I know a few folks who have gotten a real measure of financial wealth by ignoring their top-end financial experts on one key type of situation—and that's when the financial expert believes that the price of a particular stock is what's called "priced for perfection." Yet, sometimes the financial advisor can be spot on. So, just what does "priced for perfection" actually mean? The Motley Fool, one of the most-trusted, widely-followed advisors in the U.S., says this: "['Priced to perfection'] suggests that a stock's price is rather high, with investors expecting perfect performance from it and a correspondingly high valuation. It also hints at riskiness, because if the company makes some mistakes or there's some bad news, the stock price could take a significant hit."

Well, the first signal we get from this definition is that there's a more than a little mushiness throughout this short definition. Yes, even with writers who are usually quite direct in their phrasing, here we see "soft" words like "suggests," "rather," "expecting," "performance," "valuation," "hints," and "could." Of course, that's part of the point: there's at least a dimension of a "crystal ball" required of investors because there are a whole lot of moving parts and judgment involved in a stock holding. And notable aspects of purchase or sale decisions are psychological and emotional, for better or for worse.

The upshot when it comes to this term "priced for perfection" is this: financial analysts and advisors who link that term to a particular company at a particular point in time generally believe that all the good news and expectations for the company have already been considered and actually factored into the current price of the stock—and then, the idea is that just a bit of a hiccup or bad news could well precipitate a notable drop in the trading price of the stock. That is, the price reflects a perfect snapshot of the moment that is precariously perched too high and is ready for a big fall.

Now, let's gain some context about the value of a publicly-held company—remember, that total is called the *market cap* of the company. The trouble is, virtually every company is susceptible to falling from a very high perch, oftentimes in the short-term and ultimately in the long-term. That's because long-term competition is typically so strong in a robust economy that companies ultimately become vulnerable—if not for their whole existence—well, then at least vulnerable regarding a current stock price that seems too good to be true!

And there's the rub here. Many advisors as to the stock market are invariably eager to embrace the idea that high-flying stocks will go down. Part of the reason why is that when that happens, advisors get to put that advice in their "I-told-you-so" file, perhaps rightly so! But here's a problem scenario. Off and on, over the past several years, stocks like Amazon, Microsoft, Google, and Apple have been tagged as priced-for-perfection by some really smart folks. And that's totally understandable, because each of these tech stocks actually broke the trillion-dollar market-cap barrier. So, someone might have been saying, "You've got to be kidding…a business is worth more than a trillion dollars? *Really?"* Now, you can see how that kind of high-value stock is a candidate for the thinking that it's priced-for-perfection. Still…

The fact is, these companies roared past the $1 trillion mark for a long while. Specifically consider Apple. Some advisors have been telling investors for years to sell Apple stock—*too high-priced…it has had its run…it is bound to drop…take money off the table,* yes—for several years, Apple was perceived by many as pretty much "priced for perfection." Yet, at the time I craft this, Apple's market cap is at *$2.75 trillion!* Now, perhaps Apple's stock price has dropped by the time you experience this episode. But even if advisors were correct *recently* about Apple being priced for perfection, they were *unhelpful for years!*

Maybe there's at least one lesson here. Perhaps amazing, vibrant tech companies with continuous scalability—that's the ability to grow without needing huge additional resources or infrastructure—naturally cloak their future more than say, Ford or Target, which have to build more factories or stores. But there's a case to be made that a recommendation to sell Apple stock when the company was worth less than a trillion likely says a lot more about the investment advisors involved than it says about Apple.

