

“Be careful what you ask for!” Have you heard that before? Yeah—be careful what you ask for, because you might actually get it...and then come to regret it! Or *the giver* might actually come to regret it!

There are lots of stories of wealthy people carefully building great holdings and then working to ensure that the next generations of their family are very well taken care of. Sometimes that seems to work well—at least looking in from the outside. But in other cases, that wealth is systematically squandered by the generation or two that follows...often with other problems brewing in the pot, like alcoholism and drug abuse. Here’s a key point: if you do inherit, be sure about your ability to manage and grow the inheritance!

One of the most instructive stories of a sort of “business-leadership inheritance” was heralded *at the time* as one of the most brilliantly orchestrated events in business history. CEO Jack Welch—named “manager of the [20<sup>th</sup>] century” by *Fortune* magazine—grew General Electric’s ownership value by about 30 times ...from \$14 to \$410 billion! Welch prided himself on cultivating the best executives...and for six years, he held a bit of a beauty contest among three internal candidates for GE’s next CEO. The rest is history! Jeff Immelt “won” the beauty contest to become CEO and the other two candidates were quickly hired to lead other large, famous U.S. companies. But in the next 20 years, none of the three was really, truly successful!

For starters, Welch had built a vital part of GE’s aura on its GE Capital division...and GE Capital’s success cracked up in the 2008 financial crisis—the bailout by the U.S. cost \$139 billion! So, while Immelt had inherited what was gauged as a great company, he is now often judged a failure as a CEO. Immelt himself called his tenure “controversial”...yes, when he left, GE was worth less than half than when he took over. Be careful what you ask for...be careful how much you value what you inherit...be real about your abilities!

Jim McNerney, Welch’s second CEO candidate, was picked up by 3M but soon departed for the CEO job at Boeing. However, his development project of Boeing’s 737-MAX airplane was botched in crucial ways, with fatal crashes costing Boeing many billions in value.

Then there’s Bob Nardelli, Welch’s third CEO candidate, who went to Home Depot as CEO, where he was a fish out of water and was ultimately bumped out in just a few years. So, were these three executives respected at GE? Yes! But nowadays do astute observers consider them elite? *Not so much*. So be careful of what you ask for...and about your ability to grow an inheritance!

So, for years, Jack Welch, that so-called “manager of the century,” developed three CEO candidates to be his possible successors...yet none of them demonstrably succeeded in further advancing the inheritances then bestowed upon each of them. A couple of reminders here. Sometimes an inheritance isn’t quite the great deal that it might look like. And then there’s this: truly managing an inheritance fruitfully may require a skill set that’s beyond the inheritor, even for those who are confident they’re eminently qualified! *Yeah, be careful what you ask for!*

Let’s pivot and look at the utterly unique family inheritance story of Abraham, father of many nations. Abraham and his wife Sarah preempted God’s plan for a baby and Ishmael was born to their servant Hagar. Because of the strife that ensued, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away. And the two of them were so destitute that God rescued them. Historically, Ishmael is regarded by many as the father of Arabs.

Then Abraham and Sarah begat Isaac. And after Sarah died, Abraham married Keturah and they had six sons! Then when Abraham died, he “gave all he had to Isaac.” Yet while he was still living, “Abraham gave gifts to the sons of his concubines...” (Genesis 25) Talk about “blended family” issues! But the record remains that Abraham “gave all to Isaac.” And Isaac begat Jacob and Esau...and you know that sad story: Jacob maneuvered and got his older brother Esau to trade his inheritance for a bowl of soup!

So, as to Abraham's tangled family tree, his blood descendants from multiple women have mostly lived somewhere in or around the Promised Land, with many descendants largely disinherited as Abraham solely honored the Lord's giving of Isaac. 'Course, Isaac begat Jacob, who became Israel. And then the story of the Israelites unfolded: betrayal among brothers...slavery in Egypt...the giving of the Law...the occupying of the Promised Land...the many deliverances of the Israelites by God. But how did the Israelites manage those latter inheritances? *Not well.* The prophets remind us they failed constantly in obeying God.

