

Do you recall what a *chokepoint* is? Well, by some accounts, the origin of the word is from the military. A chokepoint was a narrow place where an army division could only go through a soldier or two at a time and so were vulnerable to a successful attack. This is a version of a single point of failure for a system we've talked about. The point is, a savvy military general will be aware of possible chokepoints in two ways: to avoid a fatal chokepoint for his troops...and to use a chokepoint to defeat enemy forces!

Every significant supply chain has chokepoints, and often it's not a matter of simply eliminating them—it's a matter of adroitly managing risks. Does your enterprise have just one supplier of a vital ingredient for production processes—and getting another supplier is difficult? Freedom-oriented nations today have a real chokepoint of this type: vital chip manufacturing is located in Taiwan which is constantly under threat by mainland China. So now, free countries are rushing to create large-scale chip production.

It could be that your enterprise can solve an element of chokepoint risk by creating redundancy or other options in supply chain partners or routes or materials. Perhaps your sole-source labor pool like a labor union is a chokepoint risk. Perhaps the fact that you have only one internal expert in supply chain—well, that's clearly a risk! In short, the leader's goal is to find ultra-reliable supply chain partners, processes, and routes—whether that's by innovation, planned redundancy, multi-faceted supply-chain structures, or much more. This ongoing task is relentless, and often even short-term success is very hard to sustain.

So, every long-term leader of a successful, complex enterprise must be vigilant about chokepoints, testing internal people and processes to determine possible cracks...testing external supply chain partners and processes as well...creating vital redundancy for coverage...creating or staying abreast of key innovations.

But there's one enterprise that's the most instructive of all: an organization where multiple chokepoints for failure were actually known far ahead yet there was no rushing in to fix things too early, even as the expected failures happened. Yeah, *the ultimate handling of chokepoints was by God in His economy*—from the foundation of the world! Here's the point: for a fruitful, full life in Christ in every realm of life, believers can learn a whole lot from how God has handled chokepoints in His economy. Let's take a look...

In the Garden of Eden, God created 1,000,000 people. *Yeah...that way, when one or two failed, everyone else could blame the two who started it all for being to blame!* But of course, that isn't what happened! God created Adam and Eve in the Garden and gave them an unimaginable amount of authority over His creation—including the capacity to fail, the free will to choose badly. In short, God tested Adam and Eve...and they failed. These two were a very key chokepoint for the future of humanity...and they failed. *But God already had made a provision for humanity*—the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8) for all who would believe! Yes, God strategically established His Son Jesus as *the perfect, positive chokepoint*...the narrow path...the only Way that all must go to for eternal life and fellowship with God! So, what key was established in the Garden of Eden? That the "first man Adam" was not reliable!

And it didn't stop there! Humanity did so badly after the Fall that God sent the Flood. So, was this to establish a perfect, positive chokepoint through the righteous Noah and his family? No, this small chosen chokepoint of eight people who survived the flood failed as well...*clearly not a perfect, positive chokepoint.*

So, what then, was it Israel, God's chosen people? Well, immediately after the miraculous parting of the Red Sea on their behalf, the Israelites ungratefully grumbled about God's provision (Exodus 17:1-3), they didn't obey or even incline their ear to God—*therefore* God then gave them the Law. (Jeremiah 11:8) But, of course, the Israelites didn't keep the Law. Israel was a failed *group* chokepoint, through and through.

And Israel wasn't done. Displeased with God's handling of their affairs during the 270-year period of the Judges, Israel asked for a new chokepoint of a human king! But did they know what they were getting in to? Yes, at God's direction, the prophet Samuel told them (1 Samuel 8)! And, of course, both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah failed, sacked by nearby empires—this despite God blessing them and God's miraculous hand operating on Israel's behalf many times!

So, what's a key takeaway? God placed defined, recognizable chokepoints in His economy *that failed!* And when events *did* go well in the short-term throughout the Old Testament narrative, it was always because God's hand, direction, provision, or leading was involved! Here's the thing: multiple Old Testament tests proved humanity—from one person to many—to be a negative chokepoint, *even when designed by God.*

Enter Christ and Him crucified, *the only perfect, positive chokepoint!* Yes, God "desires all people to be saved" (1 Timothy 2:4 ESV) but eternal life is only through Christ and the Cross (John 3:16)—not a church, not a family, not a mere human! That is offered through God's grace to all people, in fact, Titus 2:11 says, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people." Yeah, *that's all people on earth!* And that's why Jesus gave believers the Great Commission to "go forth and make disciples." (Matthew 28:18-20) And do that where? In Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth! (Acts 1:8)

Whoa, just a minute, you say: we know from the Bible and personal experience that humans are often *not* positive carriers in the Gospel supply chain, say, to their families or their communities or Nigeria! Indeed, *many* folks who identify themselves as Christian *do not* witness for Christ, thus declining the Great Commission and largely negating an assigned role for themselves in God's supply chain. Here's Paul...

"For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:11-17)

So, how do believers best love their next-door neighbors...and those in Nigeria, too? By exercising their privilege as believers, of course, and by acting on the fact that they are sent by God to their workplace, their neighborhood, and even to the end of the earth as part of God's supply chain. But God knows many will not pointedly go or send...so He promises increased rewards at His judgment seat for those who obey!

So, notably the past 200 years, a slice of Christians has blanketed significant portions of the globe with the gospel...in person and digitally! God has proven He will send those who are willing to bring his message to those who seek the Lord! But sadly, many Christians have chosen to be an opaque, negative chokepoint to the Gospel! That brings forth God's *redundancy, His sending the obedient to supplant those opting out!*

Now...just what key lessons can we learn from God's economy regarding chokepoints that help us in our roles in the Kingdom and all our other enterprises? First, *God anchored His economy on the perfect positive chokepoint* that is Christ, of course, with all other options being unreliable. Yes, God supplanted them!

Second, *God proved the need for that better, perfect, positive chokepoint of Christ over a long period of time, using tests and trials in the Bible for rebuking, learning, and training*—for both the participants and for billions of others that followed. The key lesson is the contrast between Jesus being the perfect, positive chokepoint and the insufficiency or inconsistent reliability of others as participant-chokepoints!

Third, *God set the target market and made key, foundational connection with that market.* God graciously offers salvation to every person worldwide (Titus 2:11). And He gave the essential foundation to that salvation with every person being without excuse for not knowing Him through creation (Romans 1:20).

Last, *God graciously allows every Christian to effectively participate in the supply chain of the Gospel of grace...yet has readied redundancy to send proclaimers when others choose to be a negative chokepoint!*

Hey, we must take time to study God's perfect handling of chokepoints, whether negative or perfectly positive—our study will work to help make us vigilant, realistic, exceptional leaders as to supply chains!

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. What level of competence does your workplace enterprise deliver when it comes to building ultra-reliable supply chains? (That may encompass many elements, from labor to materials to supply chain partners, etc.) Give examples of both chokepoints and successes.
  
2. Is your church more of an opaque chokepoint to the spread of the Gospel...or not? What is your local church's actual positioning with your congregants as to your church's "settled" role—perhaps ranging from evangelistic, neighborhood outreaches to "God is sovereign and already executes the entire supply chain"...? Discuss.
  
3. What about you personally? Regarding your witness and the Gospel, are you more of an opaque chokepoint of the good news or a reliable node on God's supply chain? Discuss.