

Google by all accounts is one of the most creative companies around, and apparently is also one of the most fun companies to work for. The tech giant that is known for its powerhouse search engine has also developed such products as: Gmail, the Android operating system, Google Docs, Chrome, Chrome Books, and GPS technology. Google is also well-known for the benefits provided to their employees such as: pool tables, bowling alleys, free food, free soda, gym memberships...The corporation even employs a chief happiness officer whose sole job is to keep employees happy, and to maintain productivity.

A man named Laszlo Bock, a former vice president of operations at Google, was responsible for attracting, developing, retaining and delighting people who use their search engine and products, also known as “Googlers.” In his book, *Work Rules!*, Bock offers a ton of advice aimed at helping leaders “live and lead.” He instructs them to remove the power that managers’ have over employees, to learn from their best and even their worst workers, to only hire people who are smarter than them, and if they’re comfortable with the amount of freedom they’ve given their employees, they haven’t gone far enough.

In fact, freedom is something for which Google is famous for. Enshrined into the management ethos at Google is the concept of the 20 percent rule. Founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin highlighted the idea back in 2004 in an IPO letter in which they wrote, “We encourage our employees, in addition to their

regular projects, to spend 20 percent of their time working on what they believe will most benefit Google.” These days, however, there’s some debate as to whether the 20 percent rule still exists. Mr. Bock says that only about 10 percent of employees use it, but that “it doesn’t really matter, as long as the idea of it exists. Googlers at the company aren’t forced to work on additional projects and there are no written guidelines about it.

And all of this is relevant because...in today’s gospel reading, a would-be Good-Newser — identified only as a rich man — approaches Jesus, whom he believes to be the Chief Happiness Officer of the kingdom of God. Perhaps it may help us to consider this encounter as if the wealthy individual is interviewing for a job. After all he has an impressive resume, and Jesus’s first impression of the guy reveals that he appears to like him — to like him a lot. In fact, our story this morning says Jesus *loved* him. So it isn’t too far fetched for us to imagine that our Lord would love to have the man — let’s call him Eli — join his team. And why not? Jesus would be smart to add this discipleship candidate to the team. He’s young. He’s reverent, he’s pious (notice that he actually knelt before Jesus.)

A background check reveals that he has no rap sheet and is an upstanding citizen. He follows the Law of Moses, so he’s religiously observant. And — best of all — he’s a potential angel investor, a man with standing in the community, and financial resources, to fund Jesus’ mission for a long time! So Jesus gives Eli the

good news: the job is his. All he has to do is cough up 100 percent of his possessions and give them to the poor — not 10 percent or 20 percent, but 100 percent. Evidently, Jesus doesn't need funding after all. He's on his way to an execution. But Eli doesn't know this. And After Eli has disposed of his possessions, he can then, and only then, return and follow Jesus.

Who would have thought that there was ever a possibility that the Jesus team could have been known as the Thirteen instead of the Twelve. The job is his! But Eli, alas, is “shocked.” He apparently was unaware of what it takes to be a Good-Newser. He didn't get the earlier memo from the Lord about picking up a cross and denying himself. He wasn't prepared to pay the price. So he leaves, with grief weighing heavily upon his soldiers in utter disappointment. He turns away and we never hear of Eli again!

Yahoo CEO, and former Google employee, Marissa Mayer once bluntly denied the existence of Google's 20 percent rule. “It's funny, people have been asking me since I started working at Yahoo, if Yahoo would eventually implement something similar.” She was speaking at an employee gathering at the time and went on to say, “I've got to tell you the dirty little secret of Google's 20 percent rule. It's really more like 120 percent.”

