

Let's get right to the point today. When it comes to your workplace, are the leaders in your organization "puttering around" on secondary or unimportant priorities...or "pottering for greatness for the long haul?" Let me repeat that. Is the leadership in your organization "puttering around" on secondary or unimportant priorities...or "pottering for greatness for the long haul?"

Did you get the gist of that? Well, let's get clear by breaking it down. First, it's likely you know what *puttering around* on lesser priorities is—that's keeping busy...or at least looking like it...without getting anything important done. You know, like puttering around in the garage or in the backyard on a Saturday morning, pretending you're getting work done—but you know all along you really aren't getting anything of key importance done. But it feels kinda therapeutic...like we're productive—when we actually aren't.

The problem is, in many an organization, there are people who pretty much specialize in puttering around. You know, looking busy without much real fruit to show for it—and often no interest in doing anything different. Maybe they're kind of a member of one of those proliferating "protected classes" as defined by the HR department—and the top executives have lapsed into just letting unfruitful stuff like that happen. 'Course, if leaders do that once or twice or five times, then they end up doing that approach routinely! And before you realize it, that bureaucratic virus has fastened itself like a barnacle in your organization.

But a very real, elevated problem is when the leadership team itself is puttering around in what it's doing! You know, like when the CEO is just four years away from mandatory retirement and is really just operating in fear of the possibility of a financially bad year to report to the stock market. Or operating in fear of a serious Amazon-type of devastating encroachment that risks the very existence of the enterprise—but not really knowing how to do something effective about that.

So, in due time, the CEO unveils a brand-new initiative that's actually just a head-fake to try to show that the key leader "has vision." But the reality is, the company's veterans know that this new project rollout, this new initiative, is not going anywhere positive. And as long as the future feels reasonably secure in each department, the leaders themselves and everyone else just keep on puttering around, continuing to hope that nothing drastic or fatal happens to the organization on their watch. Then...it's rinse and repeat.

But then there's the polar opposite: *pottering...for greatness...for the long haul*. Yeah, that's "pottering," like the Bible word that describes what God does with His willing followers. You know, when God is the Potter and we are the clay—and God is shaping us or re-shaping us exactly in the fashion that He, the Master Potter, wants? And for God, it was about Israel, spoken through His prophet Jeremiah (18:1-6).

"The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.' So I went down to the potter's house, and there [the potter] was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the Lord came to me: 'O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done?' declares the Lord. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.'"

So, this is really interesting! To God, the clay for which He was the Potter in this passage was the House of Israel, the total organization full of His people! And that clay was "spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do." Yes, Israel was "spoiled." And now we pick up the rest of the narrative in Jeremiah, verses 7 through 12, with God still doing the talking.

"If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: 'Thus says the Lord, Behold, I am shaping disaster against you

and devising a plan against you. Return, every one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your deeds.”

Wow, did you fully catch that last part? The fall of both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and then the Southern Kingdom of Judah about 130 years later—that was God’s pottering! And He gets individualistic here, too, saying, again, “...Return, every one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your deeds.”

Also, the prophet Isaiah had this to relate as well: “But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.” Isaiah 64:8 Yes, the clay here is the “we”...!

Then, centuries later after these two kingdoms fell, God restored leadership of the House of David for His people Israel through His Son Jesus, the Risen Christ! And God has been shaping and re-shaping Christ’s followers ever since—at least re-shaping those who allow Him to do so.

You see, those who “hear” and come to Christ are new creatures—the Master Potter reshapes their lives! But others reject the offer of the Gospel: so guess what, their lives are not re-shaped...no big surprise.

The story of countless churches the past two millennia is similar—many a local church has fallen by the wayside. No matter how “on fire” they were when they started, these churches were then unwilling to let God continually re-shape their local body. Do you doubt that? Take a fresh look at Revelation 1-3, which profiles seven churches. And it’s not flattering for most of those churches. So, we must consider this...

How about *our* churches? Are we doing God’s purposes, going forth and making disciples, loving our neighbors, letting God continually re-shape us as the Master Potter wishes the clay to be? ...Or not? Current reports are that thousands of churches have been closing their doors. Honestly, when churches are doing God’s purposes, honoring His heartbeat of salvation for souls, would that truly be the case?

Oh, you say, but you don’t understand the pressures of our era! Raging secularism, outrageous politics, culture wars—and that’s all very true, of course! But maybe, just maybe those defunct churches were just puttering around, going through the motions, perhaps even distracted by prominent but secondary issues, you know, like raging secularism, outrageous politics, and culture wars...rather than the proclamation of the Gospel and making disciples! Indeed, we must all ask ourselves this: are we embracing the Potter’s re-shaping of clay, the re-shaping of us into greatness? Well, that’s surely His intent! The Apostle Paul, himself a broken clay vessel dramatically re-shaped by God, wrote this to the Philippians (1:6): “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

Then he wrote this just a few verses later (2:12-13): “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Hey, friends, that’s a “Potter”-style of language that was inspired by God to be written by Paul!

Then there’s this from Romans 12:2... “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Now that’s re-shaping, isn’t it? *God isn’t just puttering around...He’s pottering for greatness!*

The upshot is this: like his desire for Old Testament Israel, God will re-shape His Kingdom’s citizens for their benefit such that the Kingdom will bear very full fruit for the Lord—if we are not rebellious or disobedient like the Israelites were! Wow, that’s God’s pottering...for our joint greatness for the long haul!

And that brings us back to *our* leadership roles in stewarding our workplaces. It may be tempting to just be puttering around on the wrong priorities like the guy in the next cubicle...or like a lackluster department head...or even, sadly, maybe like our CEO. But God calls us to witness for excellence and impact everywhere He places us...and that definitely includes our workplace! So, just like in our local church, we have the privilege of probing and examining ourselves and then taking stewardship action: ...are we personally pottering for greatness for the long haul in every role God has appointed us to? Whoa...

A&A: Application & Action

1. What techniques have you found helpful to be pottering for greatness in the midst of your workplace that might well be puttering around a bit too much for its own good health? Share.
2. Have you found God's re-shaping of you to be a pleasant or a difficult process? Explain.
3. In the past, have you found yourself in a local church that is mostly puttering around on secondary or unimportant issues rather on pottering for greatness in helping fulfill God's key purposes? How did you handle that?