

Chapter 1

The Case for a Kingdom Business



The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

Matthew 13:31-32

All of human history is converging to a point where there will be a new heaven and a new earth, where the church of Christ will rule over the nations, with Jesus Christ as its Head. In Revelation chapter 21, we are given a stunning account of how all things will be made new by Christ and the church will be “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” The new Jerusalem, otherwise known as the church, is referred to as “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” This culmination of Christ’s redemptive work will result in our worshipping and glorifying Him forever. At this point, I am certain that what is written in Philippians 2:10-11 will be true, “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

What does the fact that the church will reign with Christ at the Head have to do with your business? These Scriptures let us know that Jesus Christ is primarily concerned with the redemption and

perfection of His bride, the church, in order that God's people might enjoy the perfect fellowship for which they were created. From a business standpoint, it tells us to prioritize our efforts according to those of our Head, Christ. If Christ is focused on building and perfecting the church, so should we through our businesses.

I invite you to consider several passages in Ephesians to further strengthen these points in your mind. First, Ephesians 1:22-23 tells us, "And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." By saying all things are under His feet, the apostle Paul means every aspect of human endeavor falls under the authority of Jesus Christ. Everything, business included, is under His authority. Obviously, now it is imperfect, but it will be perfected in the new heaven and earth. In saying "to the church," Paul means the universal body of believers, all Christians. All our endeavors are to be under the authority of Christ in order to bring glory to Him and His bride, the church. The church is referred to as "the fullness of him who fills all in all." I believe that refers to the new Jerusalem and shows us that the perfected church is the focal point of His work.

In Ephesians 2:10, we are told that the purpose of our salvation is to do the works that God prepared beforehand for us, and in Ephesians 3:20-21, Scripture tells of God's amazing power at work within us in order to bring glory to Christ and His church. Clearly, God brings about this perfecting of the church through the individual and collective efforts of individuals, families, and all His chosen people throughout the entire world.

Taking this a step further, Romans 12:1 tells us that as a result of the great mercy provided to us by Christ, we should present our bodies as living sacrifices, "holy and acceptable to God." In the verses immediately after this, Paul directs us to use our gifts for the benefit of the church. For the business owner and leader, that means we are to strive for excellence in our businesses in ways that honor Christ and build His church.

The essence of all these Scriptures is to lead us to the conclusion that the ultimate purpose of our lives and businesses is to bring glory to Christ by building His church. When we refer to His church, it is the same as referring to His kingdom. Since Christ goes to the

greatest efforts imaginable to build His church, any business that seeks to glorify Him also should seek to aggressively, assertively focus its efforts on building God's kingdom.

Because of this, I believe there is a difference between a Christian business and a kingdom business. They are similar in that their owners are Christian and do their best to uphold Christian principles in their businesses. Both seek to honor Jesus by treating their customers and employees with respect, selling high-quality goods and services, and providing outstanding customer service. These are traits every Christian should strive for in his business, and I believe God will honor him for it. The distinguishing characteristic between a Christian and a kingdom business is the vision of each type of business.

The vision of a Christian business is to operate profitably and in a way that shows its customers the love of Christ by the way it treats its customers and employees. It may be a good member of civic organizations. There is much good in every way in this type of business. However, its vision is often limited to the here and now. Often the entrepreneur sees it as no more than a job, a means to earn a living. There is nothing wrong with this, but its limited vision tends to underutilize the assets of the business in terms of how they can be used for God's kingdom.

In contrast, kingdom businesses operate with a larger vision in mind. The vision of a kingdom business goes far beyond the products or services the business sells. In fact, the vision may often be generational; that is, going beyond the lifetime of the owner. The mind of the kingdom-building entrepreneur considers his or her business not only as an income source, but also as a resource to be used by God for the expansion of His kingdom. Such an entrepreneur knows he must build a strong and profitable business to support the needs of his family. Beyond that, however, he is concerned about making his company more profitable and successful, not to live an opulent lifestyle, but to have an increasingly large impact on the growth of God's kingdom. His passion is far beyond mere income generation and survival. His drive is to use whatever business skills and opportunities God has given him to have a potentially massive

impact for God's kingdom by creating capital and other resources to glorify Christ and His church.

A kingdom entrepreneur, with a vision of generating capital for God's kingdom, realizes that a successful kingdom business has the capacity to provide many more resources for God's kingdom than any one individual family. From a financial perspective, he realizes the capital his business produces can build new hospitals, plant new churches, help existing churches become debt-free, fund missionary movements, create Christian schools and colleges, and provide training and education to the poor.

