

BUSINESS
1 Timothy 5:8
By Raymond White

The Christian faith demands that a Christian not only be right with God but also right with the world, not only living a sin-free life preparing to live with God but also contributing something while you're living here — being useful, giving more than you take, or to be blunt about it, have a job or business and be productive. Then you can be a blessing to your employer, to your family, and to society as a whole.

[1] PERSONAL

1 Timothy 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

But this invites the question, just how is one to be productive and provide for his own? One answer is to do what you do well and earn a living from it. And if you accomplish that, then you have a business.

The Bible has a lot to say about money and wealth, but it also has some things to say about business. So without further ado, let's focus down and see what the Bible has to say about how we are to conduct our business activities.

[2] NATIONAL

2 Chronicles 17:13 And he [Jehoshaphat] had much business in the cities of Judah.

Jehoshaphat was a good king of Judah, not only because he led his people to righteousness but also because he encouraged good commerce. He was a businessman, and under him the entire nation prospered.

[3] ADVICE

2 Chronicles 18:7 And the king of Israel [Ahab] said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah.

Ahab was a bad king of Israel. One of his failings was that he never listened to anyone who gave good advice. He was getting good advice but wouldn't accept it.

If the only people you listen to are your kiss-up yes-men, you're in trouble. Ahab wanted the prophet Micaiah to be a yes-man, "tell me what I want to hear." It's easy to find people who will agree with you because everyone wants to be popular. But the people who think you are about to make a mistake, and can tell you why, and are brave enough to say so, those are the people you need most on your team. Before you proceed with a major plan, yes you need approval from wise advisors, but you need some contrary advice as well, for perspective if nothing else.

[4] TRAVEL

***Psalms 107:23** They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; **:24** These see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep. **:25** For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. **:26** They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. **:27** They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. **:28** They cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. **:29** He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. **:30** Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.*

Business and commerce very often rely on travel, and specifically in this verse, sea travel. Sailors know that when they go to sea, they put their lives at risk. They are subject to the whims of the weather, of fate, and of God. And every seasoned sailor knows there are times when there is nothing more to be done except pray. There is this saying, "Ships are safest when they are in the harbor, but that's not what ships are for."

It's all about risk. Every meaningful endeavor requires risk. Whether it's storms at sea, or volatile stock markets, or bad tenants, or fickle customers, a successful business requires successful risk management, and that amounts to correctly answering this question: "If things go wrong, how do I escape?" Ships do not expect to sink, but they still have lifeboats. Airplanes do not expect to crash, but they have black boxes.

[5] HARD WORK

***Psalms 126:5** They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*

Hard work pays off. But not just any hard work, but smart hard work, doing something that actually matters.

A friend, Steve, once told me that he really would like to be a high school band leader. I said, well do that. He said, but it will take four more years of college. I said, but if you don't do it, the four years will go by anyway and you'll have nothing to show for it. We met again a decade later and he reminded me of the advice I gave him. He took the advice, returned to school, graduated, and became a high school marching band leader. He said, "This is so much fun, I can't imagine why they pay me to do this. Thank you."

That's what the verse says: sow in tears, reap in joy. When a farmer faces the summer, he knows the summer will pass whether he plants or not. So might as well suck it up and plant.

[6] NEGOTIATION

***Proverbs 20:14** It is nought, it is naught, saith the buyer: but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.*

This is the art of negotiation. When you are haggling a best price, you say, “What, that little item?” to get the price down. But when the trade is done, you go to your friends and say, “Look at what a great deal I got!” Fair enough.

Here is a rule of negotiation: He who wants the deal most, loses.

A customer brought an old violin into a shop wanting to sell it. The shop owner said, “These old fiddles aren’t worth very much.” The customer asked, “What’s the difference between a violin and a fiddle?” The shop owner answered, “If you’re buying it from me, it’s a violin. If I’m buying it from you, it’s a fiddle.”

[7] CREDIT

Proverbs 20:16 Take his garment that is surety for a stranger: and take a pledge of him for a strange woman.

You don’t know a stranger, so if you are going to lend him money, you’d better get some surety. Basically, don’t be so trusting. The *strange woman* may mean foreign woman or it may mean harlot. Either way, if someone is trying to get a loan from you for someone else, and the more distant or strange that someone else is, the more you should insist on some surety.

[8] CONNECTIONS

Proverbs 22:29 Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.

A successful businessman can choose the company he keeps. He can hang with politicians if he wants, he doesn’t have to put up with lower classes.

[9] INTEGRITY

Proverbs 24:8 He that deviseth to do evil shall be called a mischievous person.

What goes around comes around. The crooked businessman thinks he gets away with it, but what he doesn’t know is that his cheated customers are not stupid and news travels fast, and very soon the crooked businessman has no customers and wonders why.

