



## WHY BUSINESS MATTERS TO GOD

By: Jeff Van Duzer

Theology of Business – How God thinks about business.

Two big questions: Reasonable choices

1. **WHY?** Why business? Why does business matter to God?

**PURPOSE** – What is the purpose of business?

2. **HOW?** How should business be done from God's perspective?

**PRACTICE** – How should business be practiced

Understanding the theology of business is so critical because there are two thought extremes/views on how people even think about business (two different end of the spectrum).

### **Q: What do Christians think about business?**

A: One extreme (those not in business) say *business is evil* and corporations/business owners just use/abuse people so they can line their own pockets. The other end of the scale (those who are Christian business owners) claim *capitalism and Christianity are joined at the hip* and you would have a hard time separating the two. They clam if critics and the government would get out of the way and they could just operate in a true free market it would in fact lead to God's heavenly kingdom.

What we need in business theology is a capacity of *nuance*. A capacity to sit in the middle of those two warring perspectives, affirm what is appropriate and be a critic where it is needed.

### **Q: How does your work in business contribute to God's kingdom?**

A: I make a lot of money – I do a lot of good with the money I make.

That is good, God calls us to generosity, *but* still - even bank robbers can tithe. Giving away money does not tell us what God thinks about business. Theology of business allows us to figure out/determine how the nuts & bolts of business (hiring, firing, negotiations, etc.), how does that stuff matter to God and advance his kingdom.

***Q: As a Christian business what difference does your faith make in how you run your business?***

A: Business is business and everyone has to do business the same way. But as a Christian I try to “be nice” while I do business. (*Enron with a smile*).

Often, our view of what God calls us to in business seems to be limited to this micro personal level: be kind, respectful, act with integrity. We tend to think of the structure of business as if they are immutable. This is not true. Business is a social construct and God cares a lot about how it is constructed.

***A theology of business needs to be sophisticated enough so that it can look at the structures/paradigms of business and hold them up against God’s values.*** Where they are out of line we can call the way of business to a realignment with those values.

## **PURPOSE OF BUSINESS:**

What would God say is the purpose of business?

Man’s view of business: To make money. That is the dominant mindset of business and many corporations/businesses large and small run on that philosophy. Business school curriculum is built on that model.

***As Christians we are to adhere to a different understanding of purpose.***

***Narrative of Scripture:***

- **Creation**
- **Fall**
- **Redemption**
- **New Creation**

Genesis 1 – 2 gives us a little glimpse of what God intended for our world before corruption by sin, therefore, that would be a good place to start when looking for God’s purpose in business.

1. Adam and Eve were assigned **work** in the Garden (Work is **not** a part of the curse. Responsibilities were given **prior** to the fall). God intended for us to engage in work. Being made in God’s image, we are to engage in work that is creative and meaningful.

"The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."

Genesis 2:15

## Scripture (Genesis) Reveals:

- God Is A Worker
- God Creates
- What God Creates =GOOD

2. Work is set in the context of **relationship**. “Let *us* make man in *our* image” Before God did anything he was in loving relationship in the God-head. All work proceeds from relationship and is intended to come back for the benefit of the relationship. It’s not right Adam is alone, so he creates someone with a different set of skills and abilities, putting them together so that out of that relationship work can flow, they can engage in procreation and their work will come back to benefit them in their relationship. As the population grew, it would be to come back for the benefit of all. For the common good.

That’s what business does. *Business is particularly well suited to bring people together in relationship, so they have opportunities in relationship to engage in meaningful and creative work.*

## God's MISSION Statement For Business (Part 1):

**-It Exists To Provide Opportunities For  
Individuals To Express Aspects Of Their God  
Given Identity In Meaningful & Creative WORK**

The material world matters to God. We don’t read anything about God creating souls or spirits in Genesis 1 -2. We read about him creating real things, and each time he creates them he says that it is good, and when he is done the whole of creation he says that it is very good. *Material things matter to God.*

We go on to read that the Garden of Eden was not complete. The garden was perfect – not in a static sense (like a picture), but what was intended from the beginning was that God would “partner” with humanity to bring forth its productivity (God made the fields, but there was not yet crops – humanity was not there to till the land). God didn't have to use man to provide for humanity, he could have provided a self-functioning land. He choose instead to create humans who are willing to:

### God's Business Model:

*Create Human Beings Who Will:*

- Pool Resources (Capital)
- Design An Oven (Innovation)
- Gather Supplies From Supply Chain
- Bake Bread (Operations)
- Put It Trucks (Logistics)
- Feed A Hungry World (Distribution)

God Would "PARTNER" With Mankind To Bring  
Forth The Full Capacity Of The Garden

*“When we do the work that God  
has given us, we become God’s  
hands for providing for the  
world.”*

*Martin Luther*

**Business is uniquely well situated for providing the material needs for the world.**

## God's MISSION Statement For Business (Part 2):

**-It Exists To Produce Goods & Services That Would Enable The Community To Flourish**

## Business Serves Two Purposes:

**-INTERNAL**  
allowing people to fulfill their God given potential

**- EXTERNAL**  
meeting the needs of the world

Business exists to serve in two dimensions:

1. **Internal**- employee looking. Striving to give individuals an opportunity to express themselves in meaningful and creative work.

