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## *Gleanings*

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### Doing Business in God's Universe

If God created the universe, then He created all the rules for the activities of His universe. Obviously, His rules govern how we worship Him and the personal choices that we make in life, but they apply equally to the practice of business.

Connecting God and business is difficult—they seem almost mutually exclusive. But the reality of God's universe is that lasting success only occurs when we align with God's rules. Hence, the degree to which any organization enjoys lasting success is proportional to its degree of alignment with God's rules of business.

As a case study consider Carl Karcher, an entrepreneur who leveraged a hot dog stand into a fast-food empire. His lifelong entrepreneurial effort led to the CKE Restaurants, which featured the Carl's Jr. and Hardee's brands.

Carl died at the age of ninety in January 2008. Barring the return of Christ, death is the destiny of all us. I would like to use Carl's death as an opportunity for reflection. What can we learn from Carl, both good and bad, about God's rules of business?

Carl was an outgoing service-oriented person who applied himself to business. He was not born into privilege; he worked hard and lived life with zeal. He was a devoted Roman Catholic who was active in his church, shared his faith with others, and supported conservative political causes.

Carl grew up at a time when biblical values were widely accepted and practiced in the culture. He employed many of these values in business and therefore enjoyed great favor. Some examples of the biblical principles he used were:

- hard work (Proverbs 14:23),
- superior service to customers—exceeding their expectations (Mark 9:35),
- excellence and taking pride in his work (Colossians 3:17, 23),
- faithfulness (Luke 19:17), and
- generous giving (Acts 20:33).

These principles served him well and were a major reason he enjoyed long-term success. Toward the end of his life, however, he strayed from biblical principles, which caused him much difficulty.

Recently I conducted a seminar on the biblical worldview of investing. I taught a key principle of successful investing: alignment with God (Psalm 1). Using this principle and the Beyond Babel Model presented in my book titled *Beyond Babel*, one of the seminar participants, Randall Hobson, provided an astute analysis of why Carl's latter days were not as good as his former days. (Please note that the Beyond Babel Model is a biblical model for building organizations. It includes five key elements—biblical worldview, equally yoked senior leaders, strategic planning, executional excellence, and customer validation.) Here is Randall's perspective on Carl.

Carl appears to have founded his company on a proper worldview, attempting to incorporate biblical philosophy, values, and principles into his business. It appears that he possessed clear strategic vision as evidenced by the consistent and profitable growth that occurred during the first forty years of his organization's existence. Executional excellence was reinforced as Carl made it a practice to eat several meals a week at his restaurants. Furthermore, he showed sensitivity to his customers by personally handing out coupons for free

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hamburgers.

In 1980, Carl brought his brother into the business. Shortly thereafter the company went public. Why did it go public after a four-decade track record of solid, incremental growth as a private company? Was this an evidence of unequal yoking? Was greed, rather than principle, a driving influence? Greed is an indicator of the worship of money, which was probably the critical flaw that led to other mistakes. Perhaps the greed in Carl had been dormant, but when his brother joined the company, the restraint on greed may have been lifted. Greed then opened the door for a series of mistakes.

After going public Carl led the company on a disjointed and financially costly expansion effort. This strategic initiative was flawed and therefore failed.

During this time of financial stress, Carl and some of his family members were accused by the SEC of violating insider trading laws. Though Carl denied wrongdoing, he settled the matter by paying a substantial fine.

Carl also made a number of personal investments that failed. As a result he nearly went bankrupt.

Carl's SEC problems, misguided business decisions, and failed personal investments led to not only a personal crisis but also a confidence crisis with the company's directors. The directors replaced Carl with an ex-Nordstrom executive. Carl was stripped of power and removed from the company he had founded.

All of these problems have taken a toll on both Carl and the company. I (Randall) know personally that the local Hardee's Restaurants struggle with executional excellence and customer validation. At one time I was a consistent customer of Hardee's. Today I rarely make a purchase from them.

The root of all of these issues was greed, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5).

Randall's analysis reflects keen insight into how to build businesses in God's universe according to God's rules. He deftly used the Beyond Babel Model as an analysis tool to test Carl's alignment with biblical principles.

Though Carl enjoyed success over several decades, in the end he compromised his principles and revealed his true motive. Carl built a modern-day version of the tower of Babel. His business was all about him, which means that he was trying to make a name for himself (Genesis 11:4). Initially he used biblical principles to build his business and had success, just as with the tower of Babel project. But eventually his real motive of self-glorification was exposed. Self-glorification happens when obedience to God's principles is subordinated to our personal agendas. And when we put our agendas ahead of God's agenda, we become idolaters.

The sin of self-glorification will blind anyone. And when sin blinds us, we can't see the prosperity of God (Jeremiah 17:1-6); hence, we make bad choices. Carl made numerous bad choices.

Carl was a devout Roman Catholic, but I would posit that he did not have spiritual accountability in his life. Had Carl been committed to a discipling relationship with a person who had a biblical worldview, that person would have challenged the decisions that led him astray. This would have been Carl's safety net to keep him aligned with God. But Carl apparently didn't have a discipler to whom he was submitted, so he strayed from biblical principles and fell under judgment just as did the people who built the tower of Babel project.

God does not look at reality as man does. Man looks at outward signs, such as money. God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7), which is the seat of man's motives. Solomon stressed the importance of motives when he instructed his sons to "guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The reason for this admonition is that motives not aligned with God will be judged.

God is always seeking to bring His creation into alignment with Himself; hence, though people who reject God may appear to have success, in the end they will be judged (Psalm 73).

Let us be wise and remember that we are living in God's universe; therefore, we must live by His rules, including having the right motives. The story of the tower of Babel illustrates that it is not enough to have good teams, sound leadership, clear vision, and skilled execution. God requires that we have the right motive. The only motive He will bless over the long term will be the motive to glorify Him. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear.

Source: <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-karcher12jan12,0,3269876.story?coll=la-home-center>

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