

## 1 **Spiritual shrinkage**

- The Virtue of taking Inventories

## 2 **Introduction**

- Shrinkage is an ongoing problem for retailers, and we're not talking about their waistlines.
- In the retail or wholesale world, "shrinkage" or "shrink" is the term for loss of merchandise or money, and it happens in five ways.

## 3 **Sources of Shrinkage**

- One is administrative and paperwork error. Mistakes in marking up and marking down account for as much as 15 percent of retail shrinkage.
- Another is vendor fraud, which occurs most often when outside vendors stock inventory within the store. About 6 percent of shrinkage occurs this way.
- A third source of loss -- about 7 percent -- is categorized as "unknown" since it cannot be otherwise accounted for.

## 4 **Sources of Shrinkage**

- The fourth source of shrinkage -- but the one that likely comes to mind first -- is shoplifting, outright stealing by customers.

Shoplifting costs retailers an estimated \$11-\$15 billion annually, which, of course, is not good news for the rest of us either, because it contributes to the higher cost of the merchandise we buy.

- As large a sum as that is, however, it's not the biggest source of loss.

That distinction belongs to the fifth category, what retailers call "internal" shrinkage, theft by employees.

## 5 **Internal Shrinkage**

- According to the National Retail Security Survey, internal theft is the number one source of shrinkage for retail businesses.
- While the survey found that about 32 percent of retail loss came from shoplifting and organized retail crime, it also showed that nearly 40 percent resulted from employee theft.

## 6 **Inventories**

- One way that retailers determine their overall shrinkage—and also discover employee theft—is by taking inventories of their goods.
- Inventories also reveal what's left on the shelves, racks and sales tables, as well as what's sitting in misplaced or forgotten boxes.
- Those items can then be marked and displayed for clearance to make space for incoming shipments.

## 7 Inventories

- While taking inventory is a lengthy and tedious process, it's essential to keep a retail store running efficiently and effectively.
- When I worked at SuperAmerica as an Area Manager, taking or supervising inventories was one of my main responsibilities.
- I had seven stores and each store took inventory once a month.
- If the inventory shrinkage was under 1% of total inventory that was acceptable, but if it wasn't it made everyone uneasy.
- In fact, a manager could lose his/her job from a bad inventory and if it was really bad or bad over a period of time all employees could be fired.

## 8 SuperAmerica

- If the truth be known, I as either a manager or area manager hated to take inventories.
- First of all it was very monotonous, such as, counting the number of BONANZA Bubble Gum in a jar could drive you crazy.
- But also, you may find out things you wish you hadn't.
- Sometimes we just don't want to hear bad news where we might have to make major changes.
- Doing this every month for seven stores was the worst thing about that job.

## 9 taking Spiritual Inventories

- Starting a New Year is always a great time to look at ourselves and take a spiritual inventory.
- In fact, in a couple of weeks from now, Ash Wednesday will occur and begin what is called Lent—40 days where many Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians all take spiritual inventories of themselves as they prepare for Easter.
- According to tradition, Ash Wednesday and Lent commemorates the time that Jesus fasted in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights.

## 10 Why Ashes?

- On Ash Wednesday, ashes are ceremonially placed on the heads of Christians, either by being sprinkled over their heads or, more often, by being marked on their foreheads as a visible cross.
- The words used traditionally to accompany this gesture are:
  - Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return. (Gen. 3:19), or
  - Repent, and believe in the Gospel. (Mark 1:15)

## 11 Biblical Significance of Ashes

- In ancient times, ashes were used to express grief.
  - When Tamar was raped by her half-brother, “[she] put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.” (2 Sam 13:19 NIV)
- The gesture was also used to express sorrow for sins and faults
  - The prophet Jeremiah called for repentance by saying: "O daughter of my people, gird on sackcloth, roll in the ashes"
  - The prophet Daniel recounted pleading to God: "I turned to the Lord God, pleading in earnest prayer, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes"

## 12 Stephen Harper

- Stephen Harper was one of my professors at Asbury Theological Seminary.
- He once told a story of being in a distant city conducting a seminar on the spiritual life.
- Afterward, an active church member asked if he could drive Harper to the airport.

