

Ever been to “The Guggenheim,” the world-famous art museum located in New York City? Here’s some interesting background. A man named Solomon Guggenheim founded the “Museum of Non-Objective Painting” in the 1930s. Then, in 1943, Solomon engaged the preeminent architect Frank Lloyd Wright, and 16 years later, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum opened to a predictable reception: a mix of acclaim and criticism from every possible angle. To this very day, it’s a cherished global destination for art lovers!

But we’re not here to talk directly about Solomon Guggenheim—no, it’s his nephew *Harry* Guggenheim we’re talking about in this episode. If you find the sketch of Harry in this episode engaging, go buy the fascinating book about him written by Dirk Smillie, *The Business of Tomorrow*. It’s a fascinating read!

Let’s start with Meyer Guggenheim, a Swiss citizen of Jewish descent and an immigrant to America in the 1840s. By the early 1900s, the Guggenheim name was perched alongside the names of Rockefeller the oil man...Carnegie the steel magnate...Morgan the financier. That’s because Meyer and his eight sons controlled the largest mining and smelting operations in the Americas. One of Meyer’s sons was the art collector Solomon, you know, the museum guy. Working together tightly, the second generation diligently built the family fortune, with Meyer’s son Daniel taking charge and every other brother also filling an important role. The Guggenheim sons expanded the empire and created tremendous value, every brother very wealthy by any standard, then or now! And it seemed that Daniel’s son Harry was gifted with the aptitude and drive to fill Daniel’s shoes in leading the family’s fortunes. But Harry took a different path.

Turns out, while the Guggenheim family’s fame is pretty much lost in history’s bigness today, Harry crafted his life and activities in exceptional ways that impacted the lives of many millions for the better. And that narrative is very much worth telling. We’ll take it in categories...let’s do that now!

1. Harry’s first professional steps in the family business. The Meyer Guggenheim family’s many decades in America revealed shrewd, very successful practitioners of business: from aggressively pursuing asset acquisitions...to astute handling of practical economics...to turning tough supply chain and operating obstacles into fruitful results...to innovating processes for the silver and copper operations they owned.

Harry started as a student for a semester at Yale University, where he studied at the Sheffield Scientific School, learning key areas of the highly technical parts of the Guggenheim’s business—the mining world. But Harry was restless...he soon approached his father about working in Mexico. Harry went to Aguascalientes, which means “hot springs” in Spanish and was a kind of field headquarters for the vast operations the Guggenheims had throughout Mexico. And that was a remarkable apprenticeship, for sure!

2. Continuing his education. Over time, the Guggenheim family had moved headquarters for all their activities from Philadelphia to New York. Harry enjoyed elite private schooling, then attended that first semester at Yale University, then sailed to England to earn a degree at Cambridge, zeroing in on Chemistry and Politics—and, interestingly, playing in the already world-renowned tennis tournament at Wimbledon.

3. The family business again. Harry returned to New York and started participating in the heart of the family business, regularly attending the daily meetings that very often convened Harry’s dad and all seven of his uncles each time. Wow, talk about family togetherness! Harry’s father Daniel, the second-generation’s leader, would routinely shepherd his brothers to consensus. Can you imagine? Those meetings must have been fascinating! This process yielded outstanding results; for example, the family would buy expensive properties while projecting that new technological advancements would soon work to significantly leverage the acquisitions. Consequently, the Guggenheims’ wealth compounded!

The opportunities for international expansion in this era were huge. Harry’s dad Daniel staked a claim in Northern Chile that became one of the largest copper strikes of the century. And so Harry went to Chile in a crucial role to create extensive infrastructure from scratch, from water to electricity to ore-hauling capabilities to living accommodations. This wasn’t family favoritism...Harry was clearly gifted and capable!

4. *“Godfather of Flight.”* World War I erupted. Fascinated by aviation, Harry entered the U.S. Naval Reserve, actually buying his own Curtiss Flying Boat to train on, and, from then on, aviation in the U.S. and Harry Guggenheim would be forever intertwined. After the war, Harry left the family business, causing rifts in the family. But, in due time, Harry convinced Daniel to become a pioneering contributor in the advancement of aviation, which was still a fledgling sector widely viewed as dangerous.

