

RG LeTourneau – Earthmoving Innovator

<http://www.giantsforgod.com/rg-letourneau/>



RG LeTourneau is perhaps the most inspiring Christian inventor, businessman and entrepreneur the world has ever seen. A sixth grade dropout, Robert Gilmore “RG” LeTourneau went on to become the leading earth moving machinery manufacturer of his day with plants on 4 continents, more than 300 patents to his name and major contributions to road construction and heavy equipment that forever changed the world. Most importantly, his contribution to the advancement of the Gospel ranks him among the greatest of Christian Businessmen of all time. Famous for living on 10% of his income and giving 90% to the spread of the Gospel, LeTourneau exemplified what a Christian businessman should be.

RG LeTourneau dropped out of school and began working in an iron foundry at the age of 14, in the year 1901. Numerous tradesmen jobs later, he discovered a passion for machinery, initially as an auto mechanic, and later as the manufacturer of the largest earth moving equipment on the planet. At the age of 28, he returned from a period with the Navy serving our country in World War I to a car dealership, of which he was half owner, that was steeped in debt due to a partner who took to drinking. LeTourneau removed himself from the business with \$5,000 in debt. The year was 1915. Ouch. Jobless and beyond broke, he jumped at the opportunity to level some land for a wealthy rancher. RG claimed that this experience was the most satisfying job he had ever held.

LeTourneau slowly expanded to larger and larger land leveling contracts. He continually under-bid his competitors to win jobs and would scramble to invent machines to speed up the work and keep him from going broke. Although there were many technological advances in other areas of commerce in the early 1900s, in the world of earth moving at the time, it was still in the stone age. Roads were built by employing large numbers of men with shovels and utilizing mules to drag small plows. RG LeTourneau was among the first road construction contractors to introduce machinery to moving earth.

The year was 1919 and as a Christian, he felt the tug to be doing more for God. He went to his pastor, Reverend Devol, for advice. RG thought that anyone who was wholly committed to Christ had to become a pastor or a missionary to truly fulfill the great commission. After deep prayer with his pastor, RG LeTourneau was shocked to hear Rev. Duvol say the words that guided him for the rest of his life, “God needs

businessmen too.” This was a revelation to RG. He immediately began to consider his business to be in partnership with God.

Still, RG LeTourneau was puzzled as to why God would choose him to be *His*businessman. Especially when, at the age of 40, in the year 1927, a big construction job went bad and put him \$100,000 in debt. But as RG remarked later, after seeing what God could do to restore a business and a life, “He uses the weak to confound the mighty.” For history buffs, the end of the 1920s marked a unique event in American history, the start of the Great Depression. Not exactly the best time to be up to your eyeballs in debt and uncertain as to how to feed your wife and kids.

The following story highlights a miracle that God performed while RG faithfully served God, not man. The surety company that had backed RG LeTourneau on the construction job that posted the \$100,000 loss was going to see to it that RG paid them back every penny owed. So on LeTourneau’s next job, the surety company demanded RG work on Sundays or else they would foreclose on his business, his house, everything. Since RG’s business partner was God, he gave the problem to God to solve. The owner of the surety company, Mr. Hall, boarded a train to officially shut LeTourneau down, but upon arrival to the job site the next day, something miraculous occurred. The surety man had a change of heart and allowed RG to continue.

Although the job was completed without working on Sundays, RG was still deep in debt. He was able to buy some time with his creditors by committing to improve his financial reporting. The surety company installed an accountant named Mr. Frost to reign in the books. What Mr. Frost found was worse than he had originally expected.

Meanwhile, RG had skipped his yearly missions pledge the year before so he was committed to making good with the Lord. He told Mr. Frost that he had pledged \$5,000 to his church for missions. Mr. Frost couldn’t believe it. RG was so far behind, even thinking of donating to the Lord was out of the question. Mr. Frost didn’t realize who RG was partners in business with. Unbelievably, the business managed to stay afloat and the missions commitment was paid in full that year. Then, his business hit a breakthrough.

For years, RG LeTourneau had sold the machinery he had built for himself when he got a little behind financially. Although he still considered himself, first and foremost, a road construction contractor, the selling of his earth moving equipment inventions had been a profitable sideline for him. RG’s attorney hinted at the idea of solving his financial woes by going full force into the manufacturing business rather than rolling the dice on the ups and downs of big construction jobs. RG then turned his complete focus to the manufacturing of his machinery inventions. After that, his financial woes were a thing of the past. The following are the revenue results his manufacturing business produced during a time when the rest of the country was plagued with the Great Depression:

Year 1932 – Net Profit: \$52,055.61
Year 1934 – Net Profit: \$340,275.49
Year 1938 – Net Profit: \$1,412,465.68

In 1935, with the gigantic profits pouring out of the manufacturing business, at the gentle suggestion of his wife Evelyn, they transitioned to a 90/10 split with the Lord. 90% went to the Lord and 10% went to RG and Evelyn. LeTourneau was fond of remarking, “It’s not how much of my money I give to God, but how much of God’s money I keep for myself.” With the money, they established the LeTourneau Foundation to manage the administration of donations. By 1959, after giving \$10 Million in donations to religious and educational works, the LeTourneau Foundation was still worth some \$40 Million.

In that same year, 1935, RG LeTourneau overcame a lifelong fear of public speaking and gave his first speech at the opening of his newest plant, to which he urged his fellow Christians in the room to do more for the Lord in their businesses. In attendance at the presentation were several area pastors, who immediately requested he speak to their congregation about Christianity and business. This was the beginning of a lifelong commitment to speaking on Christians in business. In later years, with the profits from his business, he was able to purchase airplanes so that he could speak to more and more audiences around the world.

RG LeTourneau was a mighty man of God whose life continues to inspire Christians in Business to this day. To learn even more, read the detailed account of his life, in his own words, in the book, [Mover of Mountains and Men](#).