## 13 Stephen Harper

- En route, the man said to Harper, "When I became a Christian, my life was radically changed.
- I was regularly and meaningfully involved in the church.
- But over a period of time, my enthusiasm waned, until today I am a Christian mostly by habit.
- I've lost the joy of my faith and sometime wonder if I'm really a Christian at all."

## 14 Stephen Harper

- Harper also tells this story as the introduction to an article about spirituality, acknowledging that it's quite possible to become spiritually bored with and depressed about one's practice of faith.
- He says, "Past experience is not automatically sufficient for the future."

## 15 Misconceptions

- Harper goes on to talk about misconceptions about spirituality, and among them are these:
  - The belief that right theology will promote spiritual vitality.
  - The belief that right experience will produce spiritual life.
  - The belief that spirituality is an entity in itself, somehow divorced from the rest of life.
  - The belief that true spirituality is something reserved for a select few.

## 16 The Prophet Joel

- The prophet Joel sets the inventory mood when he says, "Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart."

- Yes, it may need to be "with fasting, with weeping and with mourning," but the important thing is to "Return to the LORD, your God."

## 17 **The Prophet Joel**

- He's not here to scold us, "for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing," but he does awaken within us the sense that we need to repent of where we've failed to live out our faith.

## 18 **God is for us not against us**

- The important thing to remember is that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. [See Rom. 8:26]
- And that if God is for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31 NIV)
- Moreover, He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Rom 8:32 NIV)
- In other words, when we take inventory of ourselves and find there has been some shrinkage, who's there to help us restock those shelves?

## 19 **God is for us not against us**

- Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! (Luke 12:24 NIV)
- If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! (Luke 12:28 NIV)

## 20 **God is for us not against us**

- Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Rom 5:9–10 NIV)
- For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (Rom 5:17 NIV)

## 21 **God is for us not against us**

- So then, when we take a spiritual inventory of our life and find room for improvement, let us not be discouraged.
- God is there to help us, not just a little, but a lot.
- He has abundant grace in a variety of forms that can restore and even increase our spiritual inventory of good things from the Lord.

- Therefore, let us not be discouraged with a bad inventory. God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (Psa 46:1 NIV)

## 22 **SuperAmerica - Inventory FIX**

- When I worked at SuperAmerica, our core stores, located in the inner city always had a bad problem with inventory shrinkage.
- However, one day that problem stopped dead in its tracks.
- We installed surveillance cameras in those stores and inventory shrinkage in those stores greatly improved.
- Our problem was shoplifters and the surveillance cameras put the fear of the police in their hearts, so they stopped.

## 23 **Thieves among us . . .**

- The moral of this story is that just like SuperAmerica, we too have enemies that seek to steal our valuables.
- For SuperAmerica it was thieves disguised as customers.
- For us, it might be people who are disguised as friends.
- People who seem to have our spiritual interest at hand, but could in fact be tempting us to keep from following the straight and narrow or believe things that are not biblically true.
- Did not Jesus warn us about wolves in sheep's clothing? [See Matt. 7:15]

## 24 **Quality Time with the Lord**

- One of the best ways I know on how to restock our spiritual shelves is to spend quality time with God.
- In fact, if the truth be known, our busy lives are one of the biggest distractions we have that keeps us away from enjoying God's presence and energizing our spirits.
- Playing on the computer or surfing the Internet can be a waste of time as well and deplete us of valuable spiritual resources that we may desperately need for the trials of life that are before us.

## 25 **Conclusion**

- No matter how depleted our spiritual shelves may be, if we humble ourselves before the Lord and sincerely seek His face, we will receive grace.
- We will find our spiritual shelves restocked with inventory that we can use to be a blessing for others.
- I lift up my eyes to the hills — where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psa 121:1–2 NIV)
- The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him, . . . (Nah 1:7 NIV)