
Enduring Truth

AS I TOOK MORE SERIOUSLY my own study of the Bible, I began to see how detached business had become from the truths that have served us well for so many years. From the earliest days of our nation, and against long-standing Greek influence, a biblical norm emerged to form the bedrock of our ideas and values. We have our Pilgrim forbears and their followers to thank for imbedding such solid thinking into the prevailing culture of America.

But as well as those sturdy (and successful) ideas have served us, with frightening speed they have lost favor, the landscape instead dotted once again with “contemporary” humanistically based alternatives. In retrospect, Greek thought was never really that far beneath the surface.

Do you recall days in the not-too-distant past when, instead of lengthy and convoluted legal contracts, a simple handshake

was sufficient? Do you remember when it was rare to lock the door of your home or give a second thought to walking the streets of your neighborhood after dark?

Unfortunately, a mammoth shift in our culture has muscled out character qualities that were the trademark of our nation. This is graphically illustrated in the widely popular work of Stephen Covey, one of America's most respected authors and lecturers to business people.

A Radical Shift

In his #1 national bestseller, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey quantifies what I have witnessed in my own involvement in business—a radical departure from our nation's historic values. He undertook an in-depth study of success literature published in the United States since 1776 and found a startling pattern emerging in the content of the literature:

The success literature of the past fifty years was superficial . . . filled with . . . techniques and quick fixes . . . with social Band-Aids and aspirin. . . . In stark contrast, almost all the literature in the first 150 years or so focused on what could be called the Character Ethic as the foundation of success—things like integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty and the Golden Rule. Thus, in little over a generation, we have largely abandoned the enduring character qualities that shaped our history.

With myself, lessons learned while growing up left indelible impressions—for example, when my parents returned to a store where they'd made a purchase to give back extra change made in

error by a clerk. Or the day my dad and I were transporting a wheelbarrow in the trunk of our car and were unaware it had slipped out onto the highway. We went back to look for it and discovered it by the roadside, being watched over by a good-hearted man who had seen it fall and stayed to be sure we would get it back safe and sound. Or the wonderful example of Max, my first boss and mentor, who was incensed by every form of dishonest conduct, from padded expense accounts to building excess charges into government contracts. The “everybody’s doing it” mentality didn’t cut much slack with either my parents or Max.

The Biblical Root

As I studied the Bible in greater depth, I saw its strong emphasis on both absolutes and character. Its moral boundaries were unambiguous. For example, three of the character qualities mentioned by Covey—integrity, humility and justice—are dominant themes in the Scriptures. In just two books of the Bible, Psalms and Proverbs, the word integrity is referred to nine times, humility eleven times and justice a remarkable twenty-nine times.

I discovered that the book of Proverbs taken by itself is a veritable gold mine of practical wisdom and insight. As a speaker at a recent business leaders’ luncheon succinctly put it: “Do you want to know how to run your business? Get a Bible and read the book of Proverbs.”

Over the years, I have come to a firm conviction: It is of incalculable worth to us that we have at our fingertips the

wonderful eternal truths of the Word of God. Even the Bible itself testifies to its own value and validity. “The entirety of Your word is truth,” says the writer of the 119th psalm. And speaking of its permanence, he says: “Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.”

Roasting the Kill

The Bible, I have found, is much more than a theoretical standard. It is a reliable and practical life-directing compass. For example, it may surprise you to learn that a passage from chapter 12 of the book of Proverbs had something to do with my decision to write this book. It says, “The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting.” Obviously this proverb doesn’t say anything about writing books! However, as I looked into the background, I discovered the verse speaks of a hunter who kills a large animal in the woods but doesn’t do the hard work of bringing it out, skinning it, butchering it and providing it as food for others.

I thought, *I’m not like that man—I work hard, and I’m anything but lazy*. Then I felt the Lord’s nudge—reminding me I’ve had a lifetime of rich experiences in business in which he has shown me many things that may help others. For me to not write about it would be laziness. It would be like not roasting what I took in hunting. The result of that impression from Proverbs is the book you now hold in your hands—an example out of my experience that the Bible can help provide practical direction for the decisions we make.

So the Bible is an incredible resource to us, a sturdy and reliable guide. It has become for me a kind of corporate compass. The

more I spend time with it, the more I am instructed, challenged and encouraged by timeless truths that reach into every area of my life—including day-to-day aspects of my work.

Life's Classroom

And it is to this realm that we now turn in Part Three. To the practical, where “the rubber hits the road.” To the kinds of issues we face in the world of work, where we need wisdom and insight to know and to do what is right. The Beckett Corporation, with all of its flaws, will be our frame of reference, for it has been our “laboratory”—a place where we have learned much, often stumbling, but then picking ourselves up again.

In addition to telling of our experiences, I will endeavor to link the lessons we've learned on the plant floor and in the office to insights from the Bible. Ultimately, this is the deposit I want to make through this book, for long after each of us has come and gone, the Word of God will remain. Its truths are for all seasons and for all generations.

I also want to emphasize that the specifics of what we have learned in our business may or may not apply to your situation. Just as you as an individual are unique, every enterprise is unique, with a “corporate personality” crafted by its people, history, products, services, practices and even problems. When it comes to applying the lessons learned from someone else's experience, the advice a friend of mine offered as we were eating a fish dinner is helpful: “It's important to eat the meat and spit out the bones.” If something I share does not ring true for you and your situation, feel free to simply discard it.

But I have confidence that you will find, as we have found, these two basic realities: first, there are vital aspects of your faith that can be transported into your work; and, second, the Bible can serve as a dependable and unfailing guide in making that connection.

May what we've learned—and are still learning—help you, even if only in a small way.