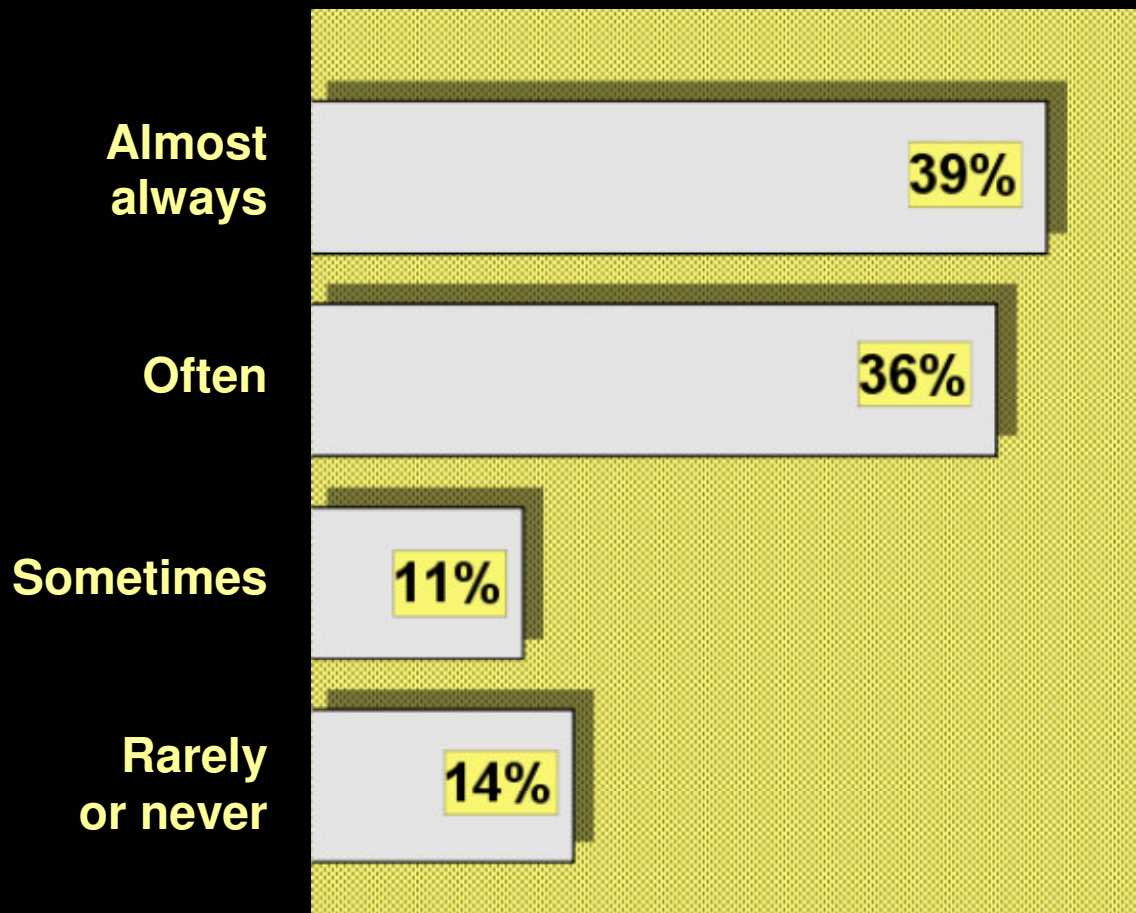


# REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW

ISSUE 16

## THE EPIDEMIC OF BUSYNESS AMONG CHRISTIAN LEADERS

**“The busyness of my life gets in the way of  
developing my relationship with God.”**



(Responses from 752 Christian leaders)



## Over-extended and exhausted? You're not alone.

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## Take an alternate route to share your faith.

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Three out of four Christian leaders we surveyed say that the busyness of their lives undermines their relationship with God. Most also say they eat quickly and they are exhausted at the end of their day. Here's help for a lifestyle that crowds out God.

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Time management experts tell us that to have more space in our lives, we ought to identify time-wasting activities and find more efficient ways of getting our work done. But if we instead start by reconsidering the concept of time as taught in scripture, we may find more permanent solutions to our frenetic lives.

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There's a better approach to sharing the gospel than our traditional argumentation—an approach that looks, sounds, and feels more like Jesus the rabbi, than Murray, the used car salesman. It involves more listening than speaking, more inviting rather than demanding “a decision.” And, perhaps most importantly, it involves answering questions with questions rather than giving answers.

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A successful entrepreneur. An author whose work has been translated into a dozen languages. A humble, unassuming ambassador of the Christian faith. John Beckett joins us for some Q-and-A about how to achieve real success.

*Regent Business Review* is an electronic magazine published by the Regent University School of Business. The mission of RBR is “to equip and encourage Christians to be more God-honoring leaders and managers.” As such, we offer practical guidance about what it means to be an authentic Christian in the workplace, as well as tools for better communication, for character development, and for other building blocks of leadership excellence. Driven by a calling to make disciples in the marketplace, we seek to exhort and coach Christians to “excel still more” (1 Thess. 4:1) in their roles as leaders and managers.

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# The Epidemic of Busyness Among Christian Leaders

Michael Zigarelli

**epi·dem·ic** (ěp-ĭ-dēm'-ĭk) *n.*  
An outbreak of a contagious  
disease that spreads rapidly  
and widely.

It's no overstatement to say that legions of Christians are infected by "an outbreak of a contagious disease," a disease that seems to be spreading "rapidly and wildly" throughout the culture. It is especially prevalent among U.S. Christians in leadership positions, but also appears to be widespread among a similar demographic overseas. Moreover, women are more susceptible than are men, though a strikingly high percentage of both genders have been affected.

A contemporary term for the disease is "busyness" and the particular strand I want to consider here entails a lifestyle that's so congested that the infected individual can neither enjoy nor nurture a healthy relationship with God. The evidence comes from the latest in a long line of studies on over-extended lifestyles, but there's also some good news to report: There's a cure that's freely available to each one of us.

Given the target audience for this article, I'll get right to the point.

## A Congested Life is an Obstacle to Leading God's Way

Let me start with a three paragraph theology of the problem. If we take scripture at face value, Christians in

## Our toxic lifestyle of hurry and over- extension crowds out God and often culminates in self- sufficient leadership

positions of authority are to lead in a way that honors God. Indeed, this isn't a very controversial statement since we're to do everything in life this way, but if you want a poignant reminder, check out Jesus' words on leadership in Matthew 20:26-28.

To do God's will as leaders—and to do it with excellence and consistency—requires that we not go at it alone. We must rely on God to do what is unattainable in our own strength. Again, the Bible is unequivocal. Classic passages like Proverbs 3:5 ("Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on our own understanding") and Matthew

6:33 ("Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you") resonate throughout the ages and remain as time-honored answers to the question "how we should live?" They are bedrock, not proof-texts, since they capture so completely the core tenets of surrender, dependence and divine empowerment.

