

The Noble Man and His Plans

*Where there is no vision, the people perish:
But he that keepeth the law, happy is he."
Proverbs 29:18*

Company vision statements are very much in vogue these days. Corporate America has discovered that casting a vision that is bigger than the financial bottom line will often increase the bottom line. In the book "Built to Last," secular researchers concluded that a defining characteristic of companies that out-performed their competition over multiple generations of management was the communication and commitment, in terms of plans and execution, to a core ideology (what we stand for and why we exist) and an envisioned future (Big Hairy Audacious Goals, or BHAGs).

Proverbs 29:18, often quoted in the business context, is translated in the NIV *Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.* Where there is no revelation of the will and purposes of God, the people will "do their own thing" and suffer for it. But, the people who embrace the will of God for their lives, families and businesses are blessed by God. Is your business plan based on a revelation of God's will and purpose for your life and business? In this study we will discover truths and principles from God's Word that are applicable to your business planning.

James 4:13-16

13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

15 Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that."

16 But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.

OBSERVE

Does the Bible actually address business planning? Yes, James gives instructions regarding planning to Christian businessmen.

Leader: Read the CONTEXT box and then James 4:13-16 and have the group say aloud and mark the contrast words "yet," "instead" and "but," and the key phrase "if the Lord wills."

CONTEXT

The theme of James is that a true saving faith will produce works, not the other way around. The changed life is the greatest assurance of salvation that a person can have. One of the changes for the Christian businessman is that he will plan differently than before.

Isaiah 30:1; 31:1; 32:5-8

30:1 "Woe to the rebellious children," declares the Lord, "who execute a plan, but not Mine, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, in order to add sin to sin.

31:1 Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses, and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horseman because they are very strong, but they do not look to the Holy One of Israel, nor seek the Lord!

32:5 No longer will the fool be called noble, or the rogue be spoken of as generous.

32:6 For a fool speaks nonsense, and his heart inclines toward wickedness, to practice ungodliness and to speak error against the Lord, to keep the hungry person unsatisfied and to withhold drink from the thirsty.

32:7 As for a rogue, his weapons are evil: he devises wicked schemes to destroy the afflicted with slander, even though the needy one speaks what is right.

32:8 But the noble man devises noble plans; and by noble plans he stands.

DISCUSS

What do you learn about business planning from the three contrasts in this passage?

OBSERVE

Is it really evil to plan without consulting the Lord?

Leader: Read the CONTEXT box and then read these Isaiah passages and have the group say aloud and mark "plans" and "noble."

CONTEXT

Isaiah, speaking for the Lord, laments Israel's dependence on human wisdom, plans and strength as they look to Egypt for help against the Assyrian invaders. Speaking of kings and those in authority, and looking forward to the reign of Messiah, he contrasts the plans of fools and rogues with that of the noble man.

Leader: Read the INSIGHT box.

INSIGHT

The Hebrew word translated "noble" means willing, generous, and in this context, a noble man is one who freely, sacrificially and wholeheartedly commits himself to the Lord's service.

The word translated "rogue" is the antonym of "noble." The rogue is miserly and not willing to help others.

The "fool" in the OT always refers to one who says there is no God, to the one who refuses to learn.

Colossians 3: 1-4; 17

1 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2 Set your mind on things above, not on the things that are on earth.

3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you will also be revealed with Him in glory.

17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Matthew 16:21-24

21 From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

22 And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests,

DISCUSS

In verses 30:1 and 31:1, what is "woeful" about Israel's plans? In contrast, what would noble plans be like?

Contrast the noble man with the rogue and the fool in these passages.

OBSERVE

Psalm 119:130 says "The unfolding of thy words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple." Lets unfold a bit further what defines a "noble" man.

Leader: Read aloud Colossians 3:1-4; 17 and Matthew 16:21-24, and have the group say aloud and mark "set (setting) your mind."

DISCUSS

Where does the "noble man" set his mind, and why?

If we're not advancing God's interests, whose interests are we advancing?

What kind of commitment does Jesus require of those that wish to follow Him, to those who wish to be "noble?" Look for the list in Matthew 16:24.

but man's.