Perhaps even more important than the creation of financial capital, a kingdom entrepreneur realizes the human capital he can develop can last for generations. By human capital, he means the development of a solid employee base that understands his vision and passionately embraces it and moves it forward. Such an entrepreneur knows he has to have a strong team motivated by his goals and moving in the same direction toward his vision. Without this creation of human capital, the financial capital created by the kingdom entrepreneur may run out if no one is left to perpetuate the company after the entrepreneur is gone. With this in mind, the kingdom entrepreneur knows he must develop his employees both from a business and spiritual standpoint if he wants his vision to continue.

A kingdom entrepreneur understands that he must continually hone and increase his business skills in order to achieve the level of business success required to attain his kingdom goals. This type of entrepreneur realizes God will not supernaturally suspend the time-tested and well-known rules of best practice businesses simply because he is Christian, nor will He automatically bring great customers and employees to him. Instead, he knows he must become excellent at what he does and makes a lifelong commitment to improve his skills by studying marketing, sales, finance, operations, and personnel development. He is committed to excellence in customer service, quality in his products and services, and profitability in his business because he knows he must achieve those ideals in order to maximize his impact on the kingdom. Moreover, the kingdom entrepreneur is not naive enough to believe that success

will come quickly or easily. He knows he will have to struggle, fight, and go through many disappointments and difficult trials before accomplishing his goals.

A kingdom entrepreneur is characterized by a love of God and knowledge of Scripture, an impassioned vision for building God's kingdom, a humble and repentant heart, the knowledge that great things can only be achieved through God's power, and a commitment to both prayer and well-thought-out action.

As we study Nehemiah, we will see all of these characteristics at work, as well as the following ones:

- A well-planned vision, organizational structure, and funding
- An organized approach to work that maximizes and rewards the accomplishments of its workers
- The strength to overcome internal and external adversity
- A faith that trusts God to see the mission through
- Repentance and forgiveness among the team members for sins committed
- Detailed attention to data processing and record maintenance
- A strong commitment to and definition of core values
- A commitment to family
- Faithful serving and use of gifts in churches
- Perseverance—not giving up
- A willingness to discipline, or terminate people who violate the business principles and potentially derail the vision of the business
- Fairness and impartiality
- Generosity—being mindful of the poor, needy, and oppressed

The full impact of kingdom entrepreneurs' efforts might not be fulfilled for generations. They may not see the full fruit of their efforts. We will see that despite the success Nehemiah had in leading Israel in building the wall around Jerusalem (the product), it was very difficult to maintain a strong team after their initial success.

The people went back to their natural sinful inclinations, and it took a fierce rekindling of Nehemiah's impassioned vision to keep the people together. Kingdom entrepreneurs know their leadership is required to keep the fires of their organizations lit, and that's why the study of this Old Testament leader is so critical.

As we embark upon our examination of kingdom business building by studying Nehemiah, we will do so first by examining a broader set of Scriptures with the goal of understanding God's eternal plan as well as the way God uses His chosen people to bring about His purposes. Nehemiah had a thorough understanding of Scripture, and he used it to fuel his passion and vision. If we are to follow the example of Nehemiah, we need to commit to acquiring his level of understanding and application of God's Word. The next two chapters are designed to provide a foundation for gaining that level of understanding, but they are by no means a substitute for a lifelong commitment to studying God's Word.

View From the Trenches

From my perspective, building a kingdom business requires an unusually high level of energy and drive. In my household, it entails reading and studying, applying and testing, coaching and directing, and reassessing and continuing the innovation cycle. The differentiator between a traditional entrepreneur and a kingdom entrepreneur is the spiritual vigilance that must be applied to the kingdom business. Without Cindy's and my vigilance in this area, our business would become secularized because our employees would drift in that direction even though they are Christians. We try to keep in mind that God laid this venture on *our* hearts; therefore, we are the keepers of it. If we do not feed and nurture that vision, carefully cultivating it within our business, Busy Bees will become just like any other preschool, and our reason for existence will have died. Even though it is extremely difficult at times, we try to stay focused on this aspect of the business. Admittedly, we have failed from time to time, but praying to God for strength and mercy continually rescues and revives us, and He picks us up so we can keep going. Of course, keeping up the spiritual intensity requires making sure we are being fed and nurtured within our church, through individual

study, weekly fellowship with other believers, and ministering in the church.