



Audio

Cafeteria Lady

3.7.10 by **Howard Butt, Jr.**

Transcript:

When Kevin stopped by his son's grade school to pay for lunch, he met Linda—and got more than he bargained for. Because this cafeteria supervisor is more than a cook.

Linda told Kevin, "When kids are having a bad day, I encourage them. When a child lacks money for food . . . when home life turns bad . . . I mention it to a counselor. Every day I talk to kids about nutrition—which they may never hear otherwise."

Besides food, Linda serves every student's potential.

This is Howard Butt, Jr., of Laity Lodge, nominating Linda for cafeteria lady of the year. Linda makes it her business to do far more than her job . . . in the High Calling of our daily work.

"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." (Mark 9:37)

Personal Reflection

No Guarantee of Results

3.7.10 by **Megan Willome**

After my husband got involved in nonprofit work, I began to change my perspective on volunteering. No longer was it an option—it was an obligation. I prayed that I would learn faithfulness and humility as I served.

Big mistake.

For years I volunteered by producing newsletters for nonprofits. I had loads of experience but no formal training. It wasn't a problem as long as I wasn't being paid. Then I was asked to serve my community in a different way, by serving on a board. I was nervous about stepping out of my comfort zone, but I agreed.

Within a month I was sure I had misheard God. Down the rabbit hole I went, into a situation more fraught with conflict than junior high school. And I made it worse.

Instead of writing the newsletter, I was supposed to oversee the contractor who did. This man was a professional—he had his own consulting company. I resented the fact that he knew more than I did. In short, I overstepped. He accused me of undermining him by doing work for free that he was paid to do. He was right.

We worked in separate spheres for months. We couldn't even email nicely. Eventually, the board selected a new president who agreed to act as a mediator. In short, the contractor was willing to try again if I was willing to do the same.

This time I was careful not to tread on his turf. More than an editor, he needed an ally. One board member said that his work was an unnecessary expense. Couldn't I do the same thing for free? Well, yes, I could, but that was what caused all the trouble in the first place. As soon as I defended the contractor, our working relationship improved. He also produced better work for the organization.

I wish I could say that my efforts on his behalf changed the nature of the beast. It didn't. When I received a promotion at work, I took it as a sign and resigned from the board. My first call was to the contractor. He asked if his contract would be renewed without me there to advocate for him, and I encouraged him to keep his eyes open for other opportunities. At the end of the year, he was let go.

Contrary to what I was taught in school, sometimes good work does not produce good results. Not for the contractor. Not for me, either. My participation on the board did not turn out to be the spiritually uplifting service I hoped it would be.

However, the experience was a crash course in working as unto God and not man (Col. 3:23). My call to this organization did not come with a guarantee of results. And yet, I do see them. I am learning those lessons of faithfulness and humility that I so boldly asked for.

The contractor and I? We regularly exchange nice emails. We regularly exchange nice emails about his job-hunt. He may even have a lead on a new contract with someone else who used to serve on that board.

Questions for personal reflection, online discussion, or small groups:

- Where does the idea of service fit into your Christian walk?
- What has been your experience working as a Christian in a secular organization?
- When have you overstepped? How did you address the situation?

Bible Reflection

God's Wisdom for Strategic Partnerships

3.7.10 by Vera Jackson

In recent years, mergers and acquisitions have become commonplace in the business world from Exxon-Mobile to AOL-Time-Warner. All kinds of market conditions can lead up to the decision to merge. But in each case, the leaders of the companies agree that they will be stronger and more competitive together than they are apart. Sometimes those leaders are right and, as we saw in the case of AOL-Time-Warner, sometimes they are wrong.

The potential for partnerships to make or break a company's success is nothing new. By the time he left Egypt in Genesis 13, Abram had become very wealthy, amassing livestock, silver and gold. He continued to travel through the Middle East, a God had commanded, with his nephew Lot, who also had flocks, herds and tents to his name. Initially, their cooperation made strategic sense: they were both far away from their native Ur, and otherwise alone in an unfamiliar and sometimes hostile land. Their partnership offered the safety and mutual protection of numbers. Yet as their journey progressed and the households increased, Genesis 13:6-9 tells us that the land could no longer sustain both parties in such close proximity. Employees began to squabble and tension grew. The time had come, for everyone's sake, to part ways.

Guiding Principles

The fact that mere "timing" can determine whether a partnership is productive or destructive should provoke us to seek the Lord's wisdom and guidance when contemplating such decisions. We should start by lifting the potential partnership before the Lord in prayer, while reading his word. Second, we should seek counsel and coaching from other godly leaders who are prayerfully connected with us. Third, we should consider the advantages and liabilities associated with the partnership: what do we bring to the table? What do they bring? How can we make each other better, and what challenges are we likely to face? Fourth, we should consider whether our potential partner shares our interests and purpose: do we want the same things and share the same priorities? Fifth, we should remain open to God's direction regarding the duration of the partnership and the terms for ending it.

Anything can happen, just as it did with Abram and Lot, to make a previously profitable partnership outlive its usefulness. If we have truly surrendered our business plans to God, we will be ready to make mid-course corrections and adjustments as he reveals. Abram knew that the strife between Lot's employees and his was a sign that it was time to reevaluate their arrangement. The problem of limited land was not going away: it would only get worse as their respective households increased. To make room for further growth, they needed to separate.

Abram also set the example for the right way to end such a partnership. Instead of insisting on his own rights and his own way, the elder business partner afforded the first choice for a prime relocation spot to his junior partner. Abram never once asked Lot for a repayment of the investment that he had so willingly made in support of his nephew. Abram trusted God to sustain him, bless him, and protect him as He had in times past.

