

Godly Entrepreneurs Look Different

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Genesis

God called Abraham into a covenant of faithful service. By leaving the territory of his faithless extended family and following God's call, Abraham distinguished himself sharply from his distant relatives who stayed in Mesopotamia and attempted to build the Tower of Babel. The comparison between Abraham's immediate family and Noah's other descendants highlights five contrasts between those who do and those who do not follow God.

First, Abraham put his trust in God's guidance, rather than in human device. In contrast, the tower builders believed that by their own skill and ingenuity, they could devise a tower "with its top in the heavens" (Genesis 11:4). They attempted to achieve significance and security in a way that usurped God's authority. Abraham, on the other hand, relied on God's authority for his source of security.

Second, the builders sought to make a name for themselves, while Abraham trusted God's promise that God would make his name great. The difference was not in their desire to achieve greatness. Both Abraham and the tower builders may have longed for significance. The difference is that the builders pursued fame on their own terms, while Abraham looked to God for guidance. God did indeed make Abraham famous, but not for

Abraham's own sake. God made Abraham famous in order that "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). The builders, by contrast, sought fame for their own sake, and the effect is that they remain anonymous to this day.

Third, Abraham was willing to go wherever God led him, while the builders attempted to huddle together in their accustomed space. They created their tower project out of fear that they would be "scattered over the face of the whole earth" (Genesis 11:4). In doing so, they rejected God's purpose for humanity to "fill the earth" (Genesis 1:28). They seem to have feared that spreading out in an apparently hostile world would be too difficult for them. Even though they were creative and technologically innovative, they were unwilling to fully embrace God's purpose for them to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28). Their fear of engaging the fullness of creation coincided with their decision to substitute human ingenuity for God's guidance and grace. This both an encouragement and a warning for entrepreneurs today. When we fill the earth with useful goods and services, we are more likely to bless others through our work. But when we cease to aspire for more than we can attain on our own, our aspirations become hollow and insignificant.

God made Abraham into the original entrepreneur, always moving on to fresh endeavors in new locations. God called him away from the city of Haran toward the land of Canaan where Abraham would never settle into a fixed address. He was known as a "wandering Aramean" (Deuteronomy

26:5). This lifestyle was inherently God-centered in that Abraham would have to depend on God's word and leadership in order to find his significance, security, and success.

Abraham had to "set out, not knowing where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8). In the world of work, believers must perceive the contrast between these two fundamental orientations. All work entails planning and building. Ungodly work stems from the desire to depend on no one but ourselves. It restricts itself narrowly to benefit only ourselves and the few who may be close to us. Godly work is willing to depend on God's guidance and authority. It desires to grow widely as a blessing to all the world.

Fourth, Abraham was willing to let God lead him into new relationships. While the tower builders sought to close themselves off in a guarded fortress, Abraham trusted God's promise that his family would grow into a great nation. Though they lived among strangers in the land of Canaan, Abraham's family had good relationships with those they came in contact with. God's design is for people includes experiencing the gift of community and working in healthy networks of relationship.

Finally, Abraham was blessed with the patience to take a long-term view. God's promises were to be realized in the time of Abraham's offspring, not in the time of Abraham himself. In Galatians 3:19, the Apostle Paul interpreted the "offspring" to be Jesus, meaning that Abraham's payoff date was more than a thousand years in the future. The tower builders, by comparison, took no thought for how their project would affect future

generations, and God criticized them for this before confusing their language and scattering them throughout the earth.

To sum up, God promised Abraham fame and fruitfulness, by which meant he that Abraham and his family would bless the whole world. Unlike others who did not trust God so readily, Abraham realized that an attempt to grasp these blessings on his own power would be futile. Instead, he trusted God and depended every day on God's guidance and provision. Although these promises were not fully realized by the end of Genesis, they initiated the covenant between God and God's people through which the redemption of the world will eventually come to completion. Abraham's family were themselves blessed beyond imagining, and so are all today who follow Abraham's example.