It follows, then, that *obstacles to our relationship with God are also obstacles to leading God's way*. Such is the case with the epidemic of busyness. A lifestyle that crowds out God culminates in the self-sufficient practice of leadership. And this is not just an exegetical warning. It has become an undeniable reality of the Christian landscape. Let's consider the evidence.

## The Evidence That Christian Leaders Are Over-Extended

To examine the extent of the busyness problem, I collected data from Christians around the world through my Web site, [Assess-Yourself.org](http://Assess-Yourself.org). At that site, people complete surveys to examine their spiritual condition and they do so anonymously (thereby facilitating their candor and permitting the collection of more valid data). For this study, I consider data from the

first 752 Christians leaders who completed my “Obstacles to Growth Survey.”<sup>1</sup>

Figure 1 presents what might be the most striking finding in these data. To the statement “The busyness of my life gets in the way of developing my relationship with God,” three out of four Christian leaders indicated that this is “often” or “almost always” true of them. Looking more closely at the data, I also found that female leaders report even more of a challenge in this area than do their male counterparts. This is also true for Christian leaders in the United States relative to their peers overseas (see Table 1). Moreover, this is not simply a businessperson phenomenon. When I separated out the 116 respondents who identified themselves as a “pastor,” “minister” or “priest,” I found that they were anything but exempt from this problem. Almost two out of three clergy members (64%) report that the busyness of their life “often” or “almost always” gets in the way of developing their relationship with God.

Other survey questions reveal even more about the toxic lifestyle of Christian leaders. As shown in Table 2, one-third of leaders say they “often” or “almost always” hurry when they do not need to hurry; half say they “often” or “almost always” rush from task to task and that they eat quickly; and six out of ten report that they are “often” or “almost always” exhausted by the end of their day.

This is quicksand for those of us who desire to love God, to

love neighbor, and to teach others to do the same. The epidemic of busyness is inhibiting relationship with God among those who are in the best positions to be ambassadors of the faith. And tragically, as we Christian leaders sink further into that

**Half of the 750 Christian leaders in this study said they often “eat quickly” and “rush from task to task.” Six in ten report being “exhausted” at the end of their day.**

sand, those who advance competing worldviews are marching ahead.

Of course, hamstrung leadership is only one manifestation of our busyness problem. Being too busy for God also hinders one’s ability to be a God-honoring spouse, parent, son, daughter, grandparent, friend, neighbor, church member, volunteer, and so on. An over-extended life leads to less God in one’s life, culminating in a less consistent witness—less love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control and other virtues—as a leader and simply as a Christian.

Clearly, this needs to change. God does not call us to a life of hurry, fatigue and distraction from Him. He calls us to relationship. So to remedy our problem, God has put a self-administered antidote into our hands.

### **An Antidote for Our Busyness**

I would guess that almost every over-extended Christian reading this article knows about this supernatural antidote: God permits us to *choose* to live differently. For most people, over-extension is purely a lifestyle choice and as such, the solution is to make a different choice. Do less. Live more simply. Stop taking on so many things and discontinue the relentless pursuit of “more.”

Now, as a father of four kids under ten years old, I do understand that there are some seasons of life that are naturally more frenetic than others. For some people, the hyper-activity of these occasional seasons is due to circumstances beyond their control. But for most seasons, we determine crowdedness of our lives. And in doing so, we choose the extent to which we make space for our relationship with God.

Consequently, for those of us who claim to be believers, there’s no escaping the question: *Am I too busy for God?* Have I chosen a lifestyle that permits continuous relationship with God, or one that relegates Him to designated times and places? Is God still my top priority in



life, or have I begun taking Him for granted?

If the answer to any of those questions is not what it should be, here's an action item for today: Take inventory of the complicated lifestyle you've selected and what that's done to your relationship with God. Do so with the help of a trusted friend, if you can. And then, with this big picture inventory in front of you...well...do something to solve the problem. I certainly don't need to be over-directive here. If there's not enough God in your life, you know what to do about that.

And so do I. But let me offer just one suggestion that's universally applicable. It may be axiomatic advice, but from my studies of Christian leaders, it's advice that needs to be underscored: A one time commitment to change will not inoculate you. It's an essential beginning, of course, but it's unlikely to alter the trajectory

of your relationship with God. Permanent change requires both a genuine commitment today and a continuing re-commitment—maybe even a *daily* re-commitment—to avoid drifting back to a life of ignoring God.

I know from where I speak, not just because of my research, but also because a strange thing happened as I immersed myself in the research and writing of this article. In the several days I invested in this piece, I made noticeably less time than usual for God.

Indeed, busyness is a powerful and persistent epidemic. Even in the midst of teaching against it we are not immune!

#### Notes

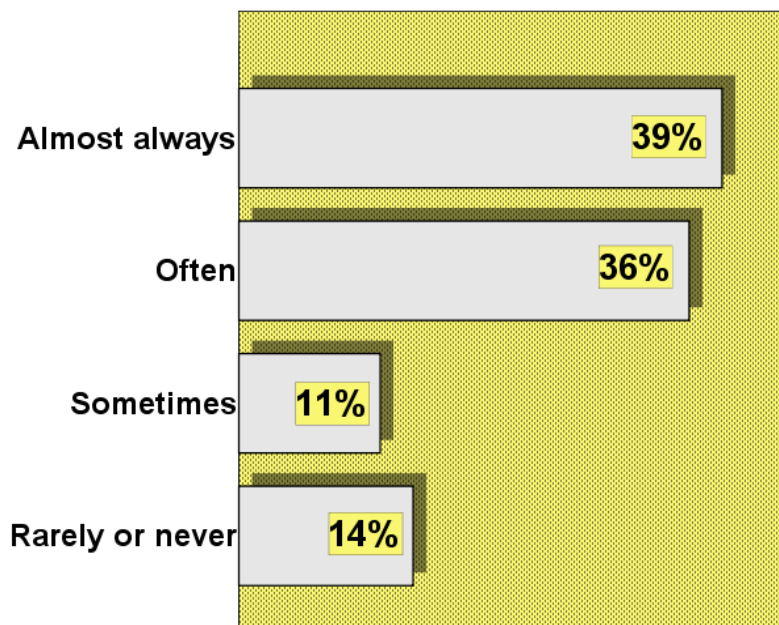
1. I identified respondents as “leaders” if they indicated having at least one direct report in their position at work. I identified respondents as “Christians”

through questions about their denominational affiliation and the number of years they have been Christian. Other demographics of the sample are as follows. Gender: women represent 60% of the sample. Respondents' average age: 40. Average years as a Christian: 21. Race: 67% White, 19% Black, 7% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 3% other. Denomination: Respondents represent 36 Christian denominations, with 33% reporting being “non-denominational.” Geographic: Respondents come from 45 states and 47 countries, with 25% residing outside the United States.