2. **External** -dimension of creating products/services that will benefit the community.

**FOR CHRISTIANS IN BUSINESS PROFIT IS NOT  
TO BE THE ULTIMATE GOAL**

**It Is To Be The MEANS To Accomplish The  
ULTIMATE Goal**

**To Serve !!!**

Under the dominate model, customers and employees are the means for serving the shareholder. Perhaps from God's perspective it is better to look at it from the other way around. *Capitol is there to enable to do what the business is supposed to do: serve.*

**Don't mix up purpose and tactics.** Perhaps non-profit and for-profit companies, from God's perspective, have the same purpose. They serve in different ways, but the big difference is in tactics (like, in obtaining funds)

We should not denigrate profit. Profit is important, but it is a tool, not an end. If a business does not have profit, it is dead and cannot serve.

*We should think of profit as the LIFE BLOOD of giving life to accomplish the PURPOSE of business.*

**What are the boundaries/limits that business must maintain while in pursuit of PURPOSE?**

## PRACTICE OF BUSINESS:

There are limits, constraints and boundaries that business must respect while it pursues the purpose. It is just as

important to understand these limitations as it is to understand the purpose of business. *It is only when we know both the object and the rules, the purpose and the limits that we really get the whole picture of business.*

We need to know both the Object (PURPOSE)

&  
The Limits

To Get The WHOLE Picture

### Humanity was (inherently) intended to respect limits.

The very of identity of Adam and Eve was formed around a limit. At the very center of the garden was a single limit (that stood for a whole set of limits). "Don't eat from that tree." The fall really could be described as humanity's unwillingness to live with limits (they wanted to be like God). We were made to deal in the context of limits.

The Garden Was To Be Preserved In Such A Way That Over Time It Would Be  
**SUSTAINABLE**

Not only was Adam and Eve made to make the garden productive, they were also to protect the garden. Use the resources, but also cultivate the land. There was a sense that the Garden was to be protected and preserved in a harmonious balance that overtime was to be sustainable (seed bearing fruits, etc).

***Business must pursue its purpose in a way that in effect does no harm*** (to the stakeholders, employees, vendors, investors).

**For EMPLOYEES**

Business Must Pay A Reasonable LIVING WAGE

To Not Do So Is Unsustainable

**For INVESTORS:**

A Business Must Pay A Reasonable Rate Of Return

To Not Do So Is Unsustainable

**Advertising**

Must Not Create An Insatiable Desire For MORE..

To Do So Is Unsustainable

John Wesley's 2 main introductory

rules for moral living are:

1. Do good (relates to purpose – go out to serve)
2. Do no harm along the way

Can A Business Operate Over A Long Period Of Time In Such A Way Where It Is Not Taking From Any Of The Stakeholders?

Employees  
Vendors  
Customers  
Environment  
Investors

The way to think about business is that it is called to pursue the purpose of service, but it must choose between a constrained range of options that if chosen will not impose harm on the stakeholders. It we function in a sustainable fashion.

**According To God:**

**The purpose of business: To serve**

**The practice of business: To do it in a way (fashion) that is sustainable**

**Questions:**

**MODERN Paradigm:**

Manager Confronted With 2 Choices:

Which Choice MAXIMIZES ROI?

vs.

**NEW (Biblical) Paradigm:**

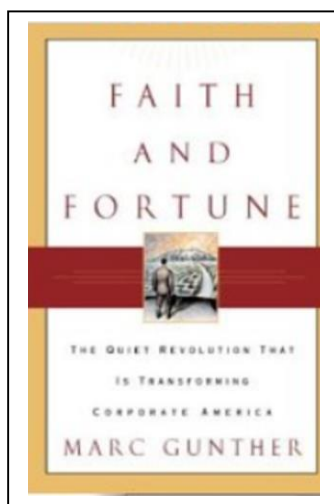
Manager Confronted With 2 Choices:

Given The Core Competencies Of My Business  
And The Assets Under My Control...How Can  
These Best Be Leveraged **TO SERVE?**

“This is a different question/from a perspective opposite of man’s typical view of business is. Over time it will probably lead to a different answer/outcome as well. (What if mortgage brokers had asked “*would putting a person in a house they cannot afford with a loan they cannot repay really encourage and nurture flourishing in my community?* vs. *How much money can I make for my company?* Would we be in a different place economically today?)

You are not way out of the mainstream to think/act on the idea that business can have more purpose than just maximizing the bottom line. It is a minority movement, but it *is* a movement and has gained attention over the years. There is an openness in society to say “isn’t there something else, isn’t there something better than what we have been doing”? And that gives an open door to Christian business owners to answer that question.

Can you be competitive in business and still use the model of using your business to serve?