That was the little secret that Eli, the Rich man in our narrative for today discovered. To be a “gospeler,” a Good-Newser, or a follower of Jesus, 10 percent

doesn't cut it. Nor does 20 percent. Jesus demands 100 percent from everyone, everywhere, all of the time. In fact, four things should jump out at us off the biblical page in today's story that we should think about carefully: 1. Eli wants to inherit eternal life. 2. "Entering" the kingdom of God appears to be about what we *do* — not what we believe. 3. Jesus says it is difficult for the wealthy to get into the kingdom of God. 4. Jesus says that "many" (not all?) who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

Let's take a quick and closer look at these four statements. First, Eli — who in Luke is called a "ruler" and in Matthew is called "young" — *wants to inherit eternal life*. This is a good thing. How can it be a bad thing? But Eli is not sure what he needs to "do" to ensure that eternal life will someday be his. And our Gospel narrative from Mark seems to give us a positive image of Eli. He runs up to Jesus. He's eager and excited. He kneels before Jesus right there in the road, in public, in broad daylight. He doesn't seek a midnight meeting with Jesus as Nicodemus did. He's bold, self-assured, reverent, and respectful.

He must have been encouraged when Jesus began to rattle off portions of what is known as the second table of the Ten Commandments, which pertain to one's relationship to one's neighbors. So, after hearing the Lord begin listing off God's rules, Eli's most likely feeling, "Yes! I got this!" He tells Jesus, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth!" But Jesus knows that there's possibly an

insurmountable obstacle which has such a strong hold on this young man that he'll not be able to commit 100 percent to the Rabbi in order to follow him.

Second, “entering” the kingdom of God is about what we *do* — *not what we believe*. This is a conclusion we might come to when reading today's passage, and our story is a good reminder that what we do does matter. For the rich man, his failure to do the one thing, that would demonstrate his faith in Jesus, revealed that ultimately he did not believe. By asking Eli to give his possessions to the poor — an ultimate expression of his ability to keep the second table of the Ten Commandments — Jesus reveals that he cannot keep one of the commandments from the first table, that is, God's prohibition against idol worship.

Moreover, Jesus' command precisely zeroed in on Eli's exclusive source of well-being. His most important sense of self came from: the status, power, and security that his affluence afforded him. Eli is therefore exposed. It turns out he is an idol worshiper, and his idol is mammon. He cannot give it up. Which begs the question, is it possible we too might have some idols in our own households that are keeping us from following God more fully?

Third, Jesus says, “it is difficult for the wealthy to get into the kingdom of God.” His suggestion that Eli impoverish himself, also flies in the face of the common understanding that possessing wealth was a sign of divine favor. Jesus reveals that, that mindset, is not necessarily true. Rather, it only acts as a barrier, or

an obstacle, for us to overcome. His command not only shocks the questioner, but it stuns those who cling to the normative standards of first-century Judaism.

While there was no scriptural prohibition preventing the pious from giving away all personal belongings, certain rules did restrict almsgiving to one-fifth of one's personal property. This ensured that the pious giver would not be reduced to poverty — thus becoming another candidate for charity himself. But note that although Jesus says it is hard for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God, he does not say it is impossible. It's difficult, not because there's anything inherently wicked about being rich, but because the **love of money** so often makes it difficult to part with money. It's hard to separate some rich people from their wealth.

Finally, *Jesus says that* “many [not all?] who are first will be last, and the last will be first.” Jesus reminds his disciples — after Eli (the Rich man) has arisen from his kneeling position and left, unhappy and grieving — that a little humility goes a long way. The quest for eternal life is found only in discipleship with Jesus. This young man's failure to follow through on Jesus' final demand reveals that his confessed observance of the Law was governed more by his possessions, and his position, than by a true thirst for righteousness.

When Eli learned about the 100 percent rule, his heart sank — for it was in his heart that he treasured all that he had accumulated. His shock and sadness are not a judgment of his worth in the kingdom to come; they simply reveal his

inability to accept the call of Christ that was before him. He missed the opportunity for a true blessing in the here and now by hoarding his possessions for the future.

Today we are reminded that Jesus and his 100 percent rule applies to us as well. God demands all of us. Not 10 percent. Not 20 percent. Not 30 percent! He desires all of us, everything that we have. Only then can we be true followers of Jesus. Amen. Let it be! Thanks be to God.