

# Our Unchanging God: An Anchor in the Sea of Uncertainty

by David Perkins and Don Pope

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As Christians, we place our faith, our confidence, and our hope in the unchanging nature of the eternal. On the other hand, as teachers of business we enthusiastically prepare our students for a world where change is expected, promoted, and applauded. Is it possible that we will unintentionally encourage our students to compartmentalize? Will they conclude that “church is church, but business is business,” as one faculty member overhead a businessperson say. Is there an even greater danger that in this world of accelerating change, our students (or even we ourselves) will view an unchanging God as old-fashioned and irrelevant to our time? The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how fundamental principles that reflect the unchanging nature of God are valued in the today’s changing world of business. Successful leaders of change and innovation are also proponents of adherence to consistency in principle throughout the organization. Not a consistency that avoids change, but a consistency that guides and manages change to avoid chaos and conflict. Just as the unchanging nature of God provides simplicity and strength to our lives, businesses target simplicity and strength by applying fundamental principles that transcend time and culture.

#### GOD’S CONSISTENT NATURE

*In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.*  
(Psalms 102: 25-27).

Beginning with the quote above, Chewning (2000) describes the immutable nature of God. Perhaps the specific manifestations of God’s immutability are controversial (Porter, 2000; Smith, 2000; Carson, 2000), but scripture leaves no doubt that He is faithful (Deut. 32:4), that He will keep His promises (Heb. 6:16-18), that He has an eternal purpose (Psa. 33:11), and that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

The unchanging and eternal character of God is best communicated in the profound simplicity and strength of His own self-description: I AM WHO I AM (Ex. 3:14). God needs no adjective or additional explanation to declare His eternal presence. He is – period. And He will always be.

Throughout history, God’s enduring qualities have inspired countless songs of praise, such as: *His love endures forever* (Psa. 136); *Standing on the promises I cannot fail* (Carter, 1886); and, *Oh God, our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come* (Watts, 1719). David referred to God’s unchanging nature as a ‘rock’ and ‘fortress’ in ‘whom [he took] refuge (Psa. 18:2). Though our culture is very different from that

experienced by King David, his God is still our fortress. God's unchanging nature offers us security and peace in a changing world.

God manifests His unchanging nature in the unchanging principles that He has established. When "discovered" by the business world, God's principles are recognized as fundamental to long-term success (even though their source may not be recognized). Business leaders are attracted to their simple truths, yet challenged by their perfection.

*Principles are deep, fundamental truths, classic truths, generic common denominators. They are tightly interwoven threads running with exactness, consistency, beauty, and strength through the fabric of life (Covey, 1989).*

God's unchanging principles are cross-cultural and timeless – therefore, relevant to a changing world.

## A WORLD OF CHANGE

In this age of globalization, we can count on this - things will change. For example, technology's impact on communication, access to information, and electronic payment options has resulted in a world without boundaries, stores without bricks and mortar, banking without a car, and shopping without a checkbook (and perhaps too often without a bank balance!) as business is transacted between customers and e-tailers without faces. Of course, the forces of change are not limited to technology.

Drucker (1993) describes the present transformation as a shift to a knowledge society. He attributes its beginning to the availability of education made possible by the GI Bill of Rights shortly after World War II. Kotter (1995) summarizes the economic and social forces driving globalization as follows: technological change; international economic integration; maturation of markets in developed countries; and the fall of communist and socialist regimes. Some of these forces may seem distant, but even small local businesses are not immune to their far-reaching effects. Consider, for example, the local effects of technological advances. While all businesses may not go on-line, all must consider how to adapt to the increasing expectations of the marketplace for flexibility, quick-response, and just-in-time solutions to business problems.

The bottom-line is that business organizations must continuously adapt and improve in order to compete or even survive. Recent management approaches support these trends by emphasizing that those who want to succeed must 'reengineer' (Hammer and Champy, 1994), develop 'lean thinking' (Womack and Jones, 1996), and embrace or, in fact, lead change (Kotter, 1996) to be on the cutting edge of developments in their industry.

