

The Problem with Transition

I work with a lady who is an inmate at the local jail. I will call her Carla – not her real name. She has been in and out of prison for years. I have worked with her on both sides, trying to help her become who God has created her to be. While much of our work together is done at the heart level – her relationship with God and bringing healing to her family – that is just the beginning. She also needs an opportunity to flourish in her life and within the community.

Carla has a talent and love for creating dresses for overweight women. I also see her heart to give to others, and she would be great in ministry to women who are struggling. But she has never had an opportunity to succeed with something she loves doing. She is trapped in a cycle of illness with no affordable health care; paying probation fees while working fast food jobs and sinking in her sense of self-worth; and trying to prove herself to her family by constantly “doing work” instead of thriving as a seamstress, which her family considers a foolish dream.

I have tried to help Carla in the areas where I am able to help. I have also connected her with a mentor, who is a seamstress. Yet her mentor is barely financially solvent. While her mentor, our jail ministry team, and I can help in certain ways, Carla needs more people to come alongside her. She needs access to the gifts and talents God has placed within the church and community.¹

Moon cites Howard Dayton on the importance of praying for a mentor.² While Carla has a willing seamstress mentor, who feels called to use her talents to teach and sew for others, Carla would also need someone with business expertise to help her create a business plan. Perhaps several business leaders within the church or community could work together and create a program that would help not only Carla, but also many others in transition from jail and prison.

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:12.

² W. Jay Moon, “Chapter Four: From a Good Idea to a Good Start,” in *The Social Entrepreneur: The Business of Changing the World* (Franklin TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2015), 46.

The local probation office has begun reaching out to the community, including churches and businesses, in an attempt to gather such assistance. However, this program serves only to network. What if the local churches were more intentional about offering such business support, bringing especially the talents and experiences of retired business persons – people who would appreciate knowing they still have more to offer? The local churches have set up a benevolence fund to help people through immediate financial crises. But how much further could God impact lives through the church, if this benevolence fund were merely one outreach of a larger business network in support of people in transition?

In this paper, I will respond to the “Twelve Elements of Economic Wisdom” presented by the Economic Wisdom Project.³ In my response as a Christian social entrepreneur, I will reflect on material from readings and lectures at Acton University in June 2017. As I outline a Christian understanding of wealth, I will also apply this discussion to the reality faced by women like Carla, in transition from jail and prison, and the response needed by the body of Christ.

1. We have a responsibility to flourish in our own lives, to help our neighbors flourish as fellow stewards, and to pass on a flourishing economy to future generations.

I grew up with a work ethic that was misaligned from a biblical view of work. A job was something that paid the rent. It had no bearing on gifts, talents, and callings. I could grow in my identity as a hobby, but not when it came to paying the bills. Partly, this perspective came from my family, who were lower middle class, not college-educated, and trying to work their way to economic freedom, at the expense of other areas of freedom. Payne describes how the work ethic I learned as a child is embedded within the middle class mentality, e.g., emphasis on “work,

³ The 12 numbered section headings in this paper correspond to the 12 principles in Economic Wisdom Project, “Twelve Elements of Economic Wisdom,” www.economicwisdom.org.

achievement,” and education as a tool for economic success.⁴ U.S. society, with its focus on consumerism and workaholism, seems to perpetuate this myth of work.

This type of work ethic is not biblical. Because this work ethic is not based on the way God created humans to thrive, it is self-defeating. When work is just for the money, it keeps people trapped in jobs that cause them to slide into poverty, hopelessness, and even depression. If, instead, individuals have the opportunity to work in their areas of gifting, they create far more value for the economy, to the benefit of everyone.

Genesis 2:15 shows how God placed humans in the beautiful, pleasing garden He created, so they could cultivate the garden. When this verse is read as part of the entire Genesis 1-2 passage, it brings a feeling of delight, refreshing, and peace. Not just a superficial understanding of peace, but rather “shalom,” which means wholeness. Bradley defines “shalom” as “flourishing,” and finds this flourishing at the heart of God’s redemption through work.⁵

Behind this biblical perspective of work lies the Christian understanding of humans as *imago dei*. When a person is valued according to his or her true worth, work should flow from a calling to flourish, cultivate, and contribute value to the community. The person creates, in the image of the Creator. Claar and Klay note that “the gift of human creativity is essential for society to thrive.”⁶ If we truly focus on a person’s value as *imago dei*, we as a church would not settle for occupational settings that devalue an individual or that person’s creative potential.