[10] PERSEVERANCE

Proverbs 24:10 If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.

Hang in there. Don’t give up too soon. Failure is always sad. But failure because you just didn’t stay with it long enough to see if you would have succeeded, that’s really sad. Thomas Edison said, “Many of life’s failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.” Don’t let that be you. Sometimes it is just one more try that is the difference between success and failure.

[11] SOMETIMES GIVE UP

Ecclesiastes 3:6 ...a time to lose.

No businessman wants to lose. But understand, sooner or later it will happen. There are two things that are really important here. The first is knowing when to cut your losses. There is no point in staying with the sinking ship all the way to the ocean floor. The second is what you do *after* you lose. Remember that Abraham Lincoln really did lose eight elections and failed in business twice before he became president.

[12] DELEGATION

Ecclesiastes 4:9 Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. :10 For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. :11 Again, if two lie together, they they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? :12 And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Teamwork pays off. That's why companies hire people. Dividing the workload improves efficiency. If that were not true, there'd be no jobs for anybody

[13] BEST EFFORT

Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Any honest work is good work. Get on with it. Work hard and work well. Someone said, "You don't need rest, you'll get plenty of rest when you're dead." That echoes the sentiment of this verse.

[14] DOING THE RIGHT THING

Ecclesiastes 9:14 There was a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it. :15 Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.

Life isn't fair. Just because you're the hero doesn't mean you'll be rewarded. Wealth comes from good business not from good behavior. No one did more good than Jesus but he had *nowhere to lay his head* and they killed him. This is just a streetwise reality check. This reality, however, makes the hero even more heroic because he never has an ulterior motive. But do keep your objectives separate: be a hero, yes, but also be successful. They're two different things. Sometimes you do a thing, not because of any profit you expect, but just because it's the right thing to do even if it costs you greatly.

[15] PREPERATION

Ecclesiastes 10:10 If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.

This is common sense. Just because a task is difficult, doesn't mean it is impossible. You may just have to put more effort into it. If you think about it, you'll come up with a solution. But maybe the solution is to back off a bit and sharpen your tools. For example, maybe finishing college is the smart thing to do, so you don't have to work quite so hard for the same result.

Luke 14:28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? :29 Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, :30 Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

When you begin a big project but didn't count the real cost, you will fail to complete. And people will laugh at you. But banks don't laugh, they just foreclose. Like the old carpenter saying, "Measure twice, cut once," you need to know the real cost of a project, not what you imagine it will be but what you know it will be.

[16] CHANGE

Acts 19:27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at naught...

The silversmiths of Ephesus found that their jobs in jeopardy. With the coming of Christianity, no one had any further need to buy their idols and so their business dried up.

The way they responded to that was they got hostile about it. Instead of getting hostile about it, what they should have done was found new services to provide: furniture, silverware, vases, something that people actually wanted. They needed to get over hocking silver gods that nobody wanted and were useless anyway. They had options. But they preferred to get mad and that got them nowhere.

[17] IS BUSINESS EVER EVIL?

Some businesses are evil and criminal by their very nature. Examples are drug trafficking, prostitution, slavery, internet thievery, and I would put the entire abortion industry in that category. Anything that hurts people is evil. Someone once said, "There's never a right way to do a wrong thing."

For some reason, God got upset with Judah about some of their businesses.

Ezekiel 28:16 By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned...:18 Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thin iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick [commerce]...

This text does not reveal to us just what upset God about their business dealings or the wealth they accumulated, but we can surmise some possibilities.

There are, as I said, criminal businesses. But besides those, there are many legitimate businesses which are not evil by their nature but become evil by their conduct. Here are some familiar examples. There's dumping toxic waste into rivers. There's releasing hazardous pollutants into the atmosphere. There are dangerous toys that harm children. There are pharmaceuticals that make drugs with dangerous undisclosed side effects. There's selling improper or flawed investments. There's insider trading and dumping losing stocks on an unsuspecting public. There are so many ways that good businesses can do bad things that it's impossible to list them all. In theory, it is the government's job to protect the public from such shenanigans, but in practice the government has shown itself to be the biggest crook of all.

But even if businesses conduct themselves with utmost integrity, there is still the matter of unmitigated greed. Multi-billionaires just keep multiplying their wealth, essentially "running up the score," and it's no wonder that ordinary people finally get mad and the French Revolution starts to make sense — at some point, the unfairness gets so egregious that the rank and file citizens just want to chop off heads. I'm not suggesting revolution, I'm just saying that ordinary people expect and deserve a fair deal, and if enough ordinary people continue to get screwed over by unconscionable business and unconscionable government, bad things happen. It is government's job to level the playing field somewhat, or if not that, at least eliminate dishonest business practices. Of course that's easier said than done, but that's the idea.