

Faith and Family Business: A Different Kind of Productivity

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If someone asked you about the productivity of your farm or family business, he or she would be expecting an answer in terms of standard metrics or crop yield, return on investment or efficiency of agricultural processes. For example, a quick online search gives us a productivity figure to the effect that the average American farm feeds around 160 people in the world.

Sole emphasis on productivity as measured in economic terms, however, may make us deaf to a remarkable verse in Proverbs that speaks about a different kind of productivity. “The lips of the righteous person feed many” (Proverbs 10:21). Normally when the verb translated “feed” is used in the Old Testament, it is translated “to shepherd” or “to watch a flock”. Thus, the full contours of this word include the protection as well as the nurture of a flock.

When Proverbs says that “the lips of the righteous person feed many”, it is pointing to another philosophy of what provides nourishment that people need. In a word, Proverbs here and elsewhere is committed to the notion that your words and how you use them are central to whether you nourish or destroy relationships, whether you nourish or weaken other people. Indeed, proper and improper use of words divides the wise and the fool, the two central categories of Proverbs.

In future months I will explore the importance of selecting good words for our faith and our daily living. For now, however, resolve this year to think of ways that your words, as well as your fields, can nurture and feed the world and your family business.