Devaluing takes place through sweat shops, human trafficking, and forced labor. Oppressive work environments, abusive bosses, corrupt corporations, and families and spouses with unbiblical work ethics also undermine a person’s worth. Even when none of these

⁴ Ruby K. Payne, Ph.D., *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 4th edition (Highlands TX: aha! Process, Inc., 1996), 42-43.

⁵ Anne Bradley, “Economic Way of Thinking,” lecture at Acton University, Grand Rapids, MI, June 21, 2017.

⁶ Victor V. Claar and Robin J. Klay, *Economics in Christian Perspective: Theory, Policy and Life Choices* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 21.

conditions seems present, a person's worth can also be devalued by feeling pressured to take a job to pay the rent, when that job does not reflect the person's gifts, callings, and worth. That reality represents a disconnect between God's intention for work and what society has allowed. As Christians, we should not merely accept this as "the way things are." This is not the way God created things to be. We have a calling not only to speak the truth, but also to point the way.

For women like Carla, in transition from jail and prison, it is important to have Christians speaking into their lives, helping them understand their value as humans created in God's image. They also need opportunities to flourish within the community, creating value on the basis of their unique gifts and callings. Upon leaving the jail, inmates are given a list of companies that accept workers with felonies on their records. The logic is that they will have a way to pay their probation fees and stay out of trouble. But this logic is not based on helping these women step into their true callings, which would be the most solid foundation for their future and for the community.

2. Economies flourish when people have integrity and trust each other.

Wariboko emphasizes the importance of trust in economic transactions, suggesting that trust "minimizes transaction costs."⁷ When economic transactions take place within an environment of trust, the perception of risk is reduced, and the willingness to engage is increased. In an environment of trust, people can move on with the business of doing business, with greater confidence and less extreme measures of self-protection. This greater transactional productivity benefits the entire community.

Trust is not a given; it must be earned. While a business can earn public trust through a history of successful transactions and properly addressed complaints, trust is built best on an

⁷ Nimi Wariboko, "The Moral Roots of the Global Financial Industry," in Deirdre King Hainsworth and Scott R. Paeth, *Public Theology for a Global Society: Essays in Honor of Max Stackhouse* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2010), Loc 791-795.

individual level, in relationships. This is not easy. It is hard enough to build trust in the most familiar relationships, even from one family member to the next. Building trust across cultures requires even more understanding and willingness to be present and sensitive to intercultural communication. Cultural distinctions might affect trust-building across national borders, ethnicities within one country, or even among socioeconomic groups in the same community.⁸

The importance of trust calls for a holistic understanding of economics that includes cultural, biblical, and relational perspectives. Widmer defines “culture” as the way we ascribe meaning to our lives.⁹ Given that economics is simply people engaged in transactions of exchange, any attempt to remove economics from these larger areas of meaning would be to reduce humans to stick figures on a page. Moreover, the way people live in their economic lives is not meant to be disconnected from their spiritual lives. Claar and Klay remind us that Jesus Christ’s “life on earth demonstrated how to live fully,” connecting daily work with both physical and spiritual food.¹⁰ Landry reminds us that work is a spiritual calling, in which we not only create outwardly, but are also created inwardly by God through our work.¹¹ As Jesus cared for spiritual and physical needs, Greer and Smith lament that the two were ever separated by the church.¹²

In our local community, gaps of trust and lack of relationships exist between socioeconomic groups. When a prison term is involved, trust decreases, in the perception of the inmate and from the perspective of a potential employer. Business-building assistance, while

⁸ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 4th edition, 37.

⁹ Andreas Widmer, “Entrepreneurial Culture: How it Supports Innovation,” lecture at Acton University, Grand Rapids, MI, June 23, 2017.

¹⁰ Claar and Klay, *Economics in Christian Perspective: Theory, Policy and Life Choices*, 21.

¹¹ Rev. Roger Landry, “Entrepreneurial Vocation,” lecture at Acton University, Grand Rapids, MI, June 22, 2017.

