



## **Maybe It Is Time to Reconsider the Bottom Line**

May 17, 2021 – Monday Manna by Jim Langley

Business professionals obviously like improving the bottom line. If you work for others, you might have to deal with performance reviews of one kind or another. Even top executives are reviewed by their board of directors and undergo scrutiny from their major stockholders. And the bottom line is usually an important element of those reviews.

In many areas of life we seek this great emphasis on improving the bottom line. Whether in business, sports or wherever we participate, it is only natural to want to be recognized for doing well. It feels good to attain our business and personal goals and set new ones. There is nothing wrong in striving to reach those goals, but what are the consequences of placing too great an emphasis on the goal itself?

Striving to achieve desired professional and personal goals has been true for me as well, but over the years I have discovered things have changed. Today the bottom line that concerns me most is how I am doing in my relationship with my Heavenly Father.

The Book of Ecclesiastes addresses this dilemma over its first 11 chapters. King Solomon, “the Preacher” as he calls himself, presents an emotional assessment of our lives “under the sun,” as he calls our earthly existence. He continually refers to the effort to improve our bottom line, to achieve and experience more and more, as “chasing the wind.” I would term this a self-centered, vain existence.

In the final chapter of Ecclesiastes, Solomon shifts to help us see what we might call “the big picture,” realizing there is more to life on earth than the relentless pursuit of more and better. He suggests bringing God into the picture so we can develop a clearer perspective and experience life’s journey in a new, deeper, more meaningful way.

Solomon closes his writing with these words of wisdom: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter; fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). Did you grasp that? Whether it is good or evil, God will bring everything into judgment – His judgment not ours. Our assignment is simply to do the whole duty of man.

During my 30-plus years as a follower of Christ, I have come to understand this duty/responsibility is to be obedient to the Lord and do my best to please Him and love others as well as I possibly can. I have also discovered I cannot truly love others until I have learned to love God, and then myself with all my faults and shortcomings.

So when it comes to “the bottom line,” I now recognize that my personal goals are not that significant. I am more concerned about the process God has laid before me. As Romans 12:2 tells us, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Each day is a new day, and my desire now is to please my Heavenly Father and simply watch for who, what, when and where He is working in my life. Yes, I continue to set goals and naturally track the bottom line, but I am most concerned about my relationship with the One who put this world on its axis and created everything we get to experience during our short time here on earth. This is only the beginning of a deep, eternal relationship with our Creator.

### **Reflection/Discussion Questions**

1. When you hear the term “the bottom line,” what immediately comes to your mind? How much does an emphasis on the bottom line affect your approach to your work – and your life in general?
2. What are the problems – if any – of overemphasizing the bottom line, professionally or personally? Do you agree that from time to time it might be useful to reassess how we view this bottom line? Why or why not?
3. In the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon – reputed to be the wisest man in the world – uses the terms “vanity, vanity,” or in another translation, “everything is meaningless”? Have you ever felt this way about your life, or your work? Explain your answer.
4. He closes by stating that “the whole duty of man” is to “fear God and keep His commandments.” What do you think of this conclusion?

NOTE: For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages: I.Samuel 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5; Ephesians 3:8-12; Romans 8:29, 12:1-2