

The Ultimate Goal

VISION . . . MISSION . . . PURPOSE . . . principles . . . values . . . goals . . . strategies . . . objectives . . .

It can all be rather overwhelming.

A major purpose of this book is to present the relevance of a biblical approach to business. It is to affirm that we can find practical insights, answers and direction through knowing and applying the inexhaustible treasures found in the Bible—that timeless book that graces the bookshelf in your home.

But even the clearest exposition of biblical truth and the most zealous efforts to integrate this truth into our work will leave us short of the ultimate goal. *The ultimate goal is a relationship.*

Sometimes the common things that happen during the day help me to understand important truths.

I like to run—or should I say jog—but not as much as Chamois, our golden retriever. When he sees my running shoes

go on in the morning, he goes ballistic. He's well trained and runs without a leash. He likes to get out ahead twenty or thirty yards and take small detours to sniff this or that.

What I've noticed is the way he frequently glances back toward his master. It's just a quick turn of the head, but it's enough to recalibrate, to alter the pace or the direction.

One day it occurred to me that the Lord was using this simple example to nudge me toward such a relationship with him, one where I would stay close, frequently check in and be careful not to stray off.

Staying in Touch

The message of the gospel is that we are invited into a real, vital and personal relationship with God. Jesus refers to it as *abiding*, in the sense of dwelling together over a long period of time. He amplifies, using the analogy of how branches are intimately linked to and grow out of a vine: "I am the vine, you are the branches."

This relationship is essential to all of life, including our capacity to extend biblical truth into the workplace. It transcends principles, as lofty as those principles may be. I emphasize this because principle-based literature often stops short of the fundamental importance of relationships.

Let me use an analogy.

I have a wonderful relationship with my wife, Wendy. We've known each other for more than forty years. It is uncanny how much we understand each other, how we know what the other is thinking without a word being spoken. Our love relationship

has carried us through the challenge of raising six children, working through the deaths of loved ones, facing serious illnesses and accidents, standing together as our business was built, overcoming the strains, temptations, misunderstandings and adversity every married couple encounters.

But did we do it by following carefully scripted principles? Of course not.

A relationship is fluid—it goes beyond adherence to principles. It prospers when there is time taken together, when there is intimate conversation, when joys and sorrows are shared, when difficulties are worked through. If carefully tended, it grows and becomes the dearest thing in life.

A Unique Closeness

What applies in close relationships with loved ones is even more essential in our relationship with God.

The ultimate goal (and privilege) in life is to know God intimately—and this happens as we establish and maintain a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Out of that relationship flows not only the truth but also the means to properly handle that truth. Out of knowing God comes the capacity to sit in God's presence—in his private office—every day, to gain his perspective and learn his ways. Knowing God means our life becomes filled with his life.

In his book *Experiencing God*, Henry Blackaby has helped me understand the unique relationship that each of us can have with God the Father through Jesus Christ. Blackaby says we experience God when we follow the pattern modeled by Jesus.

Jesus said, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.” Blackaby draws a remarkable insight from this verse: “God is presently at work all around us—in situations, in circumstances, in difficulties. He is continually active, always with His ultimate purposes in mind.”

Jesus saw it as his responsibility to watch what his Father was doing and to join in. He said, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does.”

Here is the pattern for us—to understand that God is at work all around us and in our lives, and to *join with him in what he is doing!*

The key is a close, ongoing relationship. It is more than attending a church service and then going off to do our thing during the week. It is different from waking in the morning, having a time of Bible reading and prayer and then plunging into the day in our own strength. It is keeping our eyes on the Master, watching closely, discerning where and how he is active and then following him.

Our ultimate goal goes beyond knowing *about* God and his principles. Our ultimate goal is to come to know him as our Maker, Redeemer and Friend. Amazingly, God wants that kind of intimate relationship with us! It is the most precious of all possible gifts.

Bud

One day Bud came to grips with his need for a more intimate relationship with the Lord.

Bud joined our company in the late sixties as a department

supervisor, and after several years he progressed to plant superintendent, serving as a member of our senior management team. He held that position until his retirement, nearly twenty years after he began working with us.

An ex-Marine and a veteran of World War II with extensive combat duty in the Pacific, Bud was a no-nonsense boss whose tough exterior masked a tender heart. Nonetheless, his iron-grip handshakes let others know who was in charge.

Shortly before retirement, Bud was hospitalized with a bronchial infection. As I entered his hospital room for a visit, I sensed an anxiety in Bud that was uncharacteristic. Gone was the confident “I’m-still-in-charge” demeanor.

I had hardly said hello when Bud grimaced, revealing his pain, then blurted out, “John, I’m worried.”

“Look,” I said, “they’ll get on top of this infection in no time. With the new antibiotics . . .”

But he cut me off. “No,” he said, “that’s not my concern. I’ve been doing some thinking since I got in here, and I’m not sure things are right between God and me.”

“Bud,” I said, adjusting to his unexpected comment, “you and I have worked together a long time. You’ve seen my struggles over the years. But you’ve also heard me say my faith has helped me through those struggles.”

“Yeah, I’ve been watching,” Bud injected, squeezing out a wry smile. “I hate to admit it, but I’ve poked fun at your faith from time to time. For myself, I’ve never said much about what I believe. It’s always been more of a private matter.”

“Okay,” I said. “Let me ask you a direct question. If you could,

would you like to be more certain of your relationship with the Lord?”

Never one to mince words, Bud was equally direct in his response. “I would,” he said, “I really would.”

So we talked about the basics of the Christian faith—how sin has separated us from God, and how Jesus died for us on the cross, providing a way for our relationship with God to be restored—if we are willing.

I could understand his reserve. It hadn't been that many years since I was working through the same issues. And now it was Bud pressing further. “So what do I do?” he asked.

“The key is for you to put out the welcome mat. The Lord is gracious, and he isn't going to force you to do anything. But if you ask him, he is more than willing to come to you. Believe me, he will become the closest friend you've ever had.”

The Lord became Bud's friend that day. His prayer of acceptance was simple, but it came from his heart. “John,” he said, his eyes now misty, “I turn sixty-four next month, and this is probably the most important thing I've ever done.”

That day, Bud anchored his faith in a way he never had before. His decision became the basis for his ongoing personal relationship with the Lord. It is especially poignant to recall that special time together, for as I was doing the final editing of this book, Bud died. Attending the funeral service, I was wonderfully reassured to know that because of the commitment he made that day in the hospital, Bud is eternally in the presence of the Lord.