¹² Greer and Smith, Peter Greer and Phil Smith, *The Poor Will Be Glad: Joining the Revolution to Lift the World out of Poverty* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2009), 45-46.

vital for women like Carla, is not sufficient. Relationship-building within the community, and especially through the church, is the foundation of any business endeavors that will be built.

3. In general, people flourish when they take responsibility for their own economic success by doing work that serves others and makes the world better.

1 Timothy 5:8 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10 tell us that people need to provide for themselves and their household by working. Clara needs to provide for herself and for her family. Even though she does not have custody of her children, she is teaching them by her example. As a result of her present difficulties, they are learning to feel defeated and to depend only on others for help. While God has created us for relationship, and we are to help one another and ask for help, this does not imply total dependence on others for all of our support. Clara *does* need help, but she is also capable of contributing to her own support. What if she could show her children a different way to live and flourish?

Basic living expenses perpetuate month after month. While the body of Christ can contribute to help someone through an immediate need – as benevolence ministries or a pastor’s discretionary funds are designed to do – emergency funds cannot meet a person’s ongoing monthly expenses. When people give, they often feel that the recipient is going to be okay, based on that one gift. This is an unrealistic view of long-term needs and the nature of living expenses. The person who gives one time often does not realize that gift simply pastes a bandage across a leak in a dam. Without a way to grow her income to meet her continuous needs, Clara will be back in jail, where she has shelter and meals.

Giving agencies that make presentations at churches to raise funds are often remiss in sharing the importance of ongoing needs. Our community is home to an addiction regeneration center. While it is necessary to raise support to cover operating costs for the 24-month program, it is even more critical to provide work-transition opportunities for the men in the program.

Otherwise, they will be out on the street and back in their addiction within two or three months after their release from the center.

In Clara's situation, it is also not enough just to give money to help her get started in business. Her business also needs to be set up for success. Moon describes a clothing-design project in West Africa which encounters logistical challenges. Early adopters, who would try out the designs, are considered a key to momentum.¹³ What if some of the women in our community, who have wanted to donate money to the jail ministry, could instead buy, model, and talk about one of Clara's dresses?

Beyond practical needs, the focus on helping a person support himself or herself brings deeper theological implications. It is theologically important to relate to people as "fellow stewards" rather than as objects of our stewardship.¹⁴ When we use our gifts and talents, we reflect "the image of God."¹⁵ Our "work and exchange are forms of loving and serving."¹⁶ In reference to Ecclesiastes 38:39, Claar and Klay also remind us "our work is our prayer."¹⁷

Imagine how many ways Clara could help other women and families by her dress-making ministry. She has a heart for overweight women. She could help give women the self-esteem they need to embrace their bodies, feel beautiful, and see themselves as imager-bearers of God. This is a necessary foundation for any successful fitness or weight loss plan. Most women give up because they don't believe they are worth it. What if a woman, like Clara, who has defied the odds, tells them they are worth it?

¹³ Moon, "Chapter Four: From a Good Idea to a Good Start," in *The Social Entrepreneur: The Business of Changing the World*, 40, 50-51.

¹⁴ Economic Wisdom Project, "Twelve Elements of Economic Wisdom," 6.

¹⁵ Claar and Klay, *Economics in Christian Perspective: Theory, Policy and Life Choices*, 23.

¹⁶ Economic Wisdom Project, "Twelve Elements of Economic Wisdom," 6.

¹⁷ Claar and Klay, *Economics in Christian Perspective: Theory, Policy and Life Choices*, 23.

Despite the biblical mandate for individuals to work in supporting themselves and their households, the church often undermines these efforts. Mission teams bring clothes to distribute in impoverished communities. These teams do not consider the effect their free clothing might have on a local entrepreneur – perhaps a seamstress like Clara – who is trying to make a living selling clothes. Greer and Smith describe how a church group donated eggs that displaced a local poultry entrepreneur in Rwanda; and how clothes donated to Uganda and Zambia have undermined textile industries.¹⁸ Similarly, a local church in our community might consider collecting clothes for women in transition from jail. What if, instead, the women in transition, and their families, and the ladies at the local church purchased dresses from Clara? Perhaps she could make custom sizes for the women in the local jail.

