

One of the things that I find really interesting is what some people prioritize in their lives. In fact, I must say I am sometimes astonished at the choices of where and how many people spend their time and treasure! But to be fair, a large number of people would likely be dumbfounded at what I think is worthy of my time and treasure. Or, to put it more properly as a Christian, they would likely be dumbfounded “at what I think is worthy of the time and treasure and opportunities of choice that God has given me.”

But that’s a key richness of life: we each have free will as choosers of how we spend our time and treasure and focus on the opportunities ahead. But each of us then faces fresh choices as our activities unfold.

We see this early on in Jesus’s ministry when He sent out His disciples two-by-two to proclaim the gospel. Jesus gave His instructions as related in several gospels, here told in Mark 6:11: “And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” And here’s what Jesus adds to that in Matthew’s gospel: “Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.”

Wow, here was the best news ever given in the entire history of humanity, then *or* now—you know, the gospel of the Kingdom of God! Yet Jews in some villages in the time of Christ didn’t want to hear about it at all, even though they had been taught to look for a Messiah. So, just why that response? Lots of reasons probably—fatigue from being watchful for years, perhaps, or maybe those Jewish villagers were more than a bit “secularized,” to use a modern term. But often the reason people block out such things is pride...perhaps spiritual pride, or perhaps intellectual pride, or maybe a deadly mixture of both.

That’s why I included Jesus’s teaching about Sodom and Gomorrah. Many equate those two cities with sexual sin. but Ezekiel 16:49-50 specifically records God’s revelation that Sodom’s residents “had pride” and “were haughty.” Pride—human pride and self-regard—was a core problem for Sodom.

So what did Jesus essentially say to His close disciples? Hey, go and give it a shot! But if your target audience doesn’t receive you or listen to you, go spend your time and treasure to seek opportunities elsewhere! Now *that* is a great verse about the stewardship of every disciple of Christ: go forth and pursue opportunities, yes, but be quick to cut your losses on an unworthy investment of your time and treasure. Not all ventures are going to bear fruit. And that’s true especially when doing them for the Lord Himself!

I find this mode of thinking to be particularly helpful in the world I have spent many years in—Christian higher education. And I’m not talking about students here. You see, every person who researches and teaches in Christian higher education has spent an inordinate amount of time and effort to “show themselves approved,” as the Bible says. That means this: even when many professors are very curious people who are constant learners, they are quite certain about the beliefs and views that they hold and disseminate to their students and other audiences.

Now, to be sure, that’s not necessarily negative and it doesn’t make all those Christian professors in all those fields of endeavor in all those universities automatically prideful! Here’s why: if teachers weren’t certain about what they were teaching each and every day, do you really want them as *your* professor? But the fact remains, most every professor is wrong about at least one or two things taught in the classroom this past several years, or else they would be perfect...right? And the fact is, universities’ faculties are often hotbeds for key disagreements about important matters, even when the two parties disagreeing with one another on one key issue do agree on many other issues.

So, the truth is, on an everyday basis, I typically don’t engage verbally with any professor or teacher who is very dogmatic, very set in their ways. I would rather read what they wrote and evaluate what they had to craft and defend by their writing or recorded speech—not when they are given the opportunity to argue verbally. Two people arguing verbally typically brings heat...but rarely brings light. But by reading

or watching videos remotely—I have learned from and had my iron sharpened by strong theologians, Bible expositors, and business experts for decades! And, of course, when so-called experts are just mediocre yet are unjustifiably self-confident as strong in their field, I can quickly turn off videos or shut books.

And I don't directly try to convince other professors or teachers of my viewpoint for the same reason—unless they have sincerely sought out the specifics of what I think. On all others, my time is wasted. Stewardship requires that I invest my time and effort in someone who truly wants what I can offer them.

This brings me to a phrase that I have used for decades: distinguishing the difference between *need* and *demand*. You see, when we are selling what we are absolutely and sincerely convinced to be best, we think everybody *needs* what we hold dear. But the sad fact is, many people you are convinced *need* what you have are not going to become a consumer, that is, they're not going to *demand* what you have. In economics lingo, there is weak consumer *demand*, no matter what you perceive the strong *need* to be.

Why is this important? Because this is the pitfall of many an entrepreneur or innovator or inventor or new product-line developer for an established company—those folks become such believers and evangelists, they start thinking everyone will see that choosing their new product or service is a really big *need* and, therefore, there will be strong *demand* for that product or service! The problem is, consumers are typically content with all their choices leading up to the big unveiling of a new coffee shop or bicycle or mobile app. Yep, they're pretty darn sure that they have made wise choices so far and don't need others butting in!

That's one big reason why so many new businesses fail: the entrepreneur's team has high self-regard about consumers identifying the new product or service as a *need* that should be immediately converted to *demand*...but those consumers have a competing self-regard about their choices right up to that point in time. Sure, there are always a few early adopters who're more easily sold, but most people don't change so easily. So, that's why assuming robust demand is a very big pitfall. And you should know this for every enterprise you participate in, because if you're *not* innovating or offering better delivery of services to stimulate demand, you can be sure your competitors are in the process of taking away your customers!

Many gung-ho entrepreneurs really struggle with this vital strategic practice of distinguishing between *need* and *demand*. And then when they are not astute enough to prepare their team for the inevitable obstacles of potential customers not wanting the new idea or product, the entire team can start to crater.

And that's why we can go to Jesus as the model of very astute distinguishing between *need* and *demand*. Does everyone have a need for Jesus? Of course, and Jesus knew that! Recall the story in Luke 16:19-31, commonly called "Abraham's bosom," where the rich man desperately contrasted himself and Lazarus who was at Abraham's side—a vivid contrast of heaven and hell! Yes, Jesus knows everyone has a need for His substitutionary work on the Cross! But, sadly, not everyone converts their need to demand!

And that's likely why Jesus didn't send His two-by-two disciples to people like the Pharisees at all. Yeah, the Pharisees had no intention of accepting God's grace, not when they could hold their power over the hapless Jews caught in the undoable task of fulfilling every dimension of the Law. So, instead, Jesus sent his disciples to villages full of ordinary Jews. And yet He still warned His disciples that the villagers' *need* often would not convert to *demand*. Jesus was protecting His disciples from getting discouraged about a failure that was no fault of their own. And He was coaching them on keeping their productivity high, instructing them to move on when people were not ready to convert their *need* into *demand*.

How are you doing in your spiritual life in this special regard? Also, how are you doing in your workplace life in this, too? In these cantankerous, free-wheeling, fast-moving marketplaces of opportunities, are you astutely distinguishing *need* from *demand*, and in so doing, bearing fruit for your company? And bearing fruit for the Kingdom? So, as the Spirit prompts, shake the dust from your feet and move on, friend!

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. What is your workplace's track record on this vital issue of astutely distinguishing between need and demand? How can you help your enterprise be better at this rather elusive skill? Discuss.
  
2. What is your personal *spiritual* track record on distinguishing between need and demand, in the context of evangelism, discipleship, and overall stewardship? What can you do to better meet the spiritual demands around you? Discuss.
  
3. In your interactions with other Christians, which of these do you do most often: demand-based discipleship or theological debates? And, in your interactions with non-Christians, which of these do you do most often: demand-based evangelism or apologetics debates? Think about these contrasts and discuss—how can you increase your fruitfulness in fulfilling the Great Commission?