What Harry accomplished in these early years of aviation was breathtaking. The *Daniel Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics* was endowed with \$44 million in today’s dollars, with the requirement that the funds be disbursed in just a few years. Aviation programs started and took root at Stanford, MIT, Caltech, and others. William Boeing asked for significant funds for a program at the University of Washington; Boeing later produced a B-17 bomber every 90 minutes in 1944 for the world-war effort.

Harry recruited a “who’s who” of very famous doers like Orville Wright to join the large-scale effort to promote aviation. Then Charles Lindbergh captured the imagination of America with his solo flight across the Atlantic, and Harry and Lindbergh spent years executing a 35-point promotional strategy for the widespread embracing of airplanes as a safe and pervasive opportunity for all. Needless to say, Harry’s strategy worked. Ultimately, the respected magazine *Popular Science* named Harry the “Godfather of Flight.” Harry’s approach is known as “venture philanthropy” today. Nobody has a bigger claim to fulfilling venture philanthropy well than Harry himself—and his with worldwide implications for freedom itself.

5. *Diplomat.* Harry’s fame afforded him the opportunity to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Cuba. And what a story that is! As is with so much of the turbulent history of Latin America, Harry’s Cuba experience saw lots of political strife, corruption, and havoc during much of the Hoover Administration in the U.S. What a mess! But that was just another chapter in the remarkable Harry Guggenheim story.

6. *Rocketry.* Harry proved he still had his head in the clouds when physicist Dr. Robert Goddard came onto his radar. Goddard was a quirky visionary who was often doubted and downplayed for years. But Goddard was ultimately awarded 241 patents and is considered a founding father of modern rocketry—and a significant force in helping usher in the Space Age. But Goddard had little to no financial backing during some very lean years. Except...you got it...Harry’s steadfast support through daunting delays and failures!

7. *Other interesting stuff that’s enough for one person’s lifetime without doing anything else.* So, yes, Harry did other amazing things, too. Harry was undeniably a leading horse breeder, and his horse Dark Star won the 1953 Kentucky Derby. Harry purchased a small suburban newspaper, renamed it *Newsday*, and turned it into a leading American newspaper. And then there’s The Guggenheim. After his uncle Solomon’s death, Harry endured a years-long hassle of making that world-class flagship museum a reality, successfully navigating both highly fickle art world celebrities and the famous but difficult architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

Yes, Harry Guggenheim was very successful! Grandson of an immigrant to America. Entrepreneurial greatness. Amazing venture-philanthropy working to help stand up entire industries vital to the U.S. *But.* Troubled marriages to three wives. And although he diligently tried, Harry didn’t find a successor in the Guggenheim family to his own endeavors. And this: apparently no relationship at all to Christ. All that success, but the key point in life missed—Christ—especially poignant for a person of Jewish lineage.

Remember King Solomon? He was a man who stewarded his father David’s heritage, riches, and kingdom—to great results! He was wealthy, renowned, and brought peace to Israel. But his life had some key problems of his own making. And Harry Guggenheim tended to mirror some key problems in King Solomon’s life: in his multiple marriages, disappointments in the next generation, and seemingly glorifying man more than God. “[Solomon’s] heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God.” (1 Kings 11:4b)

Jesus came on the scene, saying “Something greater than Solomon is here!” So Jesus points us to the higher things, the eternal things—glorifying God, whatever our hand finds to do!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Family “results” can sometimes be very tricky, even troublesome. Sometimes these are of our own making and sometimes not: after all, spouses and children can take their own direction without regard to your best efforts. When such disappointments come, what are better or other strategies to touch the lives of others to the glory of God? Be specific.
2. Think for just a moment. As the story in this episode unfolded up until the last portion, did you regard Harry Guggenheim as experiencing and enjoying the ultimate in privilege? So, how well-appreciated is our graceful gift of a vibrant life in Christ when we *have to be reminded* that Harry was apart from Christ as the ultimately dominant part of his story? Read Philippians 3:7-11; write down and discuss what sticks out for you.
3. How do we work through our admiration for amazing people who are lost with their ultimate need for a Savior? Explain how you personally do that, especially when you know them personally.