Against the dizzying background of accelerating change, how do we ensure that change means improvement? Must all things change to stay current, or are there some constants on which we can rely? Should the norms of yesterday (e.g., "If it ain't broke, don't fix it") be viewed as old-fashioned (Kotter, 1996)? How do we achieve some sense of stability in the midst of change, for without it, man (or business) "is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind...unstable in all he does" (James 1: 6,7).

In this paper, we provide a few examples of unchanging Godly principles that are important to any business environment. Our discussion is not meant to be exhaustive but to simply represent another opportunity for the integration of faith in business. The principles we discuss are: (1) the principle of purpose, (2) the principle of self-control, and (3) the principle of relationships.

## The Principle of Purpose

A common thread that weaves through much of the current management literature is the focus on purpose, mission, and vision (Covey, 1989; Kotter, 1996). Leaders of management thought seem to be re-discovering what Solomon learned long ago. As depicted in Ecclesiastes, Solomon tried many short-term pursuits that led to erratic behaviors and short-lived fulfillment. Having accomplished much that this world has to offer, Solomon found that a life without purpose is “utterly meaningless” (Eccl. 1:2). His conclusion to the matter is this: “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man (Eccl. 12: 13). In other words, the essence of man is wrapped up in his purpose.

Knowing man’s need for purpose and stability, God, since the beginning of time, has planned for Christ to be the center of our existence. “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1: 17). Through His inspired word, God encourages us to “fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12: 2). In so doing, “we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor. 4: 18). With Christ as our center, we seek change – change that is synonymous with improvement as we “are transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory” (2 Cor. 3: 18). In other words, under the leadership of Christ, we have a vision of what we should be and, because of his life and sacrifice, what we can become.

Just as individual growth and maturity is achieved by developing a Christ-centered, mission-driven life, businesses must also “begin with the end in mind” (Covey, 1989). It is this “end” toward which continual improvement is directed. This is the role of leadership – to provide a clearly defined purpose and a strategy for its achievement. A well-articulated and meaningful purpose provides organizational members with a vision of the future. This vision is essential to provide a sense of direction that will guide decisions, motivate individuals to take actions that may be initially painful, and coordinate the efforts of many in a fast and efficient way (Kotter, 1996).

The need for a clearly defined purpose becomes even more pronounced when set against fallible man’s inability to hold to it. Purpose can often be overlooked due to the distraction of lower priorities and short-term pursuits. In response, Jesus rebukes the “religious” for putting their religiosity above the welfare of their fellowman. In the story of the Good Samaritan, for example, the priest and the Levite were too busy (perhaps on their way to church?) to help their stricken neighbor (Luke 10: 31,32). The tendency to lose sight of purpose is not limited to individuals. Man-made organizations suffer from the same malady. For example, the highly publicized disclosures regarding Firestone tires demonstrate the tragic long-term consequences of ignoring quality problems in pursuit of short-term cost savings. On a more subtle level, when companies are managed by the “fad of the year”, they can suffer from strategic drift and lose sight of what really adds value for the customers. For example, an unbalanced preoccupation with data can lead to the ‘paralysis of analysis’ where firms always need a little more information before making a decision. In such an environment, employees can slowly develop a level of cynicism that impedes real improvement. As educators, perhaps we should be concerned that emphasizing the latest fads may give students the impression that gimmicks are more important than fundamentals.

## The Principle of Self-Control

As Christians, we are to rise above the world and live lives of self-control. This means that we exercise the required discipline to live a righteous life and experience its reward (Prov. 10:17; 11:19; 12:28). So dangerous is the notion of compromise to the practice of self-control that we are to flee temptation (I Cor. 6:18) and even the very appearance of evil (I Thess. 5:22 [KJV]). Covey (1989) refers to self-control as self-management, requiring the discipline (i.e., being a “disciple to a set of principles”) to “organize and execute around priorities.”

Human reality, however, is far from the ideal. In contrast to the unchanging, rock-like nature of God, man’s nature is portrayed as shifting sand. Time after time, the nation of Israel was unfaithful to its covenant with God. Even their father, Abraham, doubted God and lied to protect himself (Gen. 20:2). David says, “My sin is ever before me” (Psa. 51:3), and Paul bemoans the fickleness of his own human nature (Romans 7:15). Some of the harshest words of Jesus are directed at the hypocritical religious leaders who practice their religion to be seen of men (Matt. 23:5ff), describing them as “whitewashed tombs...full of dead men’s bones” (Matt. 23:27).