But wait! These aren't the most important inheritances emanating from Abraham to his descendants through Sarah...Hagar...Keturah. Multiple New Testament passages like Romans 4-6 and the book of Hebrews tell a fuller story. You see, Father Abraham lived out the most important inheritance of all to everyone who would seek after God—what we might call *an inspired inheritance*, something more valuable than material wealth could ever be! Yes, a Bible reader today who's *not* a descendant of Isaac or Israel but who counts Ishmael or Esau as a blood ancestor *can still live the fullest life of faith imaginable!* That's because Abraham is the Father of faith for *every* believer since the Cross...including Arabs in every country surrounding modern Israel! Yes, the Arab who believes in Christ surpasses the unbelieving Jew. Galatians 3:29: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

And get this. The amazing manifestations of inheritance of the Israelites...the uniqueness of a God-chosen ethnicity...the giving of the Law of Moses...a long and rich history of deliverances...well, even to this very day, *these have often worked together to actually become a huge stumbling block as to faith in Christ for many Jews!* But...we must realize that Abraham is instructively referenced in the New Testament *for the direct benefit of seekers of every ethnicity!* This is *an inspired inheritance* each can receive from Abraham, the man who, *like believers today, was not under the law, yet was approved by God through his faith.*

*This is the inheritance that matters more than any other:* the inheritance inspired by seeing faith in action by an Abraham...by parents...by brothers and sisters in Christ, faith manifested apart from the Law, apart from the flesh...yes, manifested by the Spirit of God Himself! Imagine being an Arab—really, any blood descendant of Abraham—on this very day, reading the Bible and realizing by the power of the Spirit that *you are free to be spiritually unencumbered by ethnic jealousy, by the Law of Moses, or by ancestral grievances!* This inspiration-instigated inheritance is astounding! And it can be a weird sort of version of what tax experts in America call a generation-skipping inheritance: it doesn't matter what your parents or grandparents believed or did—as "heirs according to promise," *you* can take the measure of faith God assigned you (Romans 12:3) and, as Jesus said, do greater works than He did (John 14:12). *Astonishing...*

And this is what you yourself can model and inspire others toward...yes, people can be inspired by your faith...and, in a very real way, they can be helped in "catching" it by your words and deeds. That's what we ourselves can see from thousands of years ago in Abraham, our father in faith. With God's help, those in your household...in your neighborhood...in your workplace, can see God's gift of faith operating in you!

Sadly, some churches have effectively relegated robust personal faith in Christ and Kingdom witness below other beliefs...rules...laws...catechisms...creeds. *Yes, be careful what you ask for as an inheritance!* And you have no reason to envy those who leave plenty of tangible assets to their descendants. Yes, some recipients may indeed manage and grow that inheritance and do much good. But the truth remains, *the inheritance with the most eternal value is the one that every serious believer is positioned to bequeath to others* with no formal will or lawyer required—yes, *you* can model a steadfast, joyful life of faith in Jesus!

That is priceless. That is eternal. That is something that can truly inspire your descendants...your neighbors...your coworkers. Yeah. An inspired inheritance. Available to all, inspired by people full of faith. Like Abraham. Like you. *Inspired inheritance!*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Can you name a believer or two that had an impact in helping you ultimately “catch” faith in Christ? Share.
2. Do you believe and act as though you have an inheritance from your father in the faith, Abraham (Romans 4)? Do others notice? Do they comment? Discuss.
3. Do you believe sincere Jews have a stumbling block to faith in Christ due to all the unique inheritances they might emphasize over and above God’s fullest desire for them—which is salvation through Christ (1 Timothy 2:4)? Do you see this in certain churches and denominations where robust personal faith in Christ is actually relegated on a practical day-to-day basis below other beliefs...rules ...laws... catechisms...creeds? Discuss.