

God's Strategic Plan

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Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." ⁴ So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb." (Genesis 12:1-9)

1. Strategic Plans

About two weeks ago, Apple Inc. announced that a new iPhone 11 would be available on September 19, 2019. As you may know, Apple Inc. was started as a computer company in Cupertino, CA in April 1976 by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. While they continued to make computers, Apple introduced cellular phones in June 2007. Today, Apple sells computers, iPhones, iPads, the Apple watches, Apple tv, Apple music, AirPods, HomePods, Apple card, iCloud, and now Apple arcade.

We find ourselves amazed that Apple has continued to push the limits of creativity in order to produce interesting and valuable products for us. To make such innovative products, the people making these products spend years working on the products while creating strategic plans.

What is a strategic plan? A strategic plan is an organizational management activity to set priorities, focus energy and resources, and strengthen operations. The plan ensures that the people working on a project work towards common goals, establish intended outcomes, and assess and adjust the organization's direction in response to a changing environment.

Last Wednesday evening, we had a church Administrative Council meeting to discuss what we wanted to include in our church strategic plan. There were many interesting suggestions to try. If you have any ideas, would you please share those ideas with Susan Scott our lay leader.

This morning a question I have is “Is the strategic plan of the church different from the strategic plans of a business?” There are similar aspects like goals and timelines, however, there are also some fundamental differences. Today I would like to explore what the differences between our strategic plan and those we might see in other businesses are and how we can apply to our church.

2. Ordinary People Can Participate

The end of Genesis 11 and the beginning of Genesis 12 talk about Abram and his family, his wife Sara, and his nephew Lot. Who is Abram? The Bible does not tell us much about his background. Genesis says that he is a son of Terah who lived in Ur of the Chaldeans. He had two brothers, Nahor and Haran. Haran was the father of Lot. Abram’s wife was Sarai. Sarai had no children.

One day when Abram was 75 years old, God calls Abram and asks him to leave his country, his relatives, and friends to move to an undesignated land, where he would become the founder of a new nation, Israel. I wonder what Abram was thinking when he heard God’s command. The writer of Genesis doesn’t give us the details.

The plan to leave his hometown was not his idea. Abram didn’t know he would move to the land of Canaan. In fact, he didn’t know where he was going to go. We don’t know if Abram was hesitant or excited to leave his community.

Hebrews 11:8 says, “**By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going.**” What we know is that Abram didn’t discuss with anyone including his wife about his journey. But Abram leaves his home, going on the journey to go to a place that he did not know.

Where does Abram’s trust in the Lord come from? Did Abram believe God before he was called? Very little is told about Abraham’s early life in the Bible. According to Joshua 24:2, Abram was raised in a home that was pagan. There were many idol worshippers in his village. Even Abram’s father Terah was an idolater. Terah made idols of wood, stone, silver, and gold in his house. People came to offer sacrifices to these idols or to buy them. Terah made a thriving business of selling idols. Terah appointed Abram to be the salesman and to take care of the business.

Why did God choose Abraham? The Bible does not explain. However, according to Jewish tradition, at the age of three, Abraham recognized that there was, is, and will be only one God, the creator of heaven and earth. One of Abraham’s characteristics was the eagerness and speed with which he carried out God’s commands. Genesis 22:3 says, “**So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him.**”

Although God asked Abraham to offer his own son, Abraham did not hesitate to follow. Abraham's radical obedience to carry out God's command, setting aside his personal feelings, is the most remarkable aspect of Abraham's character. We notice that God may have chosen Abraham because Abraham was willing to sacrifice to fulfill God's commandments with eagerness and faith.

We know how difficult it is to abandon the security of our homeland, social community, and family support, in order to follow God's command. However, Abraham was willing to give up every advantage of living in his hometown to follow after the Lord. Still Abraham was an ordinary person like you and me.

How is different the strategic plan of the church from a business? For the strategic plan of a business, only those who are experts and top-quality people can participate in planning and executing. However, for God's strategic plan, anyone like Abraham who trusts in the Lord and follows his command can participate. God's strategic plan is open to everyone.

3. God's Plan is Bigger and for a Longer Term

The next difference is that God's strategic plan is bigger than any other plans because God's plan is made by the Lord. God says, "***I will make a great nation... to your offspring I will give this land***" (Genesis 12:2 & 7). At the time Abraham has no children. What God promises to Abraham does not make sense. It sounds impossible. Abraham and Sarah do not believe that they would have a son. Genesis 18:13 & 14 say, "***The Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'***" God says, "***Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.***"

Genesis 21:2 & 5 says, "***Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age. ... Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.***" Abraham and Sarah would not expect to have a son at their old age. But God helped them to give birth to Isaac. God's strategic plan is much bigger than we can imagine because everything is possible for God.

Another difference of God's strategic plan is that the plan would impact for a very long time. God's plan is not only for the present generation but also for the future generations. Genesis 12:3 says, "***In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.***" God's promise is given not only for the Jews, but also for "all the families of the earth." This promise is given not only to Abraham but also to you and me. Would you join me in reading the verse together? "***In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.***" God wants to bless everyone through us. God's salvation plan is much bigger for a longer period of time than we can imagine.

4. We are Called to be Blessings

When can we be blessings to others? Here and now. Paul tells us that God's plan was hidden from previous generations, not because God wanted to keep something from his people, but because God would reveal his plans to everyone in his perfect timing. God's hidden plan was to unite the Jews and Gentiles in Christ. Ephesian church was a multi-racial and multi-cultural congregation.

The Bible tells us that God calls His people and uses them according to his purpose. Do we see that God has called us? In the Old Testament, God called Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Jonah, Malachi, and more. In the New Testament, God called Joseph and Mary to give birth to Jesus. Jesus called Matthew, John, James, Peter, Andrew, and other disciples. In the Book of Acts and Paul's Letters, we notice that God called Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, and Silas to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. God would later call Martin Luther, John Wesley, John Calvin, and all of us.

Do you and I know what is the role that God is calling us to? Do we know what we need to do as part of God's plan?

5. Conclusion

Galatians 3:8 & 9 say, "***the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.' For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.***" Paul emphasizes that all believers in every age and from every nation share Abraham's blessing.

Because of Abraham, we are blessed. God's promise given to Abraham is also given to us, "***In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.***" Future generations, our children and grandchildren will be blessed through us.

6. Application

The passage of Genesis 12 is called "Abrahamic Covenant." God invites Abraham to have a covenantal relationship with God. God's invitation would be like a marriage proposal. God promises Abraham that he would bless him, protect him, take care of him, and make him a blessing. God promises him that God would give him the best gift. What was God's best gift for Abraham? The best gift of God was his son Isaac. I believe the best gifts of God for you and me are our children.

Why does God give us children? If there are no children, God's strategic plan will disappear. So in God's strategic plan the top priority should be given to children and grandchildren. I am so thankful to God for sending us many children, youth, and young adults. God sent them for us to love them, to bless them, and help them to increase their faith in the Lord so that they can be blessings to others. Thanks be to God for giving us such a blessing. Amen.