In a similar approach, while Clara makes dresses, what if another person in transition from jail was trained to write resumes for people as they come out of jail? They already know each other and have established some degree of trust. They know they need to associate with people who will be good influences in their lives. They also know they need to help each other.

When individuals are released from the jail community, often they feel alone. Many go back to jail just to be in a safe community. What if they had an economic way to help each other and stay in community upon their release? To take this a step further, what if local churches helped to set up an entrepreneurial exchange, focused on helping individuals in transition from jail and prison? Greer and Smith explain how churches can help and benefit from being involved with such exchanges.¹⁹

¹⁸ Greer and Smith, *The Poor Will Be Glad: Joining the Revolution to Lift the World out of Poverty*, 58-59.

¹⁹ Greer and Smith, *The Poor Will Be Glad: Joining the Revolution to Lift the World out of Poverty*, 165-166.

4. Real economic success is about how much value you create, not how much money you make.

Luke 12:13-21 warns against the greed that often comes with abundance of possessions. Blomberg makes reference to studies that “articulate a ‘theology of enough,’” by which Christians should make a determination of how much is enough, and give beyond that point.²⁰ This brings to mind John Wesley’s advice for people to gain, save, and then “*give* all they can.”²¹ Wesley’s concern about riches does not proceed from a mandate to avoid productivity, profit, or entrepreneurship. Rather, Wesley is concerned to help people not succumb to the temptations of greed while contributing to economic production. An accountability group is vital for every Christian entrepreneur – and really for every Christian – to help with stewardship of income. Wesley advocates accountability groups as a remedy for the temptations of greed. Groups are to serve as accountability in all areas of life, including “personal finances and business activity.”²²

When an individual is released from jail, that person has already entered an accountability arrangement with the court system. With strong support from social entrepreneurs, who are already walking in transparency and accountability with fellow Christians, a person like Carla could easily step into an accountability group upon being reconnected with the community.

Money in itself has no value. Rather, it is one measure of the value produced and exchanged in the economy. Any theological discussion of money needs to take a balanced view. Concern about the temptations of money is vital. But theological discussions about money also must include the requirement of profit to sustain a business for the long run; the need for

²⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 27.

²¹ Kevin Brown, Kevin Kinghorn, and Tapiwa Mucherera, “Chapter Three: What Wesleyan Social Entrepreneurship Looks Like,” in *The Social Entrepreneur: The Business of Changing the World* (Franklin TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2015), 29.

²² Kevin Brown, Kevin Kinghorn, and Tapiwa Mucherera, “Chapter Three: What Wesleyan Social Entrepreneurship Looks Like,” in *The Social Entrepreneur: The Business of Changing the World*, 29.

responsible investment in a company; and the responsibility to teach people who have a giving gift to not give everything away and create their own destitution.

5. A productive economy comes from the value-creating work of free and virtuous people.

Freedom means “treating every person as the steward of his or her own life.” This includes a right to work – to flourish, for the sake of the individual, the family, and also the community.²³ It is important that serving the community not be removed from this understanding of freedom. The Apostle Paul reminds us that freedom is meant to love and serve others, not to harm others or indulge the flesh.²⁴ Widmer reminds us that freedom means the ability to do what *we should* do.²⁵ People need to consider how they will steward their work so others benefit.

Flourishing can be affected by a sense of obligation to give everything to family or neighbors.²⁶ This can happen in a culture of poverty and might prevent someone like Carla from investing in her business. Still remembering the words of the Apostle Paul about not harming others through our freedom, how might a person like Carla balance these cultural expectations with her business needs? Perhaps she could set up a charitable aspect of her business that invests hands-on in her culture? Or she might include those individuals in her business, or in some way help them contribute to economic growth through their own giftings and talents. Carla and the people in her extended family and immediate community would need to decide what this looks like – it is their culture.

The church is a powerful network for helping people connect with the right jobs, as our local church has demonstrated through the now fully employed network of “Men in Job Transition.” The church, meaning the whole body of Christ in a community, should be a more

²³ Economic Wisdom Project, “Twelve Elements of Economic Wisdom,” 11.

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 8:9; Galatians 5:13-15.

²⁵ Widmer, “Entrepreneurial Culture: How it Supports Innovation.”

