

At the time of the crafting of this episode in the first few months of the second Trump Administration, some of the largest financial markets in the U.S. have experienced significant volatility...significant stock market changes going in one direction for a time...then somewhat of a reversal of that. And that is largely due to the actions and shifting communications coming from President Trump and his key leaders.

So, is this state of affairs good or bad? Well, the uncertainty that arises from rapid shifts of policies does get very uncomfortable for many people. Yet, there are people who thrive on such change. Warren Buffet is one of the most successful investors of the past 100 years, and it's a well-known legend that Buffet waits patiently for large shifts in equity markets to then opportunistically buy companies at bargain prices.

And as the number of people entering the investor class in America has steadily expanded over the decades by virtue of their saving and hard work, many folks have accumulated more discretionary funds and have obtained more depth in their understanding of equity markets. And what some of those stock-market investors try to do in a period of huge volatility is to do what's called "buy the dip." And that means this: when a very solid company's public stock price falls and is rightly expected to rise again, then some investors step in and buy stock after it has dipped in price in order to hold it until its value increases again.

Now there are several types of big events that can be part of the cause of this kind of volatility, those ups and downs. Perhaps it's a general economic recession—nationally or internationally—the natural ebb and flow of prosperity that inevitably happens...and a company's stock price drops because of decreasing demand for a company's particular products during the recession. But sometimes the cause of volatility is a very large "macro" event like the COVID pandemic, when people's personal and buying behavior is altered a whole lot—often by government edict. And, of course, local or regional wars can cause huge disruption for the countries both directly involved and nearby—and that's not to mention all-encompassing events like World War 1 and World War 2 in the last century.

Now here's a key thing. Many national leaders work to use the power of their office to try to change the perceived power, prestige, prosperity, or morality of their country. Other leaders simply want the power in order to oppress others without helping the populace at all—how else can you explain communism or socialism...systems deliberately impeding liberty and financial prosperity? But this much is true: the leader who doesn't use the power at hand for whatever reason is very rare indeed.

Enter the landscape of America in the 2020s—specifically, the season of President Trump dominating the news cycle globally by implementing disruptive new ways and policies. And for the attentive observer, it becomes readily apparent that the President's tagline of "Make America Great Again" is designed to try to address all four of the areas mentioned earlier: *America's power...its prestige...its prosperity ...and its morality*. And Trump's policies are designed to apprehend and even dominate each of these areas, often in concert with one another...at least in the President's personal estimation.

The very idea of restoring measures of "greatness" can easily apply to a kaleidoscope of possible avenues. Is it about wrangling better deals worldwide by using a big economic or military stick? Is it about craftily regaining the respect of leaders and nations worldwide? Is it about restoring manufacturing jobs in the heartland of the U.S.? Is it about restoring morality through withholding federal funds from offending states, institutions, and companies? The stunning reality of this season is that these themes are being advanced in record time and scope—and that happening all at once. And all that is clearly no accident.

A fair reading of President Trump's first term in office suggests an incoming President lacking confidence or at least the wherewithal to put quite dramatic policies in place. Perhaps he was just waiting to effect great change in his second term—a desire that was delayed four years by voters. Regardless, in Trump 1.0, he assembled a cadre of appointed Cabinet Secretaries, advisors, and other functionaries who were experienced members of *the existing political establishment*, even if some did tend a bit towards Trump's disruptive worldviews. But then Trump was rudely voted out of power for four years, a season to study...to brood...to plot...and to adjust his approaches a whole lot, at least as compared to his first term.

So, once elected in November 2024 but before taking office in January, it was as if Donald Trump was already in the Oval Office, proclaiming where the country was definitively headed and establishing future policy publicly in virtually every daily news cycle. And, frankly, this time around, he selected a team who was clearly not full of the traditional establishment types who gladly inhabit exalted Washington circles.