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**Figure 1**  
**“The busyness of my life gets in the way of developing my relationship with God.”**  
(Survey of 752 Christian leaders)



**Table 1**

**Summary of Findings for the Item:**  
**“The busyness of my life gets in the way of developing my relationship with God”**  
(Survey of 752 Christian leaders)

Sample	n	Almost always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely or never
Full sample	752	39%	36%	11%	14%
Women	450	43%	33%	9%	15%
Men	294	34%	39%	14%	13%
US sample	570	41%	37%	10%	12%
Non-US sample	175	34%	33%	15%	18%
Pastors	116	29%	35%	10%	26%

**Table 2**

**More Evidence of the Epidemic of Busyness among Christian Leaders**  
(Survey of 752 Christian leaders)

Survey Item	Percentage of Christian leaders who report that this is “often” or “almost always” true of them
When I <u>do not</u> need to hurry, I tend to hurry anyway	33%
I rush from task to task	50%
I eat quickly	52%
I am exhausted at the end of my day	59%

# The Fallacy of Time Management

Robert Banks

Our modern hustle and bustle places us in the grip of what Swiss psychologist Paul Tournier calls “universal fatigue.” This fatigue has reached epidemic proportions in the West. People are constantly complaining about how tired they feel—tired when they get up, tired at the office, tired at home in the evenings, tired on weekends or even during holidays. Where does this “universal fatigue” come from? It has many sources, but mainly it stems from the compulsive drive of modern life.<sup>1</sup>

Neither pre- nor anti-industrial approaches to time are able to solve our difficulties with time. Within the dominant culture of Western countries, only one systematic attempt to deal with the time problem has emerged—“time management.” It promises to make life tolerable even in the workplace.

Time management experts tell us we ought to identify time-wasting activities and find more efficient ways of carrying them out and it would be hard to find an aspect of work which has not been so scrutinized. They tell us that having pruned time-wasting activities and discovered more efficient ways of doing tasks, we need to make wise use of the “discretionary” time gained. Blocks of time need to be reserved for important thinking, writing and forecasting. We should arrange meetings so that they

don’t distract from important tasks. And so on and so forth.

The problem is, time management techniques face the time problem at its point of greatest tension and claims to relieve that tension, but does

**Time management techniques claim to relieve the tension, but often fail because they do not require of us any radical break with our lifestyle.**

so without requiring any radical break with our style of life. *Time management techniques don’t require us to challenge our fundamental views of time.*

## Time is Our Idol

The anthropologist E.T. Hall perceptively notes that for us the contents and limits of a period of time are generally “sacrosanct.” In a non-Western culture a person simply starts at some point and goes on until he has completed his task or until something else intervenes.

But if we allocate a certain amount of time to an activity, we are unwilling to rearrange our program. “Once set, the

schedule is almost sacred, so that not only is it wrong, according to the formal dictates of our culture, to be late, but it is a violation of the informal patterns, to keep changing schedules or appointments or to deviate from the agenda.”<sup>2</sup>

Anyone who has attended classes in a school or university, worked in an office or factory, or participated in conferences or conventions, knows how true this is. Not matter how important may be the person or event which turns up unexpectedly and needs attention, almost always the program will be adhered to. The show must go on...

Given this, it is not surprising some writers have no hesitation in declaring that we have turned time into a quasi-religious affair. “The time-cult is the master-concept of our day,” claims Wyndham Lewis.<sup>3</sup> Says Eric Fromm, “Time is the idol that rules our life.”<sup>4</sup>

Even before the Industrial Revolution, Jonathan Swift discerned that a new idol had arisen. In *Gulliver’s Travels*, he records his hero’s capture by the Lilliputians. Fascinated by Gulliver’s clothing, the Lilliputians note:

Out of his pocket hung a great silver chain, with a wonderful kind of engine at the bottom. We directed him to draw out whatever was at the end of that chain; which appeared to be a globe, half silver, and half of

some transparent metal ... He put this engine to our ears, which made an incessant noise like that of a watermill; and we conjecture it is either some unknown animal, or the god that he worships; but we are more inclined to the latter opinion, because he assured us that he seldom did anything without consulting it. He called it his oracle, and said it pointed the time for every action of his life.<sup>5</sup>

We have elevated clock time into a more important place in our lives than it warrants. Idols not only enslave their admirers, they also transform people into replicas of themselves. So people “actually became like clocks, acting with a repetitive regularity which had no resemblance to the rhythmic life of a natural being.”<sup>6</sup>

Time management fails to challenge the view of time which prevails in advanced industrial societies. Indeed, it wholeheartedly endorses it. The language it uses and the concepts with which it is associated come from the world of commerce and industry, and writings of Christian authors do not differ in this respect from works by those with different philosophies.

In Christian time management literature, leisure is regarded as having its justification in its relationship to work. According to one writer: “We do not work in order to have leisure. We have leisure in order that we might get on with our work ... The industrial planners tell us that

a time away from work allows us to return to our job with a greater level of efficiency.”<sup>7</sup> Here we have a striking testimony to the way in which the secular viewpoint is simply assimilated into the Christian one.

### **Time in Judeo-Christian Perspective**

We need to get back to the origins of the Judeo-Christian view and see whether these contain clues to our present

## **At the root of our busyness lies a flight from God, others or ourselves, or a desire to justify ourselves to God, others or ourselves.**

problems with time that have been overlaid or ignored.

For many Christians, biblical injunctions about use of time seem to underline the importance of each moment that passes. Consider the following:

Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of (or redeeming) the time. (Col. 4:5)

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. (Eph. 5:15)

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (Heb. 3:13)

Don’t these words stress the significance of each moment? Many have concluded from these and other passages that God demands “busyness” in his service and they find no fault with the pace of life today in itself. Lack of busyness is taken as a sign of half-hearted commitment.

But the first set of passages doesn’t encourage a busy use of time at all. What they ask is for is a discerning approach to it. We are to conduct ourselves wisely, not hectically toward outsiders (Col. 4:5). We are to exhort one another “constantly” not at every opportunity (Heb. 3:13). And, despite the translation, we are not called upon to “make the most of the time.” This choice of words underlines how affected even translators are by our modern obsession with maximizing time use. What we are required to do is to free (redeem) it from unprofitable activities. Today this injunction could be directed as much against the round of superficial pursuits that so many Christians are engaged in as against wasting time in all sorts of idle ways.

In biblical days there were two ways of looking at a particular unit of time. Time was often measured in a straight-forward, chronological way. But, a qualitative approach to time is also present in the Bible. Writers often place the emphasis on *what* is happening,



not on *when* something happens. A particular time period is defined according to its content, not its position on a chronological time line.

