

God Owns His Business

Stanley Tam • Finance

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"So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" Luke 16:11

Although he was an innovator in the reclamation of silver in the photographic process, Stanley Tam of Lima, Ohio, is best known for his commitment to Jesus Christ. A large sign adorning the home of United States Plastic Corporation proclaims "Christ Is the Answer," and Tam's widely read book, *God Owns My Business*, describes how he arrived at the conviction that he should legally make God the literal owner of his business. Tam, who has traveled throughout the country and world to testify about his Christian faith, is one who is willing to "put his money where his mouth is." Although his business success could have made him a millionaire many times over, he and his wife, Juanita, draw only modest salaries from U.S. Plastics. All profits are channeled through the Stanita Foundation, with those funds designated for a variety of Christian ministries, primarily overseas missions. In the following interview the seventy-five-year-old Tam talks about his determination to make Jesus Christ the central focus of his life and business.

Many Christians wrestle with the question of whether they should tithe, which is generally regarded as paying 10 percent of personal income to the Lord's work. Yet years ago, you reached the conviction that God wanted you to give far more than that. How did that come about? First of all, I must emphasize that I don't believe anyone should use me as an example. I must live Stanley Tam's life, being obedient to the directives I feel God gives me, and everyone else must live their own lives, being equally obedient to the priorities God asks of them. For me, all I can say is that the Lord led me over a period of time to give increasing amounts of my income. I have always tithed, from the time I became a Christian at the age of eighteen. A few years later, I felt led to increase the amount of my giving to 15 percent, and then in 1940 I felt clearly directed by God to literally make Him my Senior Partner. That meant giving 51 percent of my earnings to His work. That still did not amount to a lot, since my company's gross sales only totaled twelve thousand dollars a year, and I was only drawing a salary of fourteen dollars a week.

How did you go about making God your senior partner in a literal sense? From 1940 to 1952, I maintained a self-declared trust, recognizing it as a contract between me and God. Then in 1952, my wife and I established the Stanita Foundation (the name resulting from the combination of Stanley and Juanita) through which company profits would be channeled and directed to help fund missions around the world and in the United States.

A point came, though, when you recognized the Lord as more than your partner. Yes, in the fall of 1954, I was speaking at a revival meeting in Medellin, Colombia when God confronted me in a supernatural way. At the close of my talk, people began responding in a magnificently spontaneous way, but the Lord began directly speaking to me through my thoughts. At that point, He let me know He

wanted me to turn the business over to Him completely and become His employee. So, on January 15, 1955, I ceased being a stockholder in either of my companies, States Smelting and Refining Corporation or United States Plastic Corporation.

As you pointed out, God works differently in each of our lives, so we cannot presume that His plan for you is the same for each of us. But why do you think the Lord made such an unusual request? I have always enjoyed making money, and God knew that. Had He left me undisturbed in this area, I could have become a proud, materialistic, self-centred spiritual misfit. In asking of me the submission of the greatest drive of my life, He removed a blighting influence and replaced it with an inner peace and satisfaction such as I could never have known otherwise.

Inner peace and satisfaction by giving away most of your company's profits-that certainly doesn't seem to fit in today's society. It does if you recognize that a person's soul is the thing of greatest value in all the world. And if it is true that only spiritual things are eternal, it makes sense to use the profits of a business to win others to Christ. Jesus told us in Matthew 6:20 to "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven," (NAS) so really the only difference is where we are depositing our money. It is said that "you can't take it with you," and it's true - unless you send it on ahead. In 1952, I was in Korea to speak to a number of churches. During that time, the Lord impressed on me Psalm 2:8, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, and the ends of the earth your possession." My prayer was to ask God that I would be used in His harvest field, and as my burden for lost souls has grown, so has my business, so I have been able to do more.

How much of a financial commitment are you making to God's work around the world? In 1988, we committed about \$1.5 million to foreign missions and to help fund Christian work in the United States through our foundation. With the sign on the outside of your building proclaiming "Christ Is the Answer" and your commitment to devote business proceeds to reaching people for the Lord, you don't seem to see a distinction between your Christian and secular pursuits. We built our business on the promise in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you," (NAS). I don't think there is such a thing as a part-time Christian; we are all in full-time ministry. We each need to ask God to take our vocation and make it a ministry. And if we ask Him, He will do it. You're 73 now. Do you have any goals that you have yet to achieve? Mainly, I want to do more of the same. But I do have three goals I hope to reach before I die. I want to have talked to one million people about Christ during my lifetime. In forty-five years, I believe I have spoken to about six hundred thousand. I also want to see one year in which we are able to invest \$2 million in foreign missions. The best we've been able to do so far is \$1.7 million. And third, I'm asking God to see three people a day commit their lives to Him through our various business mailings. We publish two catalogues and send out two million each year, along with about one hundred and twenty thousand product shipments. We always include literature that gives a clear presentation of the gospel message. Responses to our non-denominational Bible study course indicate that, each year, more than seven hundred people receive Christ as Saviour and Lord through our communications. To some, that may sound like counting spiritual scalps. I hope it doesn't, because I know that God's greater goal is that none should perish, and I just want to participate in that.

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