Just as man has trouble translating purpose into practice, business processes are also plagued by lack of discipline and instability. The resulting quality problems lead to costly scrap, rework, warranties, and lost sales (Crosby, 1979). Firms historically defined quality as producing within the specification limits set by the customer. However, Taguchi’s Quality Loss Function defines all variation (i.e., compromises to perfection) as a source of poor quality that incurs a cost to the firm (Taguchi, 1986). For example, even when all output is in conformance tolerance stackup can occur (e.g., a loose connection when a conforming bolt and nut vary at opposing ends of specification)(Schonberger, 1986).

One of the major contributions of the quality movement is the priority given to reducing variation in business processes (Deming, 1986). Similar to an individual exercising self-control, firms use Statistical Process Control (SPC) to monitor and control process variation, yielding greater system stability and discipline. SPC helps firms avoid the tendency to increase variation due to over-adjustment and informs operators when systematic variations require that adjustments should be made. Production workers trained in SPC are instructed to stop the production line whenever systematic variation occurs to find and eliminate the cause of the problem – whether or not defects have been produced. It is only after systematic variation is under control that additional refinements to the process may be attempted. As an outgrowth of SPC, the goal of reducing variation is now applied to various management issues as firms target greater stability throughout the organization (Hare, Hoerl, Hromi, and Snee, 1995).

## The Principle of Relationships

To remain competitive in a global economy, firms must pay increased attention to the entire flow of goods and services through the interdependent relationships making up the value chain (Womack and Jones, 1996). While these supply chain initiatives depend on well-established logistical and information systems, perhaps the most critical determinant of success is the development of trusting relationships between supply chain partners. In order to understand how trust is developed between organizations, it is

important to first understand how trust is developed between individuals. After all, it is the individuals in one organization who must come to trust the individuals in another (Handfield and Nichols, 1999).

Covey (1989) describes a relationship as an 'emotional bank account' in which trust is accumulated. Positive attitudes and behaviors toward the relationship deposit trust into the account. Deposits must be made consistently since trust builds up slowly over time. Covey refers to this as "the law of the harvest." There are no quick-fixes or short-cuts.

Philippians 2: 3,4 addresses the idea of making emotional deposits with the admonition to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." In fact, the importance of relationships goes back to the beginning of time. "One of the earliest questions uttered by man is, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' (Genesis 4:9). The answer was 'Yes' then, and it is 'Yes' today" (Money, 2001).

Throughout the scriptures, the Bible provides valuable insight on how to deposit trust into our relationships with others. Basic characteristics such as integrity, humility (Prov. 13:10), generosity (Prov. 11: 24-26; Prov. 18:16) kindness, understanding (Prov. 13:13-16), and Godly love (I Cor. 13) are essential to the development of relationships built on trust and respect. Jesus provides the best guidance on managing relationships with the simple exhortation to "do unto others as you would have others do unto you" (Luke 6:31). Of course, the value of this statement is so universally accepted that it is known as the Golden Rule. These characteristics apply equally to business relationships, as alluded to in the wisdom of Solomon:

*The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. ... The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity* (Proverbs 11: 1,3)

More recently, Deming (1986) was an early proponent of the need for businesses to develop and maintain a minimum number of long-lasting, interdependent relationships. The development of supplier relationships has the dual effects of (1) reducing variation in incoming materials and (2) encourages mutually committed partners to work together to solve problems. Based on mutual trust and respect, supply chain partners share information regarding markets and distribution channels to help each other respond to change. For example, Womack, et.al. (1991) provide a thorough discussion of how supply chain management benefited the Japanese automotive industry. Also, Walmart's phenomenal success is often attributed to its information network with suppliers that provides a seamless flow of products into the hands of consumers (Handfield and Nichols, 1999).

## Conclusion

While some management fads seem to disappear without notice, lasting developments in management thought and methodology reflect unchanging principles that precede management as a discipline. Our students must understand that cultures come and go, but principles are eternal. The challenge before business is analogous to

our Christian walk: be purpose-driven, be true to our purpose, and be true to others.  
Some things never change.

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