Take a look at the Apostle Paul. Paul's activities sometimes follow a regular pattern, like visiting the synagogue on the first day each week (Acts 17:2), and sometimes display considerable flexibility. In fact, some considered him a vacillator whose statements of intention were not to be trusted (2 Cor. 1:17-18). His travel plans were mostly provisional as to both destination and duration. Sudden changes in plan occurred, owing to external circumstances, personal anxieties, and uncertain reception or God's guidance (Acts 13:49-51; 2 Cor. 2:12-13; 1:23-2:1; Acts 16:6-8). Only when he had a clear understanding of God's purpose for him could he make predictions of a reasonably certain, time-specific kind (1 Cor. 16:8-9).

Paul did not equate opportunity or need with God's requirements. He chose not to take advantage of certain opportunities because he recognized that at the time he did not have the emotional energy to cope with them (2 Cor. 2:12-13). He was careful to proceed only in the direction God indicated, though this sometimes meant bypassing whole fields in which he could have spent time (Acts. 16:6-9). He never attempted to exploit every new opportunity or press every situation as far as it would go.

None of this means that Paul failed to exert himself

strenuously in his work (Acts 20:31; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8). We should be careful that we do not read into such passages notions of "busyness." We should also be wary of interpreting comments about his working "night and day" more literally than remarks which we

## **We Christians should be willing to face up to the unfortunate fact that our ways of looking at time are virtually identical to the attitudes and behaviors of those around us.**

do not take that way, e.g., his injunction to "pray unceasingly." Remember that in such passages, Paul is protesting against those who did too little.

Clearly, both the measurement and significance of time were important in the Judeo-Christian outlook. Today we are so preoccupied with measuring time down to the smallest unit that we forget that generally, it is the content that should determine when and how long we should engage in something, not the other way round.

### **Breaking Out of the Time Prison**

At the root of our busyness and haste lies either a flight from ourselves, others and God, or a desire to justify ourselves to God, others and ourselves. In other words, our activism is either idolatrous self-absorption or a self-justifying exercise.<sup>8</sup> It is one thing to look for meaningful, valuable, satisfying work. It is another to regard work as that which proves to myself, others or God that I am acceptable—that my existence is justified. If we depend on our work to give us worth, what happens if we are declared redundant, become invalids or retire? What message do we have for the disadvantaged, unemployed, the aged?

No. We must fully embrace the gospel which we claim to believe. Time management stresses the possibility of a technical or organizational solution to the problem of overwork. The counter culture defies nature and champions harmony with it, rather than the one who created it. The gospel approach goes deeper than either of these, showing us how to come to grips with the problem of who we are, in a way that returning to nature or relying on our reason cannot. Time management cannot save us from the tyranny of time.

So, let's look at biblical ways to deal with our time problem.

#### ***The vitality of becoming.***

The first step we can take is to reject the activism which permeates our thinking. Our first temptation is always to ask what we should "do" about something. Our approach to the problem of time is

generally along this line. We want action. We want a program. We want a manual of do's and don'ts to help us shift into a different lifestyle. But this doesn't work. Our difficulties won't dissolve simply by substituting one set of actions for another.

The counter culture asks us to forsake "doing" in favor of "being," an emphasis which comes from Eastern religions and certain types of Western psychology. The first encourages us to lose ourselves in the all-pervading cosmic "Being," the latter stresses our need to get in touch with our own "being."

The trouble is, what we discover when we begin making contact with our inner selves is a nest of contradictions, weaknesses and uncertainties. It is not enough for people to get in touch with the genuine core of their beings, for that core is itself part of the problem.<sup>9</sup>

So as Christians, we must reject the emphasis on being, which is often regarded as the only alternative to activism. From a Christian point of view, the most important thing is not that we are "doing" or "being" but that we are "becoming."<sup>10</sup>

The process of "becoming" has a dynamism which merely "being" lacks, and a depth which "doing" lacks. In becoming I gain a real center to my life. This is the consistent thrust of biblical writings. In becoming like Christ, we develop gifts and character qualities which fit us for whatever tasks God has in

view (cf. Matt. 5:21-48, Col. 2:20-3:17). The right sort of "doing" inevitably follows.

Transformation of character and lifestyle—of "becoming"—means making a commitment to live a less hurried, less harried existence.

***A single minded approach to life.*** We must become clear about the main path God requires us to follow. Whatever God wishes us to devote ourselves to, he will grant us time enough in which to do it.

One of our greatest problems is that we misunderstand what God asks of us, either by adding all kinds of extra responsibilities or by possessing only a hazy idea of what he wishes. We will gain more time by properly understanding his will for us than by all the time-saving suggestions put together.

It is a matter of taking seriously Jesus' words "Seek first his kingdom ... and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matt. 6:33). We must look behind our commitments and responsibilities to the priorities which inform them because our time problems may well be based on poor priorities. Only a radical reappraisal will reveal where we have gone astray and where God wishes to lead us. And, we must learn to distinguish between the *important* and the *urgent*.

C.E. Hummel finds the solution to escaping the tyranny of the urgent in Jesus' practice of daily seeking God's will:

By this means he warded off the urgent and accomplished the important. It gave him a sense of direction, set a steady pace, and enabled him to do every task God assigned ... If the Christian is too busy to stay, take spiritual inventory, and receive his assignments from God, he becomes a slave to the tyranny of the urgent. He may work day and night to achieve much that seems significant to himself and others, but he will not finish the work God has for him to do..."<sup>11</sup>

***Developing a sense of personal rhythms.*** It is important to discern our natural rhythms and to adjust our behavior accordingly. These rhythms differ from person to person.

We have physical rhythms which range from small "ninety minute ones" through which our bodies move during the day, to longer annual cycles. We should maintain regular sleep patterns. Men as well as women should identify and make allowances for their monthly cycles. We ought to lower our expectations of what we can achieve when the weather is extremely hot or cold. As we oscillate between health and sickness, we should recognize the behavior appropriate to each. Traveling and staying put also need to find their proper levels because too much travel puts stress upon our bodies.

There are also psychological rhythms. A balance should be struck between large gatherings and smaller ones,

between times devoted to strangers and time with friends, between demanding, people-oriented periods and relaxed, time-expansive, self-regarding ones. It is also important to ensure that time spent directly with God is balanced by time spent simply with ourselves. Time given to appreciating the world is needed alongside time spent consuming its benefits.

In his book *Freedom of Simplicity*, Richard Foster talks about the balance between quiet reflection and strenuous activity. He comments on the great relief he experienced in discovering his own cycle.

I function best when I alternate between periods of intense activity and of comparative solitude. When I understand this about myself I can order my life accordingly. After a certain amount of immersion in public life, I begin to burn out. And I have noticed that I burn out inwardly long before I do outwardly ... I must learn to retreat, like Jesus, and experience the recreating power of God.<sup>12</sup>

He no longer castigates himself for giving insufficient attention to study or meditation during periods of activity. Nor does he rebuke himself for lack of activity in times of quiet reflection or vacation.

