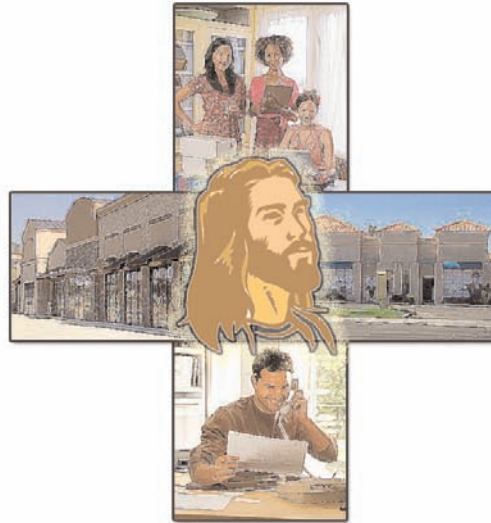


# Operating A Small Business-Ministry To Extend God's Kingdom

Followers of Jesus Prayerfully Discovering A Need  
and Establishing A Christ-centered Business-Ministry To Meet It

## Lesson 3

### Your Business As A Ministry



### Ministering From Your Business

*A business* discovers what people need  
and seeks to make a profit through meeting that need.

*A ministry* encounters a need and seeks to alleviate it  
through compassion and relief.

*A business-ministry* serves our Father through discovering needs and establishing  
a profit-making enterprise that helps His children provide for themselves.



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## The Guiding Principles of a Christ-centered Business-Ministry

*“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”* (Matthew 6:33)

*“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets”* (Matthew 7:12)

### Lesson 3

## A Business-Ministry Owner Whose Lord Is Jesus

*“Seek first His kingdom  
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A *business-ministry* is generally initiated when God reveals to someone a need he or she could meet through that business-ministry as well as obtain God’s provision by it. While meeting a need may be the catalyst for starting the business-ministry, the most important foundation for the owner(s) is to establish the biblical basis for *why* they’re in business.

God is primarily interested in the *motive of your heart*. In our previous lesson we noted the difference between the orthodox farmer and the orthopractic one: The latter was stirred to obedience by the *love and concern of God* in his heart.

As with the vineyard owner of the parable, any Jesus follower who would conduct a business-ministry needs to align his or her motives with those which please God. That’s not easy, since the sin nature inclines us to please ourselves instead:

- *“All a man’s ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the LORD”* (Proverbs 16:2).

- *“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God”* (James 4:3,4).

In order to determine which particular Scriptures will guide the goals and methods of your business-ministry,

prayerfully consider the ones you believe Lord Jesus would use if He were you. Especially search His Word to establish *why* you are operating your business-ministry. Certain verses such as Matthew 6:33 point to *“the vertical dimension”*; these center around your devotion to your Lord and to your determination by His Spirit to seek and extend His Kingdom, bringing glory to the Father.

Other passages represent *“the horizontal dimension”*; these will guide you in the way you conduct your business-ministry, such as how you treat and serve your employees as well as your customers. “Horizontal” verses will also guide you in how to handle the resources God entrusts to you, and how to carry out your business practices in complete honesty.

God knows your heart motives will determine your actions. That’s why He calls for wholehearted intensity in your “vertical” goals. He has graciously made known to you the commands that will guide you along His path as you walk wholeheartedly in accord with His indwelling Spirit.

Because of God’s righteous jealousy for your love, He doesn’t want you or your business-ministry to be compromised by anything that’s contrary to His Word. Mixing earthly motives with vertical goals results in *spiritual adultery* from His perspective.

The passages below describe the fervor you need in your heart to make sure you don’t allow worldly goals to deter you from serving His purposes for your life as well as your business-ministry:

*“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where*

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*thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, **there your heart will be also***” (Matthew 6:19-21).

“*Do not work for food that spoils, but for **food that endures to eternal life**, which the Son of Man will give you. On Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval*” (John 6:27).

