

FOCUS ON FAITH

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VALUE ADDED

For many of us the two words "Value Added" are inextricably linked to a third word "Tax" and if you are a business owner just thinking about VAT probably makes your blood start to boil!

It was back in 1973 that VAT was introduced into the UK. In those days it was levied at the rate of 10% – half of what we pay today on most purchases of goods and services. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Anthony Barber, said VAT would be a simple tax but over the years the complexity levels have increased and of course companies – large and small – have to keep up not only with the ever changing legislation but have effectively become unpaid tax collectors.

And it's not a cheap process either – the Treasury estimates that it costs small businesses between £150 and £200 million each time the VAT rate is amended. That may be good business for those companies supplying the software for the technological and systems changes required but not so good for the companies who have to shell out the money or for customers who eventually end up paying for it all.

But the "value added" I'd like us to consider has less to do with the taxation system than our personal value systems.

Although I'm no mathematician I understand that I can either add or subtract value to my life. Adding value occurs each time I have a positive attitude rather than a negative one; when I recognise and play to my strengths rather than worry about what I can't do; when I take opportunities instead of letting them pass me by.

But there is another mathematical dynamic at work here. When I encourage and support other people; when I share my expertise and experiences willingly with them without expecting anything in return; when I invest in their development and give them opportunities to grow and learn, that's not just adding value, that's multiplication.

Having previously worked in the financial and property worlds the whole area of investment is of interest (no pun intended!) to me and recently a verse in the Bible caught my eye. One translation of Proverbs 23:23 says,

"Invest in truth and wisdom, discipline and good sense, and don't part with them."

The kind of "value added" investment we can make involves:

- Acting with personal integrity, faithfulness, sound judgment and self-control
- Demonstrating respect, care and concern for those who are less well-off than we are
- Standing up for those whose rights have been abused through injustice or prejudice

And when we do so, we reinforce values that sadly have been sacrificed at the altar of individualism over the years.

The vast majority of us are indebted to the scores, possibly hundreds, of people who have invested into our lives. We've learned often through other people's successes and failures. None of us can honestly say that we are "self-made" – we've watched, maybe from a distance, how relatives, friends, colleagues and sometimes complete strangers have acted and reacted. We've modelled ourselves on those we respect and admire whilst determining not to follow the example of those who we didn't admire. And someone,

somewhere probably took a risk with us by giving us our first break and encouraged us to step out of our comfort zones.

Proverbs 27:17 says, ***"People learn from one another, just as iron sharpens iron"*** and it's a sobering thought that our lives impact not just those around today but future generations as well.

Each day we have the opportunity to positively enhance our lives and those of other people by investing time, energy and wise advice.

It's an investment that always shows a good return.

To find out more about the Christian faith and resources available plus information on services at local Churches together with contact details, please log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk.