

Prosperity

Everyone wants to prosper. We rise up early and stay up late to do it. The desire for prosperity creates focus, and sometimes, hyper focus. Focus is good because it can lead to excellence, which blesses everyone. However when we hyper focus, the pursuit of prosperity can be a harsh task master.

Is there a key to prosperity? Many would argue that it is hard work. Others would contend that it is luck. Which is it or is it something else? I would like to share a story with you that, I believe, illustrates the key to healthy prosperity.

Robert was a 43 year old dirt contractor who worked hard to overcome a business failure that occurred earlier in his life. He procured contracts to build roads, dams, and other projects where large quantities of the earth needed to be moved. Because there were so few machines available to help in the early part of the 20th Century, he built his own equipment.

Despite the depression, 1930 was a very good year for Robert. Revenue was \$100K+ and profit \$30K+. (Multiply by 10 to get current dollars.) The next year was looking even better. He had a contract to build a road to the site where Boulder Dam would be built and a contract to build an earth dam in Orange County, CA. Plus he had a new plant for building his equipment.

Despite starting 1931 with high expectations, something went terribly wrong with the Boulder Road project. Test bores missed the presence of extensive hard rock deposits that had to be penetrated to build the road. Therefore Robert's bid did not include any allowance for this hidden condition. As a result, he finished the job over \$100K in debt, which happened to be his total revenue for the prior year.

Wounded but not dead, he forged on hoping to recover the loss on the earth dam project. As you might expect, he was under a lot of pressure from the bonding company, creditors, and the state. The bonding company and creditors were concerned about his financial condition, which was not good. In fact, the bonding company was so concerned that an on-site representative was assigned to the earth dam project. The state was concerned that he complete the job before the fall rains. Since he was late starting the job, because of the problems on the Boulder Road project, they were rightfully concerned.

Prosperity

Initially, the state did not want him to start the job, but they gave him a test to see if he could work fast enough to make the schedule. The test was to build the base of the dam in one month, which would hold very little water and pose no serious threat if the dam was not completed until later. Despite the fact that his employees did not believe it could be done, they worked 7 days a week and miraculously moved 400,000 cubic yards of dirt in one month.

Passing this test was crucial for the survival of Robert's company, which was teetering on the precipice of bankruptcy. Clearly, everyone was thrilled that they passed the test; however, Robert became very concerned about working his men 7 days a week. He had worked them for a month without a break and was given the go ahead to complete the project based on the demonstrated production capability. Now Robert wanted to give his men a break; in fact, he wanted to give them a day off every week. The bonding company's on-site representative was not pleased. He believed that working 7 days a week was necessary to complete the project on schedule. Nevertheless, Robert gave his men the next Sunday off.

Sunday morning the only people on the job were the bonding company representative and his assistant. Given Robert's financial condition, the bonding company stood to take the hit if Robert was late completing the project; hence, the bonding company representative was very angry. It was not surprising to Robert that the bonding company went ballistic. Monday morning, the bonding company representative gave Robert a very impassioned piece of his mind and then marched off to report the situation to his boss, Mr. Hall, at the home office in San Francisco. Immediately, Mr. Hall called Robert and asked him if he had received the \$30,000 check. (Apparently the bonding company was making the progress payments.) Robert indicated that he had, Mr. Hall told him not to cash it and that he was coming down. It appeared that the bonding company was going to foreclose and take over the job.

The reason that Robert was determined to give his men a day off every week was that Robert believed that a Sabbath rest was the teaching of scripture. Robert was a Christian and believed that the Bible provided him with the principles by which he was to live his life including his business life. Unlike what is happening today where God is

Prosperity

being removed from business, Robert was seeking to integrate the teaching of the Bible into every area of his life as opposed to bifurcating his spiritual life from his work life. Therefore, Robert was determined to honor the Sabbath for he believed that it was what he must do to honor God. He was so convicted of this reality that he was willing to turn his company over to the bonding company, if need be. No matter what, he was going to be true to his faith. Given his convictions, the only thing that Robert could do was pray. He didn't pray for the Lord to save his company or to give him wisdom. He didn't even pray that bonding company would have mercy on him. Rather he prayed for the ability to honor God by observing a weekly Sabbath.

In those days, the road system in the United States was not well developed. A trip from San Francisco to Orange County, which was several hundred miles, would take a full day and perhaps then some. When Mr. Hall, left his office in San Francisco, he was determined to foreclose on Robert. However, on the way something happened. Something that even Mr. Hall could not explain – he changed his mind. When he arrived at the project site, he asked Robert if he could complete the project on schedule working six days a week. Robert indicated that he believed he could. Mr. Hall told Robert to go ahead and cash the progress payment check and to take Sundays off. Robert was stunned. He fully expected to be terminated by the bonding company, and therefore, out of business, which means jobless and \$100,000 in debt. Just a dozen years prior, he went broke in the car repair business and ended up \$500 in debt. Now the thought of being \$100,000 in debt, with no means to pay it or support his family, was a daunting thought. Deep down, he knew that God answered his prayer. God granted him the favor he was seeking – the ability to honor God by observing the Sabbath. So Robert and his company continued on the project. He finished it on time and on budget.

This experience didn't solve all of Robert's problems. He finished the job and made a small profit, but not enough to pay off the \$100,000 debt. In time, however, he did pay it off and that's another story. But the lesson that Robert learned on the earth dam project was incredible. It served him the rest of his life. He learned that following God's principles is the key to favor and prosperity. The God of the Bible made it clear

Prosperity

that He blesses obedience and curses disobedience¹. By simply standing on his convictions, Robert saw God's favor at work in an unexplainable way. What could Robert do to change Mr. Hall's mind when he was determined to foreclose? The only thing Robert could do was pray.

Knowing the risk of defying the will of the bonding company, Robert stood fast with his decision not to work on Sundays, for he knew that continuing to dishonor God was a greater risk. Did he want to risk the judgment of God or of the bonding company? The judgment of men is only finite, but the judgment of God has eternal implications. Thus regardless of the response of the bonding company, he knew that he could not defy God.

Consider your life. When faced with the expediency of compromise to relieve the pressure of the urgent, what would you do? The temptation to compromise is enormous for all of us. Compromise appears to have an immediate reward – it relieves pressure, but in the end it does not lead to prosperity. When the federal government compromises a balanced budget and spends more than it takes in, what happens? There is an apparent short term benefit, but soon inflation and the burden of paying off the debt must be faced. When companies, such as Enron, choose to capitulate to the pressure of producing quarterly earnings growth, lies and deception become an acceptable compromise; but in the end, lies and deception do not bring prosperity. Do God's principles drive your decisions? Are you willing to stand on God's principles and against the pressure to compromise?

If God created the universe, He alone makes all the rules for the games – personal, family, church, business, and government. If He makes the rules, does He not prosper those who follow His rules (i.e., the righteousness)?

He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor. Pro 21:21 (NIV)

What happens to those who don't follow His rules (i.e., the wicked)? To those who choose to make up their own rules?

¹ Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Prosperity

The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out. Pro 13:9 (NIV)

Robert was determined to align his life, and his business, with God's principles. And so he did. Robert went on to become one of the most famous businessmen of the 20th Century. You know him by the name R.G. LeTourneau. His autobiography is titled **R.G. LeTourneau: Mover of Men and Mountains**.² He was indeed that, because he was a man who, regardless of the price, learned to obey God in his business practices. As a result, God's favor shined on him brightly. He was a man who prospered, who understood that the key to prosperity was alignment with the creator. After all, the creator makes the rules for all the games and blesses those who align their lives with His principles.

Gerald R. Chester, Ph.D.

October 2003

² Much of the information for this article was gleaned from this book.