Think of your *treasure in heaven* as the souls of people who might have been lost for eternity if you hadn't done your part in the Kingdom out of love for your Lord! When you as the owner of a business-ministry are guided by our Lord's motives, you have a powerful opportunity to touch the lives of those who have yet to enter His fold. In essence, when His motives are your motives you see people through the eyes of Jesus. And like the vineyard owner, you're able to help the less fortunate praise God by helping them provide for themselves through honest labor.

### God's Commands For Business-ministry Owners Are Timeless

The common thread among successful business people is that they're always on the lookout for opportunities. They have a keen eye for the best, most efficient ways to do things. But few however, even within Christendom, focus on the real source to success: *God's blessings*. From His standpoint, there is no higher goal for a business-ministry owner than to make Christ known and to extend His Kingdom through his or her efforts.

Conducting business for the glory of God and according to His Word may seem naive in this slick, advertisement-influenced society. But, trying to run a business *without* His guidance and blessing is futile.

God always has His ways of prospering those who live valiantly for Him even in the most difficult and harsh circumstances. Their souls can remain steadfast for however long it takes for Him to intervene (Isaiah 26:3)! Think of how Joseph and Daniel were lifted up in heathen nations as they remained courageous for God. Daniel served four different kings. That was no small feat for a Jew in a heathen empire that worshiped false gods.

Consider the first business people who followed Jesus as their Lord in decidedly pagan societies. For instance, try to picture yourself in Corinth, Tyre or Athens:

Many business owners who followed Jesus were scattered throughout nations where people worked seven days a week. Jesus followers, however, worked six days and observed a Sabbath day of rest.

- Don't you think God honored their obedience to set apart that day of rest by making sure they prospered the other six days?
- Don't you think the unbelieving business owners started asking the followers of Jesus about the reason for their success despite their shorter labor?
- Don't you think *other Biblical commands* about business practices surfaced during these conversations, such as how God would have them treat employees or conduct themselves honestly?
- Should it be any different today for business owners who follow Jesus? No! They should be on the frontlines for the sake of making Jesus known, role modeling God's Word as a way of life. Then, as He has so often, He may bless them in front of the world and prompt inquiry (1 Peter 3:15).

Keep in mind that it wasn't until the *3rd century* that the books of the Newer Testament were universally accepted in

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Christendom. So how were the earliest followers of Jesus guided in their business practices? Two passages in the Newer Testament offer a clue. The first is a public proclamation by Jesus pointing to how people would learn to become His followers:

“*Whoever trusts in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.*’ By this He meant **the Spirit, whom those who trusted in Him were later to receive.** Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified” (John 7:38,39).

The only Scripture in existence when Jesus spoke these words was the *Hebrew Bible*, the Older Testament. The “*streams of living water*” were the *undeniable evidence* of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling in anyone who trusts in Jesus as Lord of their life. If you want to trust Jesus “*as the Scripture has said,*” you must study the Hebrew Bible to discern the complete Gospel and God’s parameters of repentance, love, and determined trust. Those who first put their trust in Him knew from the Hebrew text that He indeed was the prophesied Messiah.

[For more on the Gospel found in the Older Testament, download a free copy of our article, *The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*:

<<http://www.restorationministries.org/pdf/hebraicArticles/GospOfCov.pdf>>]

Almost all of the Newer Testament writers cite the Older Testament as the basis for the truths they share. For example, Matthew refers to the Hebrew text 55 times in his gospel account. There’s an important reason for them to use the Older Testament in their writing, one that has significant ramifications for business-ministry owners as they estab-

lish their goals and practices on a biblical foundation. Keep in mind that the Newer Testament points back to the Older as the source for how one should live a life that pleases God in doing His will:

“*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work*” (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Again, Paul understood “Scripture” to be the *Older Testament*, prophetically inspired and recorded according to the Spirit. God’s truth is timeless and His commands are practical expressions of a loving God to His people. Every command demonstrates a way to love either God or one another! Therefore His commands are *not* burdensome. But neither do they justify us as righteous in His sight since only the sacrifice of Jesus can do that. Rather, through His Spirit our Father empowers His children to *love Him* and to *love one another* in very do-able ways—through *every good work we do*.