This priced-to-perfection idea also plays a key role in interesting areas of modern organizations. Take Tom Brady, the NFL football player considered by many to be a GOAT, the Greatest of All Time! After leading the Patriots to an unprecedented six Super Bowl wins over 20 years—and breaking many records along the way—Brady and the Patriots could not reach a mutually-agreeable contract for an extension of Brady's time with the Patriots. So the 42-year-old Brady—who *was* clearly near or at the twilight of his career—then went on to win yet another Super Bowl with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

So here's the question: was Brady "priced for perfection," a price tag too steep for the Patriots who as a team were challenged to also surround the 42-year-old Brady with the resources necessary for another Super Bowl title? Indeed, were the Patriots boneheaded because they couldn't return to the Super Bowl themselves with the resource-constrictions that came with a Brady contract? In short, could the Patriots have won another Super Bowl with Brady at the helm, or was Brady priced for perfection? There are millions of football fans who are "Monday-morning quarterbacks" who indeed believe the Patriots were boneheaded. But the Patriots had to be mindful of whether the Brady extension was so pricey that it would actually hurt the future of the Patriots, especially in the long-term. So. What do you think?

Here's another story to ponder. When the Blockbuster movie-video store chain was still in its heyday with many thousands of physical locations in the early 2000s, the leaders of the upstart company Netflix approached Blockbuster with an offer to sell Netflix to Blockbuster for a reported $50 million. Well now, Blockbuster might well have bought Netflix if the price were lower, say, $1 million, or even $10 million. But was $50 million priced for perfection? After all, Blockbuster might say, why hadn't Netflix obtained venture capital funding or perhaps closed a deal with CBS…or Disney? So, the deal didn't happen, and the rest is history, often widely perceived as a bonehead move by Blockbuster. But…that's in retrospect.

Here's the question: if Blockbuster had bought Netflix, would Blockbuster have had the maturity of corporate culture and the stewardship vision to pivot its entire business to a Netflix approach, which was still just mailing physical DVDs to customers at the time? Isn't it reasonable to believe Blockbuster would not or could not pivot…and so would have wasted $50 million with the result of culturally, strategically, operationally smothering the Netflix baby in the Blockbuster household? You see, *priced for perfection* is ultimately interpreted by decision-makers in their unique context, for better or for worse! After all, very few organizations have the savvy and will to pivot radically. So. What do you think?

Hey, here's the good news about all this priced-for-perfection thinking. I really do mean, here's the *really good news* about all this! Every person has the opportunity to respond to a priced-for-perfection transaction. When Jesus was crucified on the Cross, the cost was very high—His life—and His delivery was sinless…perfect! Of course, the price for whosoever to enter the Kingdom of God is free—believers simply must accept the gift of grace by faith in order to become a part of the Kingdom of God! Then, we can expect to enjoy an amazing life in Christ in the here and now…*and* we are also fellow heirs with Christ for eternity! What a deal—priced for perfection, a perfection already delivered on our behalf by Jesus! Yes, Jesus Christ was willing to be the only true case in history of a transaction being *rightly* priced for perfection unto salvation for billions—and that transaction was rock-solid and eternal.

But. We are told by Jesus Himself to count the cost of discipleship. (Luke 14:25-33.) Hey, remember the story of the rich young man who approached Jesus about inheriting eternal life? Jesus challenged him on giving away his wealth…and the young man departed. (Mark 10:17-22). And, the Pharisees were unable or unwilling to value the Messiah event unfolding before them. However, unlike Apple, Brady or Netflix …where the future was unknown in each case…believers both *look back* upon the finished transaction at the Cross as rightly "priced for perfection" and *look ahead* to it being sustained for eternity!

But here's the rub. When we proclaim the Gospel, the hearer may reject the offer, or the hearer may enter the Kingdom of God and rejoice! Regardless, our essential, appointed privilege is to proclaim!

A&A: Application & Action

1. When you are in the battle, do you believe that "priced for perfection" decisions are more generally more clear or more cloudy? Give examples and indicate how you bring more clarity.

2. Maybe your workplace enterprise is a publicly-traded company or perhaps it's a small business, a nonprofit, or a church. Are you "priced for perfection" in your workplace, ready for a fall? What are you doing to "do it like Apple did it" in the coming years, defying the experts' expectations with extraordinary results?

3. The Cross was the perfect answer for humanity, one that came at a very high price. As churches in America devolve into social and political "answers" that will inevitably disappoint, what can your church do to rightly prioritize the proclamation of the Gospel that truly satisfies both the Father and His adopted children? Be specific.