²⁶ Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, 4th edition, 14; also Greer and Smith, *The Poor Will Be Glad: Joining the Revolution to Lift the World out of Poverty*, 80-81.

powerful network than LinkedIn. The church could even use a platform like LinkedIn as a tool, but driven intentionally by members of the church. It is important for the people of the church to remember that personal financial problems do not mean a person is not living rightly.²⁷ It is imperative not to judge, but rather to come alongside and find the *best* path to flourishing.

6. Economics generally flourish when policies and practices reward value creation.

If policies are based in ignorance, the consequences for human flourishing can be severe, despite the best intentions. For example, Claar and Klay suggest that aiming for a zero unemployment rate would not be optimal. It is more beneficial to individuals and to society if people find a job that helps them create more value, in line with their giftings and callings, rather than just “a job.”²⁸ Landry reminds us that unemployment is not merely a financial issue but also an issue of a person’s sense of creative worth.²⁹

Booth warns Christians that it is imperative to know the facts before speaking on behalf of life-and-death policy decisions concerning global poverty.³⁰ He encourages Christians to investigate the ways in which globalization has helped to alleviate poverty by creating a robust economy. It is not enough to know that global poverty has declined. We must also learn *how* it has declined, so we do not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Rather than decry globalization outright, we have the responsibility to look at what is working within globalization and what needs help.

It is also important to understand and know how to recognize genuinely unjust practices. These might take place halfway around the world or in our own backyard, e.g., human trafficking is a major industry in Atlanta, just one hour’s drive from our small community.

²⁷ Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*, 25.

²⁸ Claar and Klay, *Economics in Christian Perspective: Theory, Policy and Life Choices*, 116-117.

²⁹ Landry, “Entrepreneurial Vocation.”

³⁰ Philip Booth, “Globalization and Inequality,” lecture at Acton University, Grand Rapids, MI, June 22, 2017.

Pastors can help individuals apply “moral truths” not only to their own lives, but also to public life.³¹ Pastors might facilitate this understanding and application not only through sermons, but even more importantly through small-group and church-wide Bible studies. This helps to transform generalities into specific applications and allows people to offer questions and real-life examples for in-depth discussion. The United Methodist Church, for example, has such a strong Wesleyan foundation in discussions of real issues across the church body. To some degree, this inheritance has been lost, and would be worth the effort to revive.

7. Households, businesses, communities, and nations should support themselves by producing more than they consume.

The Biblical “virtue of productivity” – producing more than consuming – contributes value to the community.³² Has anyone told Carla she can contribute to the transformation of her community? She has as much power from heaven to do this as anyone else.

Where individuals maintain an influential privilege in economic transformation, they have a responsibility not only to produce, but even more so, to encourage and help people like Carla to be productive. Through entrepreneurship, Carla, in turn, has the responsibility to encourage others that she will employ. Widmer reminds us that an employer has a biblical imperative to love his or her employees and to want God’s absolute best for each one.³³

Booth notes that a person is responsible to God for the stewardship of wealth.³⁴ Someone who has a large amount of wealth has a large responsibility to steward it according to God’s direction. Are we, the church, teaching and helping wealthy parishioners to understand and carry this out? Or are we only trying to get their money? They are accountable to God for stewarding their wealth. We are accountable to God for them! The oversight is not always one of neglect,

³¹ Economic Wisdom Project, “Twelve Elements of Economic Wisdom,” 12.

³² Economic Wisdom Project, “Twelve Elements of Economic Wisdom,” 14.

³³ Widmer, “Entrepreneurial Culture: How it Supports Innovation.”

³⁴ Booth, “Globalization and Inequality.”

but sometimes it comes from a lack of awareness. Pastors and church staff often think in terms of donations, rather than value creation through economic productivity.³⁵ Pastors also need to understand how the biblical value of work takes place within the market, where many parishioners work.

8. A productive economy lifts people out of poverty and generally helps people flourish.

Genesis 1 calls people to help the world flourish. Can we re-envision our working lives in Genesis terms?³⁶ If people in my community are in poverty, our economy is not productive. Neither people nor economy is flourishing, according to Genesis 1. Likewise, if people from every economic circumstance are not contributing effectively to the economy, people in poverty are not being helped.