### Final Thoughts

As Christians we are unwilling to face up to the fact that our ways of looking at time and our everyday use of it are virtually identical to the

attitudes and behaviors of those around us, and time management techniques are powerless to change this. Christians have uncritically absorbed the spirit of the age. To engage in a frantic activity is to become enmeshed in the time patterns of a world which will one day come to and end—one that is even now passing away (1 Cor. 7:29-30), and we have failed to provide a genuine alternative to the stifling pressures of modern society.

A genuinely Christian perspective endorses neither a laid-back outlook nor a fast pace, developing instead a measure of each in a fully integrated life. It idolizes neither spontaneity nor organization, but allows room for both when appropriate. It frees us from our enslavement to the clock, but does not ignore the need to sensibly measure time. It encourages a freer, more flexible approach to life, but not at the expense of public relevance.

It is not too late for us to change, but something *needs* to be done. Now, of all times, it is time to do something about time.

### Notes:

1. Cf. M. Hilliard, *Women and Fatigue* (Family Life Movement of Australia) p.118.
2. E.T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1966) pp. 182, 183.
3. Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1972) p.17.

4. Eric Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), p.129.
5. J. Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: Dent, 1940) pp. 31-32.
6. G. Woodcock, "The Tyranny of the Clock" in A. Naftalin (ed.) *An Introduction to Social Science* (Chicago: Lippincott, 1953) p. 211.
7. P. King, *How Do You Find the Time?* (Edmonds, W.A.: Women's Aglow Fellowship) pp. 110-111.
8. Cf. J. Moltmann, *Theology and Joy* (London: SCM, 1973), p.69.
9. R. Hudnut, *The Bootstrap Fallacy: What the Self-help Books Don't Tell You* (London: Collins, 1979).
10. See the discerningly chosen title of K. Miller, *The Becomers* (Waco: Word, 1977).
11. C.E. Hummel, *The Tyranny of the Urgent* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1967), pp. 4-5.
12. R. Foster, *Freedom of Simplicity* (London: SPCK, 1981) p.91.

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# Rabbinic Questioning: A Better Way to Evangelize

Randy Newman

Some people have told me that my lack of evangelistic fruit results from lack of prayer. I certainly don't pray enough, but I wonder if that's all there is to it. Other people have told me that I don't push hard enough in "closing the sale." I don't know how to respond to that; the gospel isn't a product that we sell. On introspection, I've wondered what I haven't said to work the same magic as so many others.

And I'm not alone in my frustration. In fact, frustration might be the most common emotion that Christians associate with evangelism (followed closely by guilt, confusion and despair). Our frustration is multifaceted. We're frustrated that our message doesn't yield more decisions, genuine fruit, cultural impact, or advancing of God's kingdom in the way about which Jesus talked. There are three fairly common reasons for our frustration and intimidation. They've led to a condition that borders on evangelistic paralysis—what one speaker has referred to as "spiritual lockjaw."

First, we believers just don't engage in as many evangelistic conversations as we know we should. The message that has gripped our hearts and forms the centerpiece of our lives remains unspoken, unshared, and unproclaimed. Our culture's secularism has

silenced us when we should be sharing, and we wonder why the topic so often on our minds is so seldom on our lips.

**A better way does exist—a way that looks and sounds more like Jesus the rabbi than Murray the used car salesman.**

Second, we're frustrated by the lack of lasting fruit. If you've ever led someone to Christ, and later found that person totally uninterested in spiritual growth, you know the pain to which I'm referring. True, not all the seeds in Jesus' parable landed on good soil. Still, we wonder why some plants spring up and then wither in the sun, or on the rocky soil, or under the distractions of this world. We wonder why, for all of our evangelistic efforts, the percentage of born-again Christians in our country has remained stagnant for more than thirty years while the percentage of Mormons, Muslims, and purchasers of New Age crystals has grown.

Third, most of us don't hold a candle to people who are gifted by God as evangelists. And when we actually do step out in faith and share Christ, not as many people as we'd like bow their heads and pray "the sinner's prayer." Hearing about the successes of a Billy Graham only adds to our frustration. Instead of motivating us to be bold, the success stories discourage us. That's not an excuse, though. Paul told Timothy, who was a timid non-evangelist, to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5). So we find ourselves clinging to the promise that God forgives even the greatest of sinners—assuming that sinners means those who are evangelistic failures—and hoping for a method of evangelism for non-evangelists.

## A Better Way to Evangelize

A better way than the traditional fire-on-all-cylinders sales pitch approach does exist. And, it looks, sounds, and feels more like Jesus the rabbi, than Murray, the used car salesman. It involves more listening than speaking, inviting rather than demanding "a decision." Perhaps the most important component to this kind of evangelism is answering questions with questions rather than giving answers. It's uncanny how often our

Lord answered a question with a question.

A rich man asked Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” That question was a great set up for a clear, concise gospel presentation. I can almost hear a disciple whispering in Jesus’ ear, “Take out the tract.” But how did Jesus respond? He posed a question, “Why do you call me good?” (Mark 10:17-18).

When religious leaders asked Jesus if it was right to pay taxes, Jesus referred to a coin and asked, “Whose portrait is this?” (Matt. 22:17-20). When the Pharisees asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” Jesus’ response was a question: “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?” (Matt. 12:9-12).

At times (far too many, I’m afraid), I’ve answered questions with biblically accurate, logically sound, epistemologically watertight answers, only to see questioners shrug their shoulders. My answers, it seemed, only further confirmed their opinion that Christians are simpletons. So I started answering questions with questions, and have gained far better results.

Once a team of skeptics confronted me. It was during a weekly Bible study for first year college men in a dorm room. The host, in whose room we met, had been telling us for weeks of his roommate’s antagonistic questions. This week, the roommate showed

up—along with a handful of likeminded friends. The question of the gospel’s exclusivity arose, more as an attack than a sincere question.

“So, I suppose you think all those sincere followers of other religions are going to hell!”

“Do you believe in hell?” I responded.

## **Answering questions with questions turned out to be a more effective, albeit less direct, way to share the gospel.**

He appeared as if he’d never seriously considered the possibility. He looked so puzzled, perhaps because he was being challenged when he thought that he was doing the challenging. After a long silence, he said, “No. I don’t believe in hell. I think it is ridiculous.”

Echoing his word choice, I said, “Well, then why are you asking such a ridiculous question?” I wasn’t trying to be a wise guy. I simply wanted him to honestly examine the assumptions behind his own question.

The silence was broken by another questioner, who chimed in, “Well, I do believe in hell. Do you think everyone

who disagrees with you is going there?”

I asked, “Do you think anyone goes there? Is Hitler in hell?”

“Of course Hitler is in hell.”

