

TITLE: Mission and the Marketplace

Scripture used: Jeremiah 29:11

OVERVIEW

Big Idea:

Our special guest speaker today was Atherton resident and business executive Ron Johnson. Ron grew up in a Christian home near Minneapolis. Ron credits his parents with giving him a deep-seated feeling that he mattered in the eyes of God, resulting in trust and joy which surpassed fleeting happiness. Ron went to Stanford (undergraduate) and Harvard Business School in the early 1980s, and became a top executive at the retail corporation Target where he engineered an innovative business transformation. In 2000, he was hired by Steve Jobs into a then-struggling Apple Computer where, against everybody's advice, he executed on a contrarian push into retail stores and developed the concept of the "Genius Bar". In 2011, he took a new challenge and became CEO of struggling retailer, J.C. Penney. Ron's turnaround strategy there failed in spectacular fashion, resulting in a time of deep personal challenge for him and his ultimate departure from the company in 2013. Ron is currently CEO of retail startup Enjoy Technology where "it's too early to tell" whether it will be successful.

KEY POINTS

- 1) **Point #1 Tend your garden.** Ron was influenced by Marianne Williamson's book "Return to Love". At Target, he realized that he was driving his team according to harsh operating principles learnt at Harvard Business School. He had a growing feeling that his team met and exceeded goals out of fear. He decided to approach his work as a garden, and treat each plant at its best. Hope and encouragement became the water and sunlight of the team. The team went from strict metrics to having a sense of unlimited potential. The intent was to secure the good of others, while refreshing one's own soul.
- 2) **Point #2 Cultivate the power of imagination.** Ron was deeply influenced by his year in Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) and his diving into the Book of Genesis. God is Creator above all, and created humans in His image. It influenced his perception of people from "customers filled with stuff" to "creative individuals." While walking in a London neighborhood, he spotted a beautifully designed tea kettle in a shop window, and ended up befriending its designer Michael Graves and later signing him into an exclusive design partnership with Target. This lifted the spirit of customers and created a new paradigm for life and family.
- 3) **Point #3 Love made visual.** Ron was hired by Steve Jobs in early 2000. Jobs was a great delegator, a "master gardener" who trusted his subordinates to take initiative. He would intervene once in awhile to "keep the complicated simple". Steve labeled the iPod as "A thousand songs in your pocket." Ron thought of John 3:16 and Luke 10 and decided to use the tagline "enrich lives" to launch Apple stores. The stores were located close to where people lived; they outperformed on ergonomics and convenience; and focused on no-pressure service and advice. The compensation structure reflected those values. Apple stores ended up being the most profitable retail play ever!
- 4) **Point #4 Learn from your pool of tears.** Ron left what had become an "easy job" at Apple against everybody's advice. He was charted to lead a renewal at J.C. Penney. The expectations were sky high. Ron trusted his instincts, and went big. He changed the company's identity, pricing, and merchandise. Sales plummeted after the company's popular coupons were phased out, and the pressure increased to go back to the old model. Ron went from glory to grief, from being celebrated as the World's Greatest Merchant to being the World's Worst CEO. He drew no support but, on the contrary, intense criticism from the Board of Directors, the media, and his staff. We all go through periodic pools of tears, and this one was particularly public. He felt like a misfit, someone who had been more lucky than gifted or smart, and was now getting his comeuppance. He reveled in the gift of solitude, daring to stand in the presence of God, and sometimes felt like the prodigal son at his all-time low. He remembered Julia Cameron's writings on the sacred potential, the possibility for redemption in difficulty, and the need to process disappointment and sadness with empathy for others and without anger. Dr King spoke about showing overflowing love without expecting anything in return.
- 5) **Point #5 I shall not want.** Why does God sometimes let us make terrible decisions? Why do we feel we don't have enough, and are never satisfied? After his exit from J.C. Penney, Ron spent time at home cultivating some quiet space in his life, as well as mentoring others. When you are blessed, be a blessing

to others. You will derive energy from mentoring and coaching young people. The spirit of Agape is at play fostering a culture of kindness.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - What stood out to you about Ron's message? How have you tended your garden, or met your pool of tears?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - Read Jeremiah 29:11 , Psalm 127:1, Proverbs 16:1-9. Of all the plans you made for your life, which ones were brought to fruition? Which were not? Is God in the plan you have for your life today?
- 3) **DO** - Take some time this week and think of the 3-4 words that summarize your current mission, whether it's in the marketplace, home, relationships, or ministry. Be prepared to share with the group when you meet next.