Abram and Lot parted on good terms. We know this, because some time later, when Lot was in trouble, Abram rescued him and recovered his possessions from four kings (see Genesis 14:8-16). Abram also prayed for Lot and interceded on his behalf when judgment was imminent upon the area where he had settled. It was Abram's prayers that petitioned God to save ten righteous people, including Lot and his family (see Genesis 18:32).

As God's representatives in the marketplace, we have a choice to make. We can prioritize business growth, expansion, and survival so highly that we are willing to do or try anything to obtain them, or we can embrace the Word of God as our

business standard. Abram chose a godly standard when he helped Lot. Abram refused to take credit for the wealth that Almighty God had given (see Genesis 14:17-24). In his choice to honor God in all he did, Abram obtained the wisdom he needed to know whom to partner with and for how long. May we seek that same wisdom in all our decisions in business and in life!

Questions for personal reflection, online discussion, or small groups:

- Identify one key point from this article and discuss how it has relevance to your current business or work.
- What business needs or wants led you to form a partnership?
- How did prayer and godly counsel contribute to your decision?
- What personal and professional goals and values do you have in common with your business partner?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the outcomes of this partnership?
- How has your partnership helped or hurt your business?
- If you had to do it all over again, what would you do differently?
- How can you utilize the word of God to address the current status of your partnership?
- For more, read the following articles about wisdom for professional relationships: [Moses and the Burning Water Cooler](#) and [Working Together, Working Apart](#)

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Daily Reflection & Prayer

3.11.10 by **Mark D. Roberts**, Laity Lodge Senior Director and Scholar-in-Residence

Christmas Trees in Lent?

[READ Jeremiah 10:1-2](#)

*This is what the LORD says:
"Do not act like the other nations . . .
Their ways are futile and foolish.
They cut down a tree, and a craftsman carves an idol.
They decorate it with gold and silver
and then fasten it securely with hammer and nails
so it won't fall over." [Jeremiah 10:2-4]*

When my children were young, at Christmastime they would decorate small, artificial Christmas trees for their bedrooms. Early in January, the trees would be undecorated and returned to the attic until the next Christmas season.

One year, however, I found myself unusually busy in January and February, so I didn't take down my kids' Christmas trees at the usual time. I left them up . . . until Mardi Gras, the day before Lent began. At this point, my wife, who had been quite patient with me, complained. "We just can't have Christmas trees up in Lent! That would be wrong!" I had to agree, so I found a spare hour to remove the trees.

My wife was right. Christmas trees don't belong in Lent. But I just couldn't reflect on Jeremiah 10 without saying something about Christmas trees, even though we're in the season of Lent. My real subject, however, is not Christmas, but Scripture and how we interpret it. This is surely an appropriate Lenten theme.

A few years ago, I did some [blogging about Christmas trees](#). I focused mainly on the cultural controversies concerning the display and even the name of Christmas trees. (One prominent store decided to sell "Holiday Trees" that year.) In response to my blog series, I received a number of emails from Christians who were unhappy with me. They weren't upset about what to call Christmas trees. Rather, they were offended by my apparent openness to Christmas trees at all.

From their perspective, biblical Christians should not ever put up Christmas trees. Why not? Because the Bible prohibits this practice. What was the source of this prohibition? Jeremiah 10! In Jeremiah 10:2-4, the Lord told his people not to act like the pagan nations, who cut down a tree, decorated it with gold and silver, and then set it up in some public place. "What could be clearer than this?" my critics asked. "Christmas trees are pagan and should be avoided by Christians."

I did appreciate my critics' commitment to follow biblical teaching. I did not, however, agree with their understanding of

Jeremiah 10. The language and the context of verses 2-4 show that the Lord was not addressing the issue of Christmas trees or anything like them. Rather, these verses condemn the pagan practice of cutting down trees, carving them, decorating them, and then putting them up as idols to be worshiped. Idolatry was the problem, not holiday decorations on a fir tree.

So, if you're inclined to worship your Christmas tree, you ought not to have one. But, otherwise, there's no reason, at least on the basis of Jeremiah 10, not to put up a Christmas tree if that's part of your Christmas tradition. In fact, as we'll see tomorrow, this passage provides a theological rationale for enjoying Christmas trees.

Let me close today's reflection by reminding us that our interpretations of Scripture matter. Even when we're reading the Bible devotionally, we need to understand it accurately. This kind of understanding comes, with the help of the Spirit and the Christian community, when we carefully study the text and its context. Serious Bible study takes work, to be sure, but it pays rich dividends in truthful knowledge and application of God's Word.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION: What helps you to understand God's Word truly? What helps you to avoid or identify misinterpretations of Scripture?

PRAYER: Gracious Lord, you know how easy it is for us to misunderstand your Word. Sometimes we fail to invest the time and energy required for right understanding. Sometimes we want a certain interpretation to be true so much that we project our desires into the text. Sometimes, no matter how hard we work or how pure our intentions, we simply miss the point. Our human limitations and our sinfulness keep us from seeing the truth.

Help us, dear Lord, to rightly discern your truth in Scripture. Stir up our desire to know what your Word really says. Help us to engage in the disciplines of study, prayer, reflection, and community, so that we might know you and your ways. By your grace, show us where we have misunderstood your Word, so that we might revise and repent.

May we know the truth so that we might embrace it, do it, and share it with others. *Amen.*