## **What's A Business For ? Harvard Business Review**

*But to turn shareholder's needs into a purpose is to be guilty of a logical confusion. To mistake a necessary condition for a sufficient one. We need to eat to live. Food is a necessary condition of life. But if we lived mainly to eat making food a sole purpose of life we would become gross.*

*The purpose of a business in other words is NOT to make a profit...*

*It is to make a profit so that the business can do something*

**MORE or BETTER.**

## **McKinsey & Co.**

***"Unquestionably the global business community has embraced the idea that it plays a wider role in society . More than 4 out of 5 respondents agree that generating high returns for investors should be accompanied by broader contributions to the public good. For example, providing good jobs, making philanthropic donations, and going beyond legal requirements to minimize pollution and other negative effects of business.***

***Only 1 in 6 agrees with the thesis famously advanced by Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman that higher returns should be a corporation's sole focus."***

We don't always use this model because it will "work" or make you more money. This model is proposed because it is what God calls us to do.

It is said sometimes that good ethics is good business, and that if you do the right thing it will go down to the bottom line. A number of times, maybe even most of the time, that is true, but not all of the time. ***Sometimes what God calls us to do is going to cost us.***

This model of business is not about how to make more money. It is about how to do the right thing. ***There can be no promise that doing things God's way goes down to an increased bottom line. But*** with that caveat, following this model of business is likely to be competitive in today's market. Why? Most people believe today that the real value of a company is far more than the assets you can look at on a balance sheet. That it is really found in the creative energy and juices of the workforce.



**Why This Biblical Model Is COMPETITIVE  
In Today's Market:**

**1. The REAL Value Of Companies Is Found  
In The Creative Juices Of Its Workforce**

**-Energize Your Employees To Bring Their  
"A Game"**

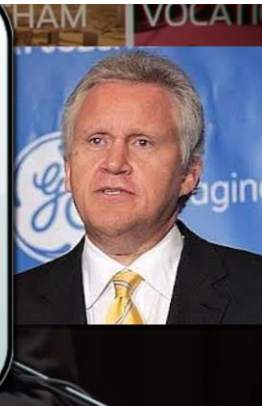
Today's Best Leaders Are Connecting The  
PASSIONS Of Their People With The  
PURPOSE Of The Business

*If you want to get the most out of your company what you want to do is energize your employees to bring their best to the workplace.*

*Find ways to help the employees understand that they are not just working for themselves or their company, but that they are working for something bigger and better.*

**"To be a great company today you also have to be a good company. The reason people come to work for GE is that they want to be about something that is bigger than themselves. They want to work for a company that makes a difference, a company that's doing great things in the world."**

**Jeffrey Immelt  
CEO / General Electric**



In this day and age, almost every company has a mission statement. Most companies do not even know what it says, but some companies truly try to run their businesses based on their mission statement.



*Exists to establish a place of work where engineers can feel the joy of technological innovation, be aware of their mission to society, and work to their heart's content.*



*Exists to make a contribution to society by designing and developing and manufacturing the finest electronic equipment for the advancement of science and the welfare of humanity.*



*We exist to alleviate pain and suffering*

If you can get a sense that the work you are doing connects to something that is bigger and better, it is likely to bring forth the very best from your employee base and this model will likely do very well on the ground in this day and age.

### ***Why is this so important?***

#### **Internal:**

In America we are experiencing a huge crisis in meaning in the workplace. It is said that (Harris Poll):

***1 in 5 American Workers See A Connection  
Between The Work They Do & Their  
Organization's Goals***

***- 1 in 5 Care About Their Organization's  
Goals***

***That says we have a very small portion of the American workforce that is doing anything day in and day out that they think has any meaning (or that they care about). This is particularly true for Christians in business.***

As long as the church focuses only on our value of making money so that we can go out and support what is considered *really* God's work (missions) it renders the work that we do as a meaningless spinning of the wheel. (And that is not the way God looks at it.)

If Christians were oriented toward service and constrained by sustainability in advancing God's kingdom here on earth, it would seem that it would animate and give us a greater sense of the nobility of the calling that we have as Christians in business.

#### **External:**

The world is facing extreme problems. 20% of the world lives in poverty, 25,000 children dying every day from largely preventable causes. Whole continents are being ravaged by AIDS. Tension and hatred seem to be on the rise. We are facing huge problems, and the organizations that typically deal with these problems: governments, United Nations, etc are overwhelmed. ***The institution that is likely to have the biggest impact on the world we live in (for good or bad) is going to be business.***

If business leaders only focus downward on maximizing their own shares/profitability then these big problems are not going to be solved. But if business leaders were to focus on the question of ***“How can I operate my business (profitably), but direct/aim it toward some of the big problems in our community and in our world?”*** then

business leaders will be incredibly effective world leaders. The world desperately needs business to get engaged. And business matters to God.

Luke 10:2 The harvest is ready, ask the Lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into his harvest field.

That does just not mean Pastors and Missionaries, it means business leaders going out into the world God loves.

#### **BUSINESS LEADERS:**

- ***Poised To Be Effective World Changers***
- ***Get A Lot Out Of Little***
- ***Organize & Deploy Resources***
- ***Optimistic***
- ***“Win/Win” Solution Oriented***
- ***Fight Enormous Odds/Obstacles***

#### **Discussion / Application:**

- 1. What key “take-a-ways” did you gain from this session?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. What is something new you learned and can apply?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3. How would you answer the two aspects of God’s Purpose for your business?**