But with Trump 2.0, what would seem to really stand out to avid students of recent political history and strategy is his apparently deliberate technique of constant and comprehensive disruption and chaos. Both Trump's political friends and his adversaries have been stunned by the breathtaking scope of his deal-making...his shifting stances...his exotic assertions about America and other nations near and afar—yes, about key economic policies...about views of “fairness”...about morality...well, you know the list is long!

Many observers have focused on this disruption and chaos as Trump's approach to what he has called “the art of the deal,” that phrase famously being the title of Trump's book from the late 1980s. And astute observers would perhaps believe that part of Trump's approach is to put everything on the table at once, working to please and deeply cultivate more single-issue supporters of, say, traditional gender viewpoints...of other nations' trade policies accusatorily branded unfair...of illegal immigration...of looming national insecurity. You could name others. The idea is apparently to please single-issue-tending folks and forge them into an overall constituency. All the while, Trump's tremendous scope of chaos can fragment his opposition into their narrow concerns, yes, like gender issues...immigration...one-world-order focus.

So, is Trump's approach working? At the time of this writing, only time will tell. But it's likely that the ultimate results will be muddled and inconclusive. For example, on tariffs, will some individual workers in Trump-favored industries be very happy while millions of U.S. consumers have to pay substantially more in their personal budgets? Will the folks involved even understand the real effects of tariffs? Likely not.

But tariffs are just one of President Trump's chosen tactics. He is working to attack federal waste, fraud and abuse through Elon Musk and DOGE. He is working to cut the vast interest-rate costs related to America's \$36 trillion debt through the Treasury Department and its leader, Scott Bessent. Trump believes that this massive debt is a huge problem...and note this: Trump is one of the few U.S. Presidents to even signal a sincere effort related to this slow-burning mega-crisis that surely mustn't be ignored.

One thing is certain: President Trump has fostered real, widespread uncertainty in the early days of his second term. As always with big-Government policies, there are winners and losers—with the innocent often grouped with the guilty. Like in the stock market volatility we just discussed. Also like in the supply chains supplying the daily needs of Americans. So, countless businesses, large and small, are now being forced to rethink and retool their carefully crafted, highly cooperative global supply chains. Like for cars. And for a plethora of daily household products. Yes, for a whole host of goods consumed by Americans.

And that's very costly and painful for businesses and their customers, especially when government policies are *not stable, once-and-done policies businesses can rely on not changing*. Many economists expect less supply and higher costs from current manifestations of policy changes. *But only time will tell*—Trump's sweeping attempts might work...or they might fail...but it's likely his attempts will result in a mix of both.

One thing is for sure. As we've said before, the greatest supply chain ever conceived and deployed is anchored by Christ and Him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2)—that's the supply chain of God's love manifesting in believers responding to God's unique offer of eternal life. Yes, Paul himself traveled throughout the Roman empire, proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples. But a general stability these recent decades for God's supply chain is now in question. Will Christian missionaries from America and elsewhere be received as well in coming decades as they have been in an era of relatively free trade and travel? Will local, domestic gospel proclaimers need to step up even more, much like some businesses are moving some manufacturing to their own shores? In a season of dramatic disruption, Christians in God's supply chain who are committed to proclaiming Christ and making disciples should take a fresh look at a changing landscape in America and around the world—an exciting harvest landscape now with fresh uncertainties.

A&A: Application & Action

1. Do you think sowing chaos and uncertainty is fair game as part of the strategies utilized by a U.S. President, especially when key issues are so deeply entrenched and dangerous? Discuss.
2. How's the supply chain of the gospel working out in your church? Is it more local-focused or more global-focused? Is it changing a bit now in this season? Discuss.
3. According to Wikipedia, the long-standing definition of the term "ugly American" from decades ago is "a stereotype depicting American citizens as exhibiting loud, arrogant, self-absorbed demeaning, thoughtless, ignorant, and ethnocentric behavior mainly abroad, but also at home."

How about the perception of American Christians serious about personal engagement for the sake of worldwide missions for making disciples of Christ both abroad and at home? Could that perception now be trending toward that of "ugly Americans"—with that especially impacting long-term access and impact for Christ? Discuss.