

GOOGL**E, THE INTERN**E**T** search engine, has become ubiquitous. It has become a verb ('I'll just google it'). It has also become big business.

The company was originally listed on the US stock exchange back in the autumn of 2004. Back then you could buy a share in the company for \$100. Today, only two and a half years later, the shares have quintupled. The whole company is now worth an enormous 150 billion dollars, and ranks among the largest companies in the world.

What is intriguing about this is not only the rapid growth in value that Google has seen, but also the company's origins. The essential search algorithm which is its backbone was created by the two men who founded the company. Since then the search technique has been refined and improved, and many 'add-on' services have been integrated. But the essence of what Google does and how it works is the same. At the end of 2005 the company still had only 5,000 employees. That is one of the lowest headcounts relative to the size of the company that has ever been seen. The whole 150-billion-dollar machine was created from the idea of just two men!

What, then, is so valuable about Google? Its value lies in the fact that it is a *gateway*. It is a mechanism through which people can get to where they want to go and find out what they want to know. It is a doorway to places that otherwise would take a long time to find or would perhaps never be found at all.

As a search platform, Google has no content of its own; it makes no attempt to 'own' information. It enables people to *find* the information they want. The reason why Google as a company is valued so highly is because people recognise how valuable it is, in today's information-drowned world, to be able to find what you are looking for. Information is cheap. But *relevant* information, the information that *you want*, is tremendously precious.

Someone once said that the definition of a wise man is not someone who knows everything, but someone who knows where to go to find anything that he needs. There is a lot of truth in the observation.

Google, then, is all about knowing where to look. Society has recognised just how valuable this is, and yet, for the most part, it still doesn't know where! There is an infinity of websites, and, with the help of

a search engine, I may be able to navigate them, and impose sufficient order to find something I am looking for. The search engine knows where to look.

But do I know where to look? The Bible is the place where the answers to life's big questions are to be found. Do I prove that I believe what I have just written by the attention I give it and by the place that it has in my life? Do I know how to navigate my way around it so that I can extract spiritual food for myself and my family?

Do I know the right questions to ask when I read it? Google won't help you find something unless you ask it the right question. It's been said that one of the ways to identify intelligent people is not by the answers they give but by the questions they ask. What are the questions to which I might want to know the answers? Are they the right questions? Even if I have identified the right place to look, am I searching for the right thing?

Think about the concept of intellectual capital. Google illustrates it perfectly; the intellectual capital, the thing which is so valuable about it, is an idea—in this case, a search algorithm. Think of the Coca Cola Company. Its value lies not in the physical bottles and factories it might own (in fact, it doesn't even own the bottles; it outsources the whole bottling process because it recognises that the value lies elsewhere); its value lies in *the recipe*, the intellectual capital. Think of the products of Apple, another hugely successful company. What is clever about Apple is not its ability physically to make consumer electronics, it is the recipes, the designs, the patents—and the designers themselves—that it has on its books.

The world has changed. Increasingly, value is shifting from *things* to *ideas*, from physical to intellectual capital. It can be a helpful concept for considering what we have when we have a knowledge of God, and when we think about its relative value. If Google is worth 150 billion dollars, what is it worth to know where to look to find out about God, about life, about death, about what is required of us? This is not merely intellectual capital, not merely *knowledge*, it is spiritual capital as well. It is not something which can be bought with money on the stock market. It is a pearl of greater price than that, for it is the gift of God.

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