership, evangelism and discipleship.
- Event support with a network of volunteers, professionals, speakers and businesspeople that can serve the various national ministries in outreach and in reaching businesspeople and (young) professionals in their nation.

TARGET GROUPS OF EUROPARTNERS
We focus on business leaders, business owners, (young) professionals and ministry leaders in business.

More information: www.europartners.org

Europartners is part of the CBMC movement