Our God wants ALL of His Word applied to our *way of life*—in our homes, our faith communities and our business-ministries. There’s a profound reason that Jesus followers distinguish themselves from the world by the *way* they live. Jesus called Himself “*the Way*” (John 14:6). In the Book of Acts those who trusted Him followed “*the Way*”; they built their faith practices on the Law and the Prophets:

“*However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets*” (Acts 24:14).

This use of the term “*the way*” has a very distinct Hebraic importance known as *halakhah*. The root word, *halak*, means

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“to walk.” Hence, *halakhah* refers to walking out your life in a way that demonstrates applications of God’s Word. Each *halakhah* that you establish from God’s Word becomes a principle of motive and character that guides you. The various *halakhahs* you establish for your business-ministry represent foundational character qualities for you and your employees as you conduct your business. We’ll discuss more about biblical applications in a later lesson.

Both Testaments present four major points that owners need to pay close attention to:

1. God does not want owners to treat people in a way they wouldn’t want to be treated themselves.
2. God does not want owners to feed greed.
3. God does not want owners to misinterpret the reason for their success.
4. God does not want owners to misunderstand when and why He causes them to fail or do poorly.

### **1. God does not want owners to treat people in a way they wouldn’t want to be treated themselves.**

Jesus captures all the Older and Newer Testament commands in one directive:

“So in EVERYTHING, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

This single statement is the foundation to the laws that protect us in our legal system. Laws are established to *ensure domestic tranquility*—so we don’t do something to others that we wouldn’t want done to ourselves. It is also known as the “Golden Rule.” Everything recounted in the Law and the Prophets is

summed up in how we treat others. And, Jesus commands us to make this interpersonal responsibility the guiding principle in our personal lives and our business practices. Six hundred thirteen commands are found in the Older Testament, and 1,050 in the Newer Testament. The great majority, particularly in the Newer Testament, specify what our God requires of His people as we *deal with others*. And, underlying all these commands is the summary principle in Matthew 7:12.

Treating others the way you want them to treat you is the primary means by which an owner in Christ represents the reputation of our Lord. Sad to say, too many who claim to be “Christian” have spent little time searching out God’s commands for the goals, values and methods He prescribes for them in their business practices.

Whether through ignorance or rebellion, many business owners treat employees (and customers for that matter) in ways they’d hate to be treated themselves. And few avail themselves of the great opportunity to instill biblical character qualities in their employees.

Specific applications (*halakhahs*) from the book of Proverbs can be drawn to guide a business owner in upholding God’s reputation as well as applying the “Golden Rule”. For example,

“The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are His delight” (Proverbs 11:1).

“Honest scales and balances are from the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of His making” (Proverbs 16:11).

If you’re an owner, how might you apply these verses to your business-ministry? So many more examples of God’s character and wisdom are found in both Testaments to demonstrate how your

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character and business principles can truly represent Him. Out of loving, obedient trust you'll want to practice these so that God will bless your endeavor.

- If you sell products, make sure the quality is what you would buy for yourself.
- If you are operating a service business, make sure the quality of your work is what you'd want for yourself and would please God.

### 2. God does not want owners to feed greed.

The vineyard owner whom Jesus cites (Matthew 20) as an example of what the Kingdom of heaven is like was able to draw righteous motives and actions from the Hebrew Scriptures. He had no doubt that *mercy and compassion* far outweighed the greed and selfishness that drive so many others in their businesses:

*“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God”* (Leviticus 19:9,10).

Owning a business-ministry and being blessed by God is all based on heart motive. Father has indwelled His own with His Spirit; this means a business-ministry owner in Christ can access not only His way of doing business but also His power to carry it out. That's why it's so essential for owners to both search out God's ways in His Word *and* reveal His Kingdom as they put into action biblically-based goals and practices. Jesus used the account of the vineyard owner to *reveal the owner's motives* that aligned with God's commands in the Older Testament about His concern for people,

and to demonstrate what obedience to those commands looked like when applied to life experience. The Apostle John captures this Divine concern that leads to compassionate response:

*“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to **lay down our lives for our brothers**. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the **love of God** be in him? Dear children, let us not **love** with words or tongue but **with actions and in truth**”* (1 John 3:18; see also Proverbs 3:27,28, James 2:14-17).

