

The other day, I was having coffee with Pastor Willard from the Ankeny UCC church. We were discussing how Alyssa and I had quit our jobs just prior to that meeting. He made the comment that we had joined The Great Resignation (TGR).

Before he said that, I hadn't considered myself part of that group. I guess I've been in management for so long that whenever I heard about TGR, I had always associated it with people that didn't want to work and I didn't really think about why.

TGR is the result of the pandemic shutdown. When the world stopped, I was on the wrong side of the shut down. At first, we weren't labeled as essential employees. So, a number of part time employees were simply not scheduled. They weren't let go and they weren't laid off. They just weren't there.

Companies were seeing record sales and record profits, running with little to no staff. We would try calling back employees and they didn't want to come back. They were making more money staying home than they were if they came back to work. I had employees coming to me and asking me to cut their hours so they could still keep their insurance, but they could also get more of the state and federal benefits.

These were the people that I thought made up the TGR. I wasn't one of those people. I didn't quit so I could reap the benefits of the social programs. I didn't quit so I could get caught up on movies and television shows, even though that has been an unexpected benefit. I wanted to still be working.

47 million Americans quit their job in 2021. And this year approximately 4 million people are quitting their jobs each month with March being the most at 4.5 million people quitting. To put that into perspective, that is more than the entire population of Iowa quitting their job every month.

For the past three years, I've been forced to deal with TGR. And lately, I've been really thinking about it. And I realized that I was part of the problem. Not as much now as I was in the past. I was part of the problem that led us to this point.

There was a time while I was working in Kansas City that I was a floating manager. I would fill in at a store if a manager was on vacation. I would help out if the store was short staffed. I would come in and do extra training to bring up the standards for staff. I was a fixer.

You would think that people would like to see me come in the door. But, most of the time, the management team was not happy that I was there. Generally it meant that someone was going to get fired. And most of the time, it was whomever was going on vacation. If I showed up at your store and you were going on vacation, 9 times out of 10 you weren't coming back. At the very least, you weren't going back to that store.

I had been put into that position because I was very good at what I did. I made improvements at the store level because I managed the numbers. I could manage inventory well. I knew when to order things like produce and when to wait for the market to recover. I would order some items in bulk and then transfer them out to other stores so I could get better pricing. I trained up and cross trained staff, so I could have fewer bodies on the clock on slower nights.

All of these qualities made me look good for the owners. Everywhere I went, I increased profits. I made these stores more successful than they had been. I had taken the time to invest in the people and show them what they were capable of. I had trusted them and in turn they trusted me. I had convinced myself that I was doing it for them, but was I really? Or was I simply managing the numbers and this was a means to the end.

In some ways, I can see parallels of myself and the company that I worked for with the Israelites in today's reading from Amos. Today's reading was from around the eighth century BCE. This was the height of Israel's territorial expansion and national prosperity that would never again be reached. They had reached this plateau in Amos' opinion, using questionable practices and stepping on the poor and working classes to achieve this greatness.

Amos was a self described farmer and herder from a small village in Judah. He openly spoke out against the Israelites practices of using weighted scales and deceit over the poor and needy. God had told Amos that the Israelites' end would be soon.

The basket of summer fruit represents the end coming soon. The fruit itself turns quickly and once the basket has turned so has their time. God is tired of how everyone is acting. They sing in their temples and praise his name, giving him offerings. But, they concern themselves more with when they can continue their sales. "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale," (Amos 8:5).

This isn't far from practices companies hold today. Black Friday sales that have worked their way throughout the day on Thanksgiving. Bars and restaurants are open on Christmas and Easter. We concern ourselves with earning profit more than giving thanks and being with our families honoring God.

Companies take advantage of underpaid hourly employees. If an employee doesn't work, then they don't have the money they need to live. They are forced into a position that they must choose between surviving and salvation. Between day to day needs and luxurious wants. Between living and dying.

When I was the fixer, I made a number of decisions based on profits and not as many based on people. I had been trained that people were temporary but the company was permanent. People would come and go. When one left, there was always another to take his/her place. The bottom line was always more important.

I had always thought of myself above that level of thinking. I didn't want to believe that my end goals were really about the profitability of the company. I thought that I cared about the people and that was why I worked so hard developing them. I remember the day that I realized that I wasn't as concerned with their well being as I thought I was.