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples,
"If anyone wishes to come after Me,
let him deny himself, and take up his
cross, and follow Me.

Ecclesiastes 2

2:11 Thus I considered all my
activities which my hands had done
and the labor which I had exerted,
and behold all was vanity and striving
after the wind and there was no profit
under the sun.

2:18 Thus I hated all the fruit of my
labor for which I had labored under
the sun, for I must leave it to the man
who will come after me.

2:20 Therefore I completely
despaired of all the fruit of my labor
for which I labored under the sun.

2:24 There is nothing better for a
man than to eat and drink and tell
himself that his labor is good. This
also I have seen, that it is from the
hand of God.

2:25 For who can eat and who can
have enjoyment without Him?

Matthew 6:19-21

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves
treasures upon earth, where moth
and rust destroy, and where thieves

Define in your own words, in one crisp statement, a "noble man."

OBSERVE

Leader: Read the CONTEXT box and then read out of a Bible Ecclesiastes chapter 2:1-9. Take note of the things that Solomon thought might bring meaning and contentment to his life while reading, and have group note below. Then read INSIGHT box and the conclusion verses printed in the left column and have the group say aloud and mark "under the sun," and "vanity."

CONTEXT

Ecclesiastes is Professor Solomon's doctoral thesis on the meaning of life. His conclusion, after years of trying to prove otherwise, is that a life not centered on God is empty, futile and meaningless.

Leader: Read insight box.

INSIGHT

The Hebrew word translated "vanity" literally means breath or wind, and in this context means senseless, empty, lacking meaning and substance. The repeated phrase "under the sun" refers to God not being in the picture.

DISCUSS

In what things did Solomon try to find meaning and contentment?
What did he conclude about them?

Leader: Read Matthew 6:19-21 and have the group say aloud and mark "treasure."

break in and steal.

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

21 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it.

11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,

13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

DISCUSS

Compare these verses with what we just studied in Ecclesiastes. What is different about "noble" treasure versus "worldly treasure?"

Leader: Read the CONTEXT box and then 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 and have the group say aloud and mark "work."

CONTEXT

2 Corinthians 5:10 says that every believer must appear before the judgment seat of Christ to have their work evaluated. This passage in 1 Corinthians describes that evaluation.

DISCUSS

How would you define "noble work" in this passage?

Based on what you've learned from Isaiah, Ecclesiastes, Matthew and 1 Corinthians, define a "noble plan."

OBSERVE

Where do the noble man's noble plans come from? Lets see what God's Word says about this.

Leader: Read Jeremiah 29:11 and Ephesians 2:10 and have the group say aloud and again mark "plans" and "works."

Jeremiah 29:11

11 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'

Ephesians 2:10

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

DISCUSS

Answer the question posed above about the source of the noble man's noble plans.

Are God's plans for us a good deal?

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES DISCOVERED

This is a list of the truths that we discovered inductively from God's Word:

- A **Noble man** is a man who has set his mind on God's interests, not man's, on things above, not on earthly things, on eternal things, not temporal things. A **Noble man** has counted the cost and willfully determined to deny himself and follow Jesus Christ.
- A **Noble man** devises **Noble plans**. **Noble plans** are focused on God's interests, on things above, on eternal things that will last forever. **Noble plans** are not made by an act of human will, but rather revealed by God and discovered by man. A **Noble plan** is a plan that is worthy of the **Noble man**, and worthy of the high calling that God has placed on his life.

We will study next time how the **Noble man** devises his **Noble plans**, and how he is able to **nobly** stand by them.

BUSINESS APPLICATION

How will you apply these truths to your business?

1. First, are you a **noble businessman**? Are the plans and purposes of your business set on God's interests, or man's? Will your business accomplishments survive the test of fire at the judgment seat of Christ? If you answered no to any of these questions, what are you going to do about it?
2. Secondly, do you have **noble plans** for your business? Look into God's Word and pray for Him to reveal a biblically-based "noble purpose" for your business that is set on God's interests. Write this "noble purpose" statement for your business and post it where you will see it everyday. Be prepared to share it with us at the next Forum meeting.

Built to Last, James Collins and Jerry Porras
Good to Great, Jim Collins