If someone lives solely off family wealth but does nothing to contribute to a robust economy; if people with limited resources try and limit themselves even further in solidarity with the poor; and if a person living at the poverty level is not given an opportunity to contribute value based on his or her talents, poverty will continue. We cannot contribute to a right attitude toward money by cutting ourselves off from the economy. As a church, we cannot help lift people out of poverty “without embracing economic growth.”³⁷

9. The most effective way to turn around poverty, economic distress, and injustice is by expanding opportunity for people to develop and deploy their God-given productive potential in communities of exchange, especially through entrepreneurship.

One effective way to counter poverty and injustice is to observe what has worked in other similar circumstances and discover how to implement these successes in culturally specific ways. If individuals can be given opportunities to flourish at a community level, some of the most immediate effects of injustice and poverty might be overturned.

³⁵ Widmer, “Entrepreneurial Culture: How it Supports Innovation.”

³⁶ Economic Wisdom Project, “Twelve Elements of Economic Wisdom,” 16.

³⁷ Economic Wisdom Project, “Twelve Elements of Economic Wisdom,” 17.

Participation in communities of exchange can create momentum for distributive justice. Theologically, individuals, bearing the image of God and working in community, can release the creative power of heaven into their local circumstances. This can have residual effects on a community and nation. Baker notes that when an individual is given the liberty to flourish, the effect is more honoring than when an individual is designated arbitrarily as part of a group to receive attempts at distributive justice.³⁸

Entrepreneurial exchanges at the local level must also be supported at the macro level by a system based on justice. Greer and Smith discuss the community-level devastation that followed large-scale bulldozing by the order of a corrupt president in Zimbabwe.³⁹ However, the more that can be done to counter injustice and poverty at the local level, through entrepreneurship, the more a justice-serving government's scarce resources can be used for activities such as law enforcement⁴⁰ and provision of needed infrastructure.

10. Programs aimed at economic problems need a fully rounded understanding of how people flourish.

Economic aid can take many forms, including foreign government aid, intervention of global institutions, nonprofit work, investment capital, and, remembering Carla, assistance in developing a business plan. While these efforts might seem noble in principle, problems can arise when a textbook solution is applied without awareness of the local culture and individuals involved. This includes sensitivity to the many ways humans can flourish.

An economic solution that would keep a father away from his family for weeks at a time misses the importance of his spiritual and emotional role that comes through constant presence in his children's lives. Routing a painting artist through an assembly-line job, simply because of

³⁸ Hunter Baker, "Social Justice, Government, and Society," lecture at Acton University, Grand Rapids, MI, June 23, 2017.

³⁹ Greer and Smith, *The Poor Will Be Glad: Joining the Revolution to Lift the World out of Poverty*, 146.

⁴⁰ Hunter Baker, "Social Justice, Government, and Society."

financial expediency, neglects the artist's creative calling and the importance of artistic beauty for human flourishing. Economics should be well-rounded enough that the same creative heavenly power that allows the artist to paint should also allow the business advisor to come up with a more creative plan to help that artist grow financially.

Returning to Carla's situation, a program that provides a cookie-cutter solution to the problem of employment for people with felonies on their record might route her into a job at a plant that manufactures window blinds – one of our local companies that hires felons who are on parole. A more creative economic solution would help Carla launch her work as a seamstress, so she can work from home, spend more time with and support her family, flourish as a daughter of God, create beautiful clothing that reflects God's beauty and honors women, and minister to women who struggle with their weight and self-care.

11. Economic thinking must account for long-term effects and unintended consequences.

I encountered a situation in which several people, including myself, were allowed to give a large amount of money and time toward a church ministry, without setting up that ministry for long-term growth. When times became lean and the leaders of the ministry tried to create the means to financially sustain the ministry, a businessman with strong influence forbade these activities. The result was the very destitution the program was designed to alleviate. Sadly, the greater cost in this lack of foresight was people feeling forced to leave a church that had once counted them as part of the community.

When a church finance committee leader pressures a ministry to eliminate activities that financially sustain the ministry, individuals like Carla receive the message that they are not important to the body of Christ, or even to God. Church doors that once opened in welcome close with a resounding thud. This happens because someone with training in financial logistics

elevates money over people, and does not consult with the people closest to the community being served.

12. In general, economies flourish when goodwill is universal and global, but control is local and personal knowledge guides decisions.

