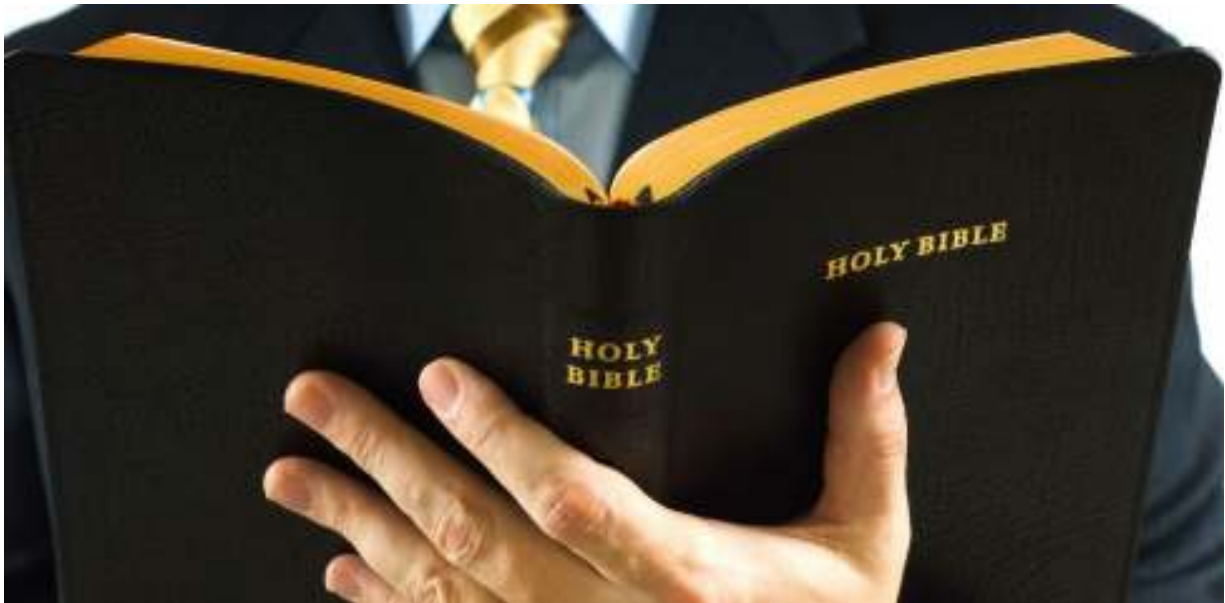


PROVERBIAL BUSINESS

By John Gagliardi



If there is one thing I preach like the proverbial “cracked record”, it is the absolute necessity of we Christians in the marketplace (the “Kingdom Business Professionals”) reading our Bibles every single day of our lives. It puts us in touch with the ultimate “business adviser”, the consummate provider of wisdom and comfort, and our heavenly Chairman of the Board.

And if there is one book in the Bible that stands out as the business person’s indispensable guide and mentor, it is the ever-relevant Book of Proverbs. Read one Proverb a day, and you will read through the Book once a month –and the time invested is the best business investment you will ever make.

Browsing in a Christian bookshop in Singapore recently, I came across one of the best books I have read on the Book of Proverbs and its relevance to the “marketplace minister”. It is called “*Management by Proverbs*”, written by Michael A. Zigarelli Ph.D., and published by Campus Crusade for Christ last year. Dr Zigarelli is Associate Professor of Management at Fairfield University in Connecticut, and holds a doctorate in the field of human resource management.

According to him, Proverbs seeks to answer the eternal question: “**How should we live?**”

He says: “[Proverbs] speaks to every life issue of consequence, and, not surprisingly, it affords us an impressive amount of guidance in business matters ... Solomon (the writer of the Book of Proverbs) knew business. Under his leadership, Israel’s copper industry as well as its horse, chariot, and other trades were consolidated under a state-ownership umbrella and transformed into tremendously lucrative enterprises.

“Consequently, Israel accumulated vast riches and enjoyed unprecedented economic prosperity throughout this era. It is an astute businessman who offers us insights throughout Proverbs.

“And, despite the cultural differences three thousand years later, this divine advice informs us today with comparable force. This is because the central problem which Proverbs seeks to correct – a human nature that is bent on doing things its own way rather than God’s way – is one that transcends generations, cultures and circumstances.”

According to Dr Zigarelli, people today remain just as prone to the same greed, envy, dishonesty and sharp tongues as those living in King Solomon’s day. This is what makes the Book of Proverbs so significant for us thousands of years later.

A central theme in Proverbs is the need to let God guide our affairs, as set out so perfectly in Proverbs 3: 5 and 6 – *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”*

Dr Zigarelli says: “Proverbs should not be construed as a rigid and contractual business manual. Rather, it offers advice that leads to a greater likelihood of human-relations success – on and off the job – for those who adopt and follow its edicts.

“God ... granted Solomon ‘a wise and discerning heart’ (and riches and honour as well – see 1 Kings 3: 10-13). By extension ... anyone who studies the written record of this ancient partnership, largely preserved in the Book of Proverbs, can share in this blessing.

“Through careful interpretation of the Book’s instruction, one gains access to a system of time-honored human relations principles that is not available through any amount of schooling or life experience. When consistently applied in the workplace, this system has the power not only to generate a competitive advantage that is difficult to replicate, but also to do so while genuinely improving the quality of life for all who participate in that system.

“In the context of management theory, therefore, managing by Proverbs can be construed as an ethical grid whose benefits can accrue to both subordinates and the organization as a whole.”

The main themes applicable to “marketplace ministers” to be gleaned from the Book of Proverbs, according to this excellent study, include:

- **Advice to Leaders:** Be honest, humble, just, reliable, self-controlled and sober.
- **Money:** Avoid “get-rich-quick” schemes, unfair pricing, charging exorbitant interest rates, and bribery; recognize the consequences of gaining money dishonestly, and money’s ability to motivate people to work; share money liberally with the poor.
- **Proper Use of Words:** Use words to impart wisdom, encourage, protect and nurture.
- **Improper Use of Words:** Avoid lying, slander, gossip, false witnessing, mocking, perverse talk, boasting, flattery or quarreling.
- **Virtues:** Show courage, diligence, humility, generosity, honesty, integrity, kindness (to the poor, to the needy and to animals), love, patience, self-control, reliability, sobriety, teachability and truthfulness.

- **Vices:** Don't acquire money dishonestly, be angry or lose your temper, bribe, be drunken, envious, greedy, hypocritical, unjust, jealous, lazy, oppress the poor, or be proud.
- **Work and Family:** Be faithful to your spouse and put your spouse and children before work in your priorities.

Over the next few weeks, we will look at some of these Holy Spirit-inspired themes as they are brought out through the Book of Proverbs. It will be time and effort very well spent as we allow Dr Zigarelli to help us tease out God's perspective on management and leadership issues in business and the professions.

And remember, *"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 and 17). It is also *"living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, and judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."* (Hebrews 4: 12)

We who spend our lives toiling in the marketplace today desperately need any advice, help and protection we can get – and the best place to get them is in the Book of Proverbs, read daily and read in faith, fully expecting it to be *"a lamp to my feet and a light for my path"* (Psalm 119: 105). Let us pray, with King David in Psalm 119: *"You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in Your Word ... I rejoice in Your promise like one who finds great spoil ... Direct my footsteps according to Your Word ... Open my eyes, that I may see wonderful things in Your Law."*