A severe snowstorm was shutting down Kansas City. It had rolled in on a Friday of a holiday weekend. I knew that we were going to get killed, because we ran a crummy weather promotion every time it snowed. People came out in droves because of it and I knew that I didn't have the staff in place to help the potential customers.

My bartender for the night called and was trying to call off. The interstate was starting to freeze over and she didn't know if she could make the 45 minute drive from where she student taught to the restaurant. I told her that I needed her there and asked her to do what she could to get there.

I was concerned more about the business than I was about her safety. I knew she needed money and I used that to guilt her into coming in for her shift. About an hour after her shift was supposed to have started, we heard from her mother, she was in a car accident and had to be rushed to the hospital.

As much as I would love to tell you that she was OK, she wasn't. She broke her back and was laid up for months. She had to drop out of college and move back home with her parents. She spent another year learning how to walk. She had to wear a brace for another 18 months after that. She lived, but her life was never the same again.

I took that night very hard. I believed that it was my fault this happened to her. I believed that if I had told her to not come in she might have been OK. I believed that God was speaking to me through her. He had reminded me that money is never more important than one person's life.

So many times over the years, I was reprimanded for making conservative decisions to protect the rights and well being of my staff. This has caused me to leave a couple of jobs over the years. I couldn't justify putting the business above their lives.

I thought about that day when Pastor Willard told me that I was part of TGR. It made me think that I was a part of it on both sides. I had walked away from my job, but I had also helped promote an environment that favored profits over people. As much as I want to believe that my leaving made a difference, I know someone slid into my place and was a much better yes man than I was.

God finds ways to tell us that we need to take a step back and take care of ourselves. Those who seek forgiveness and salvation shall hear his words, while those who do not will look for him and search to and fro without finding him.

In Luke's reading today, we are reminded about Jesus' visit with Martha and Mary. Martha works and works while Mary listens to Jesus without helping at all. Martha asks Jesus to make Mary help her. But Jesus tells Martha that Mary has chosen the better way and that he will not take that from her.

So many people in TGR are like Mary. They have chosen quality of life over working and driving themselves crazy. They are listening to what God is telling them, whether they know it or not. God is there for them. He is listening and watching for those seeking salvation.

Now, I'm not telling everyone to quit their jobs. I'm trying to remind us that we need to listen to what God is telling us. I didn't quit the job when I was a fixer until much later. In fact I changed my perspective and started listening to people more than watching the numbers. I listened to what God was telling me and started investing in people in ways that I never had before that.

One time I had a server that reminded me in a way of Martha. She was a single mom and was working two jobs trying to support her family. Every shift she worked, she came in late and was constantly running trying to make up for what she had missed. She was so stressed that she made a number of mistakes and it almost cost her her job.

One night, I found her crying in the walk-in cooler. Most of the time, walk-ins were a great place to hide, because no one outside could hear you. Fortunately, I was doing some work and had to go into the walk-in and found her. I took her into the office and we talked.

She was concerned that I was going to fire her. And that was creating more stress than she could handle. It was not only affecting that job, but her other job and home life as well. I asked her what it would take to get her to slow down and be less stressed.

I was trying to get her to be less like Martha and more like Mary. What I found out was that she just needed her schedule adjusted a half an hour every shift. She couldn't get her kids into their night time day care and be to work in time. They opened when she was supposed to start her shift. She was still doing a lot, but she was doing it on her time and her own way. Eventually she became an hourly manager, after she was ready to quit so that she wouldn't get fired.

God speaks to us and through us. He tries to communicate how we can give ourselves a better quality of life. Sometimes it is quitting. Sometimes it is simply listening to someone else. But He is always there, guiding and teaching.

I realize that I've thrown a lot at you today. And I want to make sure that you know I am not telling you to quit your jobs. If you take anything from this week's sermon, take a half an hour. Find a half an hour in your daily life to listen to what God is telling you. Find a half an hour to slow down and hear his words. If you can't do it all at once, break it down. I kept a copy of the Upper Room in my car. When I got to work I would read the daily devotional, and then I would read it again when I left. The exact amount of time doesn't matter. But taking the time does.