If you're not perceiving your business as God's means to reveal His compassionate concern for people, then you're making yourself vulnerable to greed, self-idolatry and hypocrisy. You've become an idol to yourself when you can't respond to others' needs without first wondering what your response will take away from your own larder. Add hypocrisy to stinginess when you call yourself a Christian but fail to meet a legitimate need when it's in your power to do so!

Profits aren't your problem; it's *how you perceive them* that leads to a multitude of sorrows. The Bible strongly warns owners about loving what money can buy and putting trust in what your own hands have achieved:

*“For the **love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, **eager for money**, have **wandered from the faith** and pierced themselves with many griefs”* (1 Timothy 6:10).

*“Keep your lives **free from the love of money** and **be content with what you have**, because **God has said**, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’”* (Hebrews 13:5; see also Proverbs 28:22).

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Business owners who place a higher value on their money than they do on individuals made in the image of God will have few qualms about violating God’s concern for employee welfare. Out of loving compassion for workers God warned through James against the temptation that wealth dangles before those who take advantage of their employees:

*“Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter”* (James 5:1-5).

Doesn’t this greed-driven indifference to the plight of workers sound like recent headlines? The welfare of people is always our loving and compassionate God’s first concern. He is the definition of justice, and greed is NEVER just! Kingdom-minded owners represent our Father’s awareness that everyone needs their daily provision, and employees who see His hand in their employer’s heart will praise Him for it.

We noted earlier that the Hebrew word for work and worship is the same: *avodah*. True worship of God is expressed as you experience joy in your labor, since in His sovereign plan He’s given you that work to do. Your joy as an owner reveals you’re grateful to God for the purpose and meaning you experience in both caring for your employees and customers and in the livelihood He has provided.

### 3. God does not want owners to misinterpret the reason for their success.

In the midst of running a business it’s so easy for owners to disregard God’s perspective of how His Word applies to their business. Hellenist thought has played a large part in this disconnect between business and spiritual life. It’s important that owners today seriously consider God’s warning to the Israelites:

*“Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws and His decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, Who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery... But remember the LORD your God, for it is He Who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today”* (Deuteronomy 8:11-14,18).

There are always consequences whenever anyone, ancient Israelite or contemporary business owner, forgets that it is GOD who gives success! When owners relegate to second place (or even discount) God’s concern for people and the primary call to seek first His Kingdom, they’ll readily stumble into the pit of giving *themselves* credit for their prosperity. Those who have God’s heart and mind about their business-ministry, however, will see Him at work on their behalf as a way of confirming His Covenant with them.

The earliest followers of Jesus clearly understood that God *establishes covenants* with His people. The word covenant implies “*living in union with another*”

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er.” Through Jesus a new Covenant has been offered to mankind. Your life in Jesus is an *ongoing pilgrimage with Him on earth* until the time when your name is read aloud before the host of heaven. As a business-ministry owner you have the opportunity to role model what it means to *walk in union* with your heavenly Father through the Spirit of Christ in you. Through that intimate relationship others will see that it’s HE you reflect in your business practices, not you. And He will affirm His Covenant with you by prospering your labors according to His purposes and plans for you.

If you’re going to experience God’s blessing, your personal life and business practices need biblical foundations that reveal a way of life that brings glory to our Father and Jesus. Your part in His Kingdom calls for you to bear witness to your employees and customers of your reliance on and gratefulness for His faithfulness.

Remember, the Hebraic Restoration is our Father’s invitation for His people to live in Covenant union with Him as we place our trust in Lord Jesus and walk in obedience according to His Spirit and His commands. He desires *relational oneness* with each of His own, an intimacy that’s mirrored between a loving husband and wife.