“How do you think God decides who goes to heaven and who goes to hell? Does He grade on a curve?”

From there, the discussion became civil for the first time, and serious interaction about God’s holiness, people’s sinfulness, and Jesus’ atoning work ensued. Answering questions with questions turned out to be a more effective, albeit indirect, way to share the gospel.

### **Rabbinic Evangelism**

Answering a question with a question is part of a style of sharing the Good News, one that I like to call rabbinic evangelism. Using this style of debate, rabbis train their disciples to think about God and life. The method was used in Jesus’ day and is similar to what happens today in training schools called “yeshivas.” This method is sometimes called “Pilpul.”

Moishe Rosen, founder of Jews for Jesus, encourages this style of dialogue in his book, *Share the New Life with a Jew*. Rosen shows how seeing both sides of a question can help people think, which is a necessary, but often neglected component in the evangelism process. Consider an illustration from his book.

A rabbi posed a question to a Gentile inquirer, trying to



illustrate this different style of thought. I will ask you some questions,” he said, “to see if you can logically come to the right answers. Two men fell down a chimney. One was dirty, and the other was clean. Which one washed?”

“The dirty one, of course,” replied Gentile.

“Wrong!” exclaimed the rabbi. “The dirty one looked at the clean one and thought *Amazing! We just fell down a chimney but we didn’t get dirty.* But the clean man saw the dirty man, presumed that they were both dirty, and immediately went to wash up.”

The Gentile smiled. “Oh, I see.”

“No, you don’t,” said the rabbi. “Let me ask you the second question: Two men fell down a chimney; one was clean and the other—“

The Gentile was puzzled. “You already asked me that question,” he said.

“No,” contended the rabbi, “—the other one was dirty. Which one washed?”

“The clean one,” said the Gentile.

“Wrong again,” said the rabbi. “It was the dirty one. He looked at the clean man and thought, *It’s amazing that he should fall down the chimney and remain clean,* whereupon he looked at his own hands and realized that he was dirty, and went and washed. And now for my

third question. Two men fell down a chimney; one was dirty and the other was clean. Which one went and washed?”

The perplexed Gentile shrugged. “I don’t know whether to say it was the dirty one or the clean one.”

“Neither!” said the rabbi. “The whole question is

## Practically speaking, answering questions with questions might alleviate hostility.

ridiculous! How can two men fall down a chimney together, and one come out dirty and the other come out clean?”<sup>1</sup>

Although this illustration has elements of absurdity, such an exercise teaches people to think critically. This kind of rabbinic reasoning is needed and should be used today in evangelism as we engage the hearts and minds of non-Christians.

I believe that Paul used such a style of evangelism in his synagogue preaching, which is mentioned many times in the book of Acts. In Acts 17:2-3, for example, we read, “As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he *reasoned* with

them from the Scriptures, *explaining* and *proving* that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. ‘This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ,’ he said.” (Emphasis added; similar statements are found in Acts. 17:17; 18:4, 19; and 24:25.)

Responding to a question with a question paves the way for a concept that the questioner might not have otherwise considered. When I asked my dormitory interrogators if they believed in hell, I paved the way for the concept of divine judgment. Many ideas that are central to our gospel message—God’s holiness, people’s sinfulness, Christ’s atoning work on the cross, and people’s responsibility—are alien today for many people. Questions bring these concepts into clearer focus for consideration and even acceptance.

And practically speaking, answering a question with a question might alleviate hostility. When people ask questions that are really attacks in disguise, responding with a question reflects the heat. People don’t usually like the temperature and tend to adjust the thermostat accordingly, which helps create a more productive conversation.

To be sure, at times, a direct answer is preferable. On quite a few occasions, Jesus didn’t beat around the bush. Consider, for example, His direct answer to the teacher of the law who asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” (Mark 12:28-31). When questioners are

sincerely asking, they will benefit most from a clear, concise statement of what the Bible says.

### **Plausibility Structures and How Questions Pave the Way for Answers**

Not many people have heard of the “Plug Theory.” Even fewer people believe it. Nevertheless, my son, Dan proclaims it with boldness. He sounds convinced that it holds the keys to understanding international politics, world history, and military strategy.

The Plug Theory contends that every country has a plug located somewhere near its geographical center that prevents the country from sinking. Thus, keeping its plug location a secret remains a top priority for a nation’s military, intelligence and political forces. Pull the plug and any other concern becomes meaningless. According to Dan, America’s plug sits somewhere in Kansas and his theory has some intriguing implications: Atlantis didn’t protect its plug very well; Holland had its plug pulled but rescued its land from submersion by reinserting the plug and building dikes; Vatican City is itself a plug; Lesotho is the plug for South Africa.

Dan’s theory amuses but never persuades.

For many, believing in Jesus is as likely as believing in the Plug Theory. For anyone to believe Dan’s notions, Dan would need to demonstrate support from, and correlation

to, other things that people already accept. Supporting facts and ideas build “plausibility structures,” making belief in something more plausible. For many in today’s post-modern culture where truth is relative, the propositions that there is a God, He is personal and knowable, He hates sin, and His son’s death gives us

## **This technique brings to the surface the questioner’s assumptions— assumptions he or she may have never really considered.**

freedom from guilt and gets us into heaven, are not plausible. Using questions to evangelize paves the way for hearts ready to listen. They help us to introduce plausibility structures. In order to use questions to do this, though, we must embrace five principles.

### ***Reveille precedes revelation.***

People have been lulled into believing the illogical, and we must arouse them from sleep before presenting the gospel. A good way to do this is to ask a one-word question—“Really?”

When a friend at work says for instance, “I think all religions are the same,” try responding

with “Really?” Then, after the friend begins to awaken, elaborate by saying “How about that religion that lead people to kill themselves when they saw the Hale-Bop comet? They thought that it was going to take them to heaven. Do you *really* think that their religion is the same as yours?”

### ***Some things can’t be true.***

To overcome resistance, we must soften hearts. This can be done by asking “Can you explain that [your statement] to me?” Asking this question demonstrates a genuine desire to hear their points of view and shows an unwillingness to be put on the defensive. In fact, it has a certain amount of offense to its posture.

Our message is coherent, plausible and beneficial. Other people should defend their messages. In so doing, the foolishness or impossibility of their belief system comes into question. We can take an offensive posture without being mean spirited or insulting by simply asking, “Can you please explain what you just said?”

### ***Some things can be partially true.***

Far too often as Christians, we try to show all the flaws in other religions. We don’t need to do that. Nothing is wrong with admitting that other religions get some things right. C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*

If you are an atheist you do have to believe that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake. If you are a

Christian, you are free to think that all those religions, even the queerest ones, contain at least some hint of truth ... Being a Christian does mean that where Christianity differs from other religions, Christianity is right and they are wrong.<sup>2</sup>

When conceding that another religion contains some truth, we can add the single-word question, *So?*

Someone may tell you, for example, that Buddhists are right about the reality of a spiritual realm and that we should be more aware of the unseen universe. You can say, "I agree," and then add lovingly, not sarcastically, "So?"