Not only is it important for decision-makers – whether economic, business, or church – to be sensitive to the well-rounded ways people flourish. It is also vital that these decision-makers take their cues from people who are part of the local culture. This principle of decision-making at the most local level is known as subsidiarity.

The importance of listening at the local level is illustrated by Greer and Smith.⁴¹ They describe the efforts of a US church to invest in a Ukrainian village through a local Ukrainian church. Unfortunately, the decisions were made by a group of Americans without obtaining feedback from the Ukrainian church. Thus, the well-intended purchase of a machine to produce sunflower oil was never put to use in the Ukraine. Sunflower oil was not something the Ukrainian church had an interest in producing, nor did they see a market for it. This story underscores the importance of working with individuals at the most local level, rather than trying to impose a plan created elsewhere.

Returning to Carla’s situation, any business leader or church program that tries to help people in their transition from jail will end up in failure, unless they take their cues from the inmates; from the people who work in local law enforcement and judicial programs; and from the local community.

Without input from law enforcement, efforts will fail. There are important considerations in working with individuals who have felonies on their records. An understanding of prison

⁴¹ Greer and Smith, *The Poor Will Be Glad: Joining the Revolution to Lift the World out of Poverty*, 221-222.

culture, addiction, probation and parole, and other influences that affect the life of someone released from prison – while not to be stereotyped – needs to be taken seriously.

Are community members afraid of felons working within their local economy? Don't ignore those fears. Present to these people the problem of lack of employment facing individuals transitioning from jail and prison. Discuss the impact on families, recidivism, the local economy, and the health of the community. Help people see these individuals as image-bearers of God. Then enlist the help and input of these community members in crafting a solution. Otherwise, their opposition and fear will only undermine your best efforts to make a difference.

Next Steps

In working with women in transition from jail, I have tried to use online vendor services to help them access freelance jobs in writing, online research, web design, etc. The reason is that our county is limited in jobs. However, my effort has met with almost no success.

The problem is four-fold:

1. Most of these women do not have reliable access to computers and Internet. In a semi-rural county, most do not have transportation to reach the public library, which has only a few computers. We are working on developing a community center, but that is a slow process and several years away.

2. The women would need training and supervision, and I am the only one on the team that is experienced in this type of work. Since I have no salary from the church, and already volunteer beyond my capacity, the time I could devote is limited. I am better suited to use that limited time helping the women with inner healing, which is my true calling and strength.

3. The women cannot find online work fast enough to pay their probation fees.

4. While some of the women might find a genuine calling in online freelance work, for many of them, their callings are in other areas, like caregiving, landscape design, and addiction recovery support. And our beautiful seamstress, Carla. These women need to be working toward what will cause them to flourish, as image-bearers of God, and to create value in the community through their unique gifts and talents.

It would be easy for me to stick only with inner healing ministry and serve the women in that capacity, and of course I will serve in this way. However, I do believe I am called and able to do more. I need to be fruitful, multiply my efforts, and contribute to economic growth beyond my individual efforts.⁴² I am a social entrepreneur, gifted with “taking initiative to innovate and create.”⁴³ I understand Luke 3:11 to mean that if I can do more, I need to. But not just a vain attempt to help, like the one I made previously. Rather, my contributions need to be in line with my unique talents and in a way that would allow me to flourish and create value.

My experience in the business world is not sufficient for me to create a solution for women like Carla, as I have tried to in the past. However, my business experience, coupled with my gifts of teaching, encouragement, and community-building are enough that I could speak, write, and present the problems, the potential for solutions, and invite the local churches to respond. I am weak at personal networking. But I am strong at public speaking and writing. I can use my firsthand experience with the women in jail – my knowledge of who they are as individuals, as well as my understanding of the obstacles they face – to cast a vision and to be a resource for people who might feel called to respond. At my age of 51, I am better suited as a community resource to help inspire younger people to take initiative. I hope this paper will be the beginning of casting a vision, inviting the community to participate in creating jobs after jail.

⁴² Genesis 1:28; Anne Bradley, “Economic Way of Thinking.”

⁴³ David Bosch, “Chapter One: What is Social Entrepreneurship?” in *The Social Entrepreneur: The Business of Changing the World* (Franklin TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2015), 2.

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