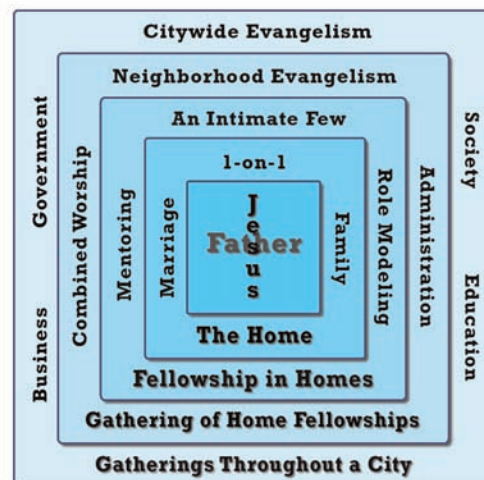
Our Father is also seeking trusting, childlike dependence on Him from each of His own: *“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 18:3). It may be hard if you’re a business owner who’s expected to ‘have it all together’ to see your position as one of role modeling childlike trust in our Father and depending wholly on Him. But with His Spirit and grace, it’s possible!

#### 4. God does not want owners to misunderstand when and why He causes them to fail or do poorly.

Many in Christendom start businesses for reasons that either don’t align with God’s commands or are even forbidden in His Word. Others don’t give His ways a second thought because they have no idea how His commands in the Bible would apply to their business practices. And those who neglect putting His Word into practice in their personal lives are unlikely to do so in their business. The results of an owner’s disregard for God’s ways are painful: greed-driven striving for wealth, and mistreatment of employees, customers, and vendors.

While we were living outside Jerusalem our Father made clear to us the Hebraic foundations He was restoring. He gave us a visual illustration of His *relational priorities* for His children (diagram below). Starting with the center of the diagram as THE foremost relationship—with *our Father and Jesus*—the importance of the other relationships decreases as you go toward the outside of the diagram.

Picture the diagram like a layer cake. The first and foremost layer is your relationship with our Father and His Son, Jesus. As you proceed outward from the





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center, each relationship is dependent on the quality of the relationship of those closer to the center. In other words, the depth and quality of your relationship with our Father and Jesus impacts the relationships in your home, which affects the relationships in your home fellowship family, and so forth.

The inner three rings, our *Father and Jesus*, the *Home*, and *Fellowship in Homes* are the core relationships in which relational intimacy is experienced as extended spiritual family. These are the primary areas of relationship that the first followers of Jesus experienced as they had all things in common and met in homes, and God prospered them by adding to their numbers (Acts 2:44-47).

The outer two rings involve administration and coordination. When the inner three priorities are healthy in the way God intends, the outer two relational rings are effective in fulfilling our Lord's broader purposes.

You'll notice that **business** is in the outer ring. Many owners fail to realize that negative conditions they experience in their businesses are often God's way of getting their attention about spiritual and emotional difficulties in relationships in the inner three rings.

About a year after our return from Israel, a national ministry to business owners asked us to consult with them. Their focus was on helping struggling business owners develop “successful” business practices. Their ministry hadn't been all that successful itself, however, even with many qualified ex-businessmen ministering. We requested that the ministry ask each married owner whose business was doing poorly if he also had problems in his marriage.

A few weeks later we were called into the ministry and told that ALL of these owners had marriage problems. We strongly suggested to the ministry that God was using the business problems to refocus these owners

on the needs in the higher priority relationships toward the center of the diagram, especially their spouse. The ministry began to do this, but shortly after there was a backlash. The owners told the ministry to focus only on business problems and not their marriages. Many of the businesses later failed.

It's essential that our God and His ways be your foremost consideration if you operate a business-ministry. He's more concerned with His children reaching the lost through business-ministries than with what goes on inside a “church building.” And, seeking His Kingdom *throughout the week* is something that's intricately linked with His heart: *avodah*, work and worship.

#### Questions to Consider and Discuss

- **Describe in your own words what you think Jesus means when He tells you, “Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”**
- **Describe in your own words what you think Jesus means when He tells you, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21).**
- **What is your view of the Older Testament? How important is it to your faith walk as a follower of Jesus?**
- **Do those who know you well see you as a person who treats others as you would want to be treated? Ask them...**
- **Describe how you see God's involvement in both your life successes and failures. Share an example of each.**