Surprised that you didn't attack Buddhism defensively, she might or might not see your point. You can clarify by adding, "Buddhism is right that there's a spiritual realm. But there's a whole lot more to finding faith. We need one that meets all our needs. We can almost expect every religion to contain some truth; the question is to find the one that gets it *all* right. I have a lot of unanswered questions about Buddhism. Have you studied it much?" From there, the conversation can progress past the level of cliché and into substance.

***Some things might be true.*** "Isn't it possible?" may be one of the most important ways to begin a question. It helps people consider that something might be true so that eventually they can accept it as

truth. Some of the applications of this phrase might sound like:

Isn't it possible that there is a god who exists somewhere but he's beyond your level of knowledge right now? You wouldn't say that you've got all knowledge, right? Isn't it possible that you could find out something tomorrow that would make a belief in God at least worth

## **If we don't really listen to people's answers, the questioning form of evangelism will yield frustration, not fruit.**

considering?

Isn't it possible that Jesus did rise from the dead?

Isn't it possible that there really is only one right way to get to God?

***We can know the truth.*** One of the most powerful questions for unearthing non-believers' underlying assumptions is "How do you know that?" Philosophers call this aspect of truth—how we know what we know—"epistemology." Asking people "How do you know that?" might get you a blank stare or a dirty look in response. Few people have ever thought on this level. Getting

them to realize they don't know why they believe what they do is in itself a victory.

### **The Importance of Really Listening to Their Answers**

My dentist drives me crazy. He asks the most thought-provoking, debate-inducing questions right as he puts sharp, pointed objects into my mouth. "So, what's the real solution for the Palestinian problem?" Or, "Aren't all religions basically the same?"

I want to respond every time. But my attempts have always been muffled by his hands in my mouth and that noisy suction thing he uses to remove excess saliva. The sign in his waiting room serves as his motto, as well as a warning: "Blessed are those who engage in lively conversation with the helplessly mute, for they shall be called dentists."

If we don't really listen to people's answers, the questioning form of evangelism can quickly come to resemble interactions between my dentist and me. One side posits a question, not really expecting an answer or listening for a response. The other side sits frustrated, not really getting to answer or expecting to be heard. Perhaps we don't listen because we don't think we must. After all, we have the truth! What can some unsaved, unregenerate, unenlightened target for conversion have to say? Gracious listening flows from a heart that has been humbled, stilled and transformed by the power of grace. Listening is simply a form of serving, of

putting the other person first, as Philippians 2 implores us. It requires an inner concern for the person more than on outward practice of techniques. Responding in a knee-jerk reaction to what the other person says, being too quick to refute, or showing dissatisfaction through facial expressions and body language shows lack of concern for what a non-believer is trying to say. It's incredible that so many Christians think that such behavior actually pleases God and wins disciples.

The next time a you and a coworker, family member, or friend talk about God and spiritual issues, try using a method Jesus had mastered

and used so effectively—rabbinic questioning. Answering a question with a question has significant advantages over using direct answers. It brings to the surface the questioner's assumptions. It also takes the pressure off you—the one being asked—and puts the pressure on the one doing the asking. Shifting the burden of the response is important because as long as we remain on the defensive, the questioners are not really wrestling with issues. They're just watching us squirm. And that hasn't ever made converts.

**Notes:**

1. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York:

HarperCollins, 2001), 35.

2. Moishe Rosen, *Share the New Life with a Jew* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 47.

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*Randy Newman is a full time staff member of Campus Crusade for Christ, where he has worked for more than twenty years, teaching seminars at a variety of locations from college campuses to the Pentagon.*



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## A Conversation with John Beckett

*John Beckett is the Chairman of the Beckett Companies in Ohio, and the author of Loving Monday, a faith in business book that has been translated into a dozen languages. Recently, Mr. Beckett visited Regent University for some Q-and-A with students and faculty. This article is an excerpt from that conversation*

### What does it mean for an individual to be successful, from God's perspective?

Too often, we focus on success relative to what other people are doing. But we shouldn't because it creates this sort of problem. Suppose that you made it to the Olympics to compete in the 400 meter race. And suppose that your preliminary heat was good enough to get you into the finals. At that race, the crowd is cheering and your adrenaline is pumping and you beat your own personal best time by two-tenths of a second. Unbelievable! But guess what. The guy in the next lane comes in ahead of you. Were you successful?

You see, we have this comparison thing going on that can be very destructive to individual

accomplishment. And I think that's probably one of the reasons that scripture admonishes us not to compare ourselves with one another.

### The most powerful gyroscope for an organization is what the leader does.

Here's another example: I was up on the MIT campus earlier this year, actually both MIT and Harvard, to speak with some of the students. A campus ministry leader surprised me by saying that one of the things she does on behalf on the students is to visit the psychiatric wards. Why is a campus minister going to the psychiatric wards in Boston? She is going to visit students who have gone over the edge. And why are they going over the edge? In several cases these are Asian students whose parents expected them to be number one in their class. They were pushing themselves to such a level of expectation that they cracked. What a cruel thing

to be measured in those kinds of terms.

So we need a definition of "success" that's not relativistic. I was thinking about that on the plane to Regent. And this is not a perfect answer, but I'd define success as "consistently achieving realistic goals without compromising personal standards or neglecting important relationships or priorities." What I've sought to do with this definition is to have a balance. Setting goals is good. We are energized and motivated by setting goals, but they need to be realistic goals. Don't go out of this room saying "I'm going to jump to the moon." It's not going to happen. Instead, set realistic goals. In doing so, and without compromising personal standards, you can accomplish all kinds of incredible things. But if you set unrealistic goals or set your standards aside, you'll likely pay a heavy price for it in the long run, especially in your relationships.

This is very relevant for those of us in business. I'd say the number one issue that believers in business leadership are grappling with is this apparent trade off between work priorities and family priorities. They



just have this gut feeling that they are neglecting their families and in many cases, they are. So we have to be careful of that. We have to realize that whether it's our relationship with family or our relationship with God or our community, we need to keep our priorities straight if we truly desire "success."

**What I'm hearing is that success is a relative term that depends on your benchmark. I'm also hearing that there are appropriate and inappropriate benchmarks to use. An appropriate one, it seems, is to define success based on what God thinks, not what people think. But how, then, do you hear from God so that you can pursue his will and be successful in his eyes?**

One of the most helpful things I've heard about hearing God is the concept of "the three harbor lights." If a ship is coming into a harbor, there are lights along the channel. If you are on course, those lights will line up and appear to be one. If you see multiple lights, you're off target. The ship's captain will then re-position the ship so that the lights appear to be one. The analogy to spiritual guidance is that if we can

get "three lights" lining up in our discernment process, we may in fact know God's will.

