

There's one key truth you should know that you truly need to handle well, whether it's related to your workplace, your church, or your spiritual life. But first, before we identify that, there's a foundational step you must embrace in order for you to be able to address this principle well. So we're going back to the very recent Whitestone episode *Jesus and Product-Market Fit*. In fact, I would recommend you go back and review that before listening to this episode. Nevertheless, here's a summary of *product-market fit*.

What is *product-market fit*? Well, pretty much what it sounds like. Have you created a product that matches with consumers' wishes in a market well? That's product-market fit. And that's always been what free markets are about, even in a medieval marketplace centuries ago. To nurture an enduring enterprise, you must establish a replicable product or service that a number of volume-consuming customers want.

The most valuable companies are often those that have created and sustained a strong relationship with many millions of people. You see, extremely successful companies like Amazon, Google, and Microsoft have created product or service offerings that "fit" willing customers. We know the Kingdom of God is the ultimate in product-market fit...Jesus's actions created the perfect product-market fit through His death and Resurrection. That allows each of us to be reconciled to the Father for eternity! Whoa!

Fleshing out four brief realities, let's recap that previous episode by summarizing why the Kingdom of God is the most powerful example of product-market fit! *First, God always has the largest target market in mind—the whole world! Second, with His offering on the Cross covering all sins, Jesus fulfilled the perfect product-market fit for all eternity! Third, God "went international" from the very beginning—while staying precisely local! And fourth, not everyone will avail themselves of even the most fitting solution, but God doesn't morph His offering to suit misguided notions.* All of that together forges a core secret to the Kingdom's eternal unshakeability! Indeed, Jesus manifested the ideal, the perfect product-market fit!

So that captures the foundational step I mentioned at the top of this episode: yes, product-market fit is the key, or all the rest of an organization's efforts will be like a feather in the wind. Now, just what is the key truth that follows? It's an ever-present reality...and a reality we must address constantly to make it all work properly: it's that *your key obstacles are internal*. That's right, *your key obstacles are internal!*

So, just what does that mean? Well, it's different for us personally than it is for our workplace organizations. And the clearest place to start is each person's spiritual life. Even before Adam and Eve, the Bible tells us the plan was for "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Yes, the Godhead agreed from the very start that the solution to humanity's core problem was to be the Cross! And so that unfolded at Calvary, and the death and Resurrection of Jesus *eternally established* the perfect product-market fit!

But the obstacle to the fit being completed is each individual's response *by faith* to the Gospel of God's grace (Acts 20:24). Indeed, God established a New Covenant through the service offering on the Cross, and those in heaven itself are attentive to the response of just one who is lost. Jesus taught it this way, "I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15:10 (ESV) So, the key obstacle to the best product-market fit of all time is the rebellious will of the person who must respond!

But, after a *right* response to the gospel of grace, a glorious ride is just beginning! The right path for the Christian life after that initial repentance is to *abide in Christ*...yes, we must learn not to be an obstacle to God's will. God is our Provider, our Healer, our All! Here's Jesus's teaching on the essentials of how to bear fruit. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:1-5) Well, now, that's pretty stark, isn't it? It's either bearing

much fruit or *nothing!* So we must abide in Christ and He in us. We must submit our will to Christ. In other words, we must stop being an obstacle! Our obstacles are not our parents, our kids, our pastor, our boss. Our obstacles are personal, *internal...in us!*

And, of course, these obstacles can be *compounded* when a bunch of non-abiding Christians get together in one place! Yes, issues can arise in a church because a number of people are not being attentive to their personal and corporate abiding in Christ. And people being people—believers or not—it doesn't take long to go beyond the "insiders" to blame "outsiders" for the problems in the church...yes, blaming external factors like a broken, secular culture or political adversaries or whatnot. The list is endless, of course!

But Paul wrote to the Colossians that we have been transferred to the Kingdom of His Son! And he tells the Corinthians that believers are ambassadors for Christ and His Kingdom. And in 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, Paul gives a great framework for obliterating faulty *internal* obstacles we can tend to insist on harboring. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

Now, that passage embodies a very key point. Churches in America have often become prone to indicate that obstacles for Christians are external—you know, the culture, politics, and all the rest. But God is consistent—the Bible teaches that *we ourselves are the obstacles*, getting in our own way, and we are to view the wider world not as an obstacle to our greatness but as the target market for the greatest product-market fit ever, Jesus's reconciling sinners to our Father in heaven. Yes, God entrusts to us the overarching message to the world of reconciliation! *Yes, in the church, our key obstacles are internal, too!*

Now, for our workplaces and *their* obstacles! Here's the point: once your enterprise has product-market fit, *your key obstacles are internal, too!* Again, yes, *your key obstacles are internal!* Have you removed internal obstacles—trained your organization in the latest technologies, how to innovate, how to mentor people to greatness, how to respond strategically to a very rapidly changing, often bewildering, world?

But, you say, *come on*, what about external threats to our traditional retail business, threats like Amazon? Exactly. But here was the real problem in that narrative. For too long, many retail executives mistakenly thought Amazon was simply a harmless, online bookstore. That shallow thinking led to loss of customer activity and was, plain and simple, a very problematic *internal* obstacle to success. So that shallow thinking has really hurt many a retail company in their stewardships on behalf of owners and employees. Poor thinking by leaders is an *internal* problem, *right?* After all, Amazon's leaders *were* thinking correctly!

In my experience doing organizational turnarounds and in observing all kinds of organizations, failing leaders often tend to believe that the key obstacles are *external*—like the current economy, competitors, climate change, new regulation. They often will not let themselves think that the people they work with and personally like aren't fully capable of doing crucially needed tasks well. These leaders often will not bring themselves to the emotional strength and fortitude needed for changing flawed mindsets, people, and processes—you know, key *internal* obstacles to success! Notice, I said they *will* not. That's their *will!*

We began this episode with these words: "There's one key truth you should know that you truly need to handle well." And, after product-market fit, that key principle is this: *your key obstacles are internal.* But when you adopt this fresh mindset and the personal and professional tools to apply that in your spiritual life, your church life, and your workplace life, you will be on the path to bearing extraordinary fruit! And your first step in that is to stop *right now* and believe this teaching is the uppermost important teaching for your future success, and then apply that! If you don't believe that, well then, *your key obstacle to greatness is internal! ...Right?*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Are you bearing the fruit in your spiritual life that the Lord intends? Just what is keeping you from what the Bible promises is the path to bearing that fruit—abiding in Christ? Be specific.
2. The Bible is clear...believers are to be ambassadors for Christ and work to reconcile people to our Father in heaven. In other words, external, worldly problems are not the problem but an opportunity to share our amazing answer—Christ and Him crucified! What's the score on the report card for your local church regarding this communication? Give specifics.
3. Are you frustrated when your workplace organization tends to always be playing “catch-up” to external competitors and pressures? So, what are you personally doing to help with this? What can you do *internal to your enterprise* to help improve, say, your division's approach to technological or technical superiority, or its people development, or its innovation? Draft a simple bulleted checklist and prepare to show others how you do this...or plan to do this.