The first of these lights is the Word of God. If scripture tells us to do

**To me, success is consistently achieving realistic goals, without compromising personal standards or neglecting important relationships and priorities.**

something or at least does not prohibit it, then we may have a clue when making a decision. The second light is the witness of the Holy Spirit. It is more subjective than Biblical truth, but just as real, and if we subscribe to the idea that the Holy Spirit wants to guide and lead us throughout every aspect of our lives, then we have to seek the Spirit's inner peace about a decision. The third light is circumstance. God will work through and speak to us through our circumstances,

but that should never be the sole source of guidance because that could be misleading. If God opens a door that aligns with his Word and the Spirit's prompting, though, then the lights are in alignment.

Another way to think about hearing God comes directly out of scripture—the concept of two or more witnesses. Now that may be two or more people speaking consistently to us, or it may be two events that happen to line up. I'll bet that for most people in this room, even over the past 48 hours, there was probably a time that you thought "I have the mind of the Lord on this because of this confirmation."

And lastly I would just say what might be obvious to you, but it's essential: Please, never underestimate the importance of prayer. God will speak during our times of prayer and when we earnestly listen for his voice.

**Companies have had so many problems in recent years ensuring ethical decision-making of their employees. How can we manage our organizations so that our people will consistently act with integrity?**

There's probably no more powerful gyroscope for an

organization than what the leader does because, let's face it, it's just like parents and kids. It's not what we say, it's what we do that people are watching and emulating all the time. It's a bit scary, actually. A leader doesn't have to stray very far to move a whole organization off balance. Little things are very important.

It's also important to articulate specifically what your standards or values are, but then, how do you incorporate them into your organization? That's the question of the hour when it comes to the administration of ethics. I'll tell you in my own case, we settled some years ago on three core values: excellence, integrity and a profound respect for the individual. They've served us very well. But I'll tell you that they are almost *identical* to the ones that Enron had. Almost identical! And when that story broke, it was a real sobering reminder for me that it's not what you've got up on the walls, it's what you've got in people's hearts.

So, we've taken that on as a challenge in our organization. How do you work your core values into the DNA of the organization? First of all, I'm not sure that you ever fully get there. But one of

the creative things that we did is to take the question back to our own people. We said, "these are the things we want to stand for. Would you help us figure out how we can work this right into the fabric of the company?" We put people in teams, gave them a modest budget,

## How do you work your core values into the DNA of the organization? That is the question of the hour.

and it was amazing what they came up with. I showed up to work one morning and all the name badges had our core values on them. I came in another day and everyone was wearing a t-shirt with the core values across the back. I came in another day and they had a banner all the way across the plant to let the world know that we were committed to these core values. Then they put headers on our emails that stated our core values. And so I saw this generating a real excitement in our people.

But the ultimate test is when problems come up that implicate those values. Are you going to adhere to them or are you going to set

them aside? This was the Enron situation. They had the values, but they set them aside. It's those crisis situations where everybody is looking that you *really* decide what your priorities are. As you do that, your decision becomes part of the ethos of the organization and your employees are going to remember it. They remember things like the time you shut your whole factory down because you weren't producing excellent product—and then you had to go to your customers and tell them: "I'm sorry. We can't ship today because our products aren't up to snuff."

Those decisions leave deep, lasting impressions. People say, "Gee, they mean what they are talking about." And then they tend to emulate your behavior.

**You're talking about humility—listening to your people, giving them a budget, accepting their suggestions, relinquishing control. A lot has been said about the importance of humility in business over the last couple of years, from Jim Collins and others. What do you look for to assess humility in your current and prospective leaders?**

One of the things I look for is in our leaders is whether they are zealous to get the

credit for themselves, or whether instead, they easily defer to other people and try to bring other people along. This is really a gauge of pride. Do they always have to be right? Are they able to admit that they are wrong?

It's to me it was fascinating that Collins identified this so clearly, because again, it is not typical of the image of the hard-driving, proud, successful business leader. In fact, I went back to Collins' book and I wrote down the terms that were used by others when they were describing the leaders they admired. Listen to this list: Admired leaders are

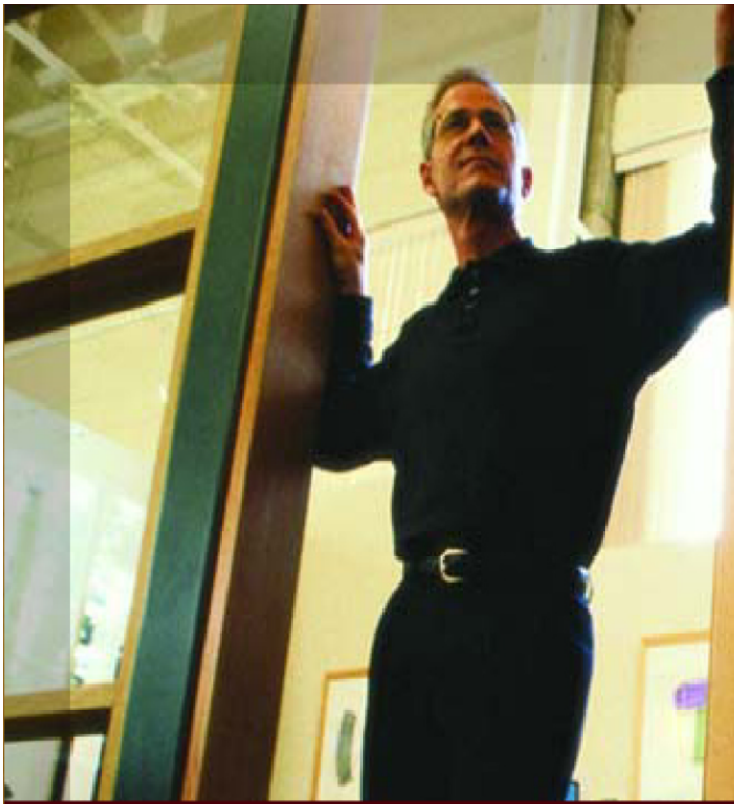
quiet, humble, modest, reserved, shy, gracious, mild-mannered, self-effacing, and understated. What an interesting list of attributes for the significant business leader!

### **How do you deal with disappointment and failure?**

I think it is important that we deal with failure in a scriptural way—and that is to repent and go on. Every great leader has a litany of areas where he or she has failed along the way. But the difference is that these

leaders re-focused, they got up and persevered.

But sometimes we let failure lead to an unrelenting introspection that casts a pall over the other people you work with and your family. It is extremely debilitating and I would go so far as to say that reaction to personal failure could actually bring down an organization. So your question is an extremely good one and an important one. I think God provides for us the way to deal with mistakes and failure. If you can embrace his approach, it is one of the most liberating aspects of the gospel.



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