

The Eternally Fatal Dangers of Success

An angry Christian leader responded to allegations about his abuse of spiritual authority by reciting a list of accomplishments in the church he pastored: conversions, growth in membership and finances.

Did his success entitle him to behave in a manner inconsistent with the character of Jesus? Perhaps he did not see the issues in such black-and-white terms. However, it was clear that he equated the external growth of his church with God's blessing upon him.

That's an easy mistake to make, and it could be eternally fatal. (Matt. 7:21–23.) Ps. 60 helps us to stay honest with God when everything appears to be going well.

When everything looks okay, but it's not

David's armies had won an unbroken string of victories (2 Sam. 8). This psalm comes on the heels of one of those triumphs—over Edom.

But instead of praise for the victory, the psalm bursts open with a forthright statement that God had rejected Israel, been angry, shaken the land, torn it open, shown His people desperate times and given them wine (i.e., judgment) to make them stagger (Ps. 60:1–3).

How could David say such things in view of his military conquests? Was it not an hour when circumstances indicated God was with him?

Sometimes you fall apart on the inside while you look put together on the outside. Your private and public worlds don't connect at all. Others cannot perceive the trauma you feel,

the despair and loneliness. Only God knows that.

Making it right

The danger in success is dishonesty with self, others or God. You will substitute eternal accomplishment for internal peace. What happens to you becomes more important than what happens in you.

David alerts us to face this problem. Our successes may be happening despite God's displeasure. Our concern must be more upon, "Is God pleased with me?" than "Is God pleased with what I am doing?"

David does not rely on his military successes for a sense of personal well-being. As in his down times when he totally relied upon the Lord, so now, in his triumphs, he does the same. It is still God who must raise a banner, save and help (vv. 4-5).

A string of accomplishments may lead us to feel self-sufficient. This psalm teaches us to remain dependent upon the Lord.

What's next?

God does want to grant us victory. Verses 6-9 restate elements in the land grant initially given to Abraham. The Lord wanted His people, through David, now to possess that promise.

David has the good sense to know that the ultimate reason for his success lies not in his own prowess, but in God who owns the land and parcels it out to whom He wills.

A new humility

David looks beyond the present hour to conflicts yet ahead. The God who rejected us (v. 10) is the same One we must rely upon for assistance (v. 11). How important, then, that we repent of any wrong relationship with Him.

The outcome for our battles in life remains in God's hands. David states, "The help of man is useless" (v. 11).

In one sense, that is an overstatement. David could not have won battles without the help of people like Joab, his commanders, armies and mighty men (see 2 Sam. 23:8–39.) But from another vantage, the statement is true.

David looked to ultimate causes. He knew he could field the best army in the world and still lose, if God were not with him.

So, also in your life. You can deploy every strategy known to man to regain lost territory, to emerge from a period of dispossession in your life. You can get the help of experts and those who truly love you. But if God is not with you and for you—the very God who rejects you and stands opposed to you when you are filled with pride and stubbornly rebellious—then you have no chance of prevailing.

This psalm begins with David knowing that external victory had come despite God's displeasure with His people. David treasures his relationship with the Lord more than continuing an unbroken string of military wins. So, before going into the next battle, he corrects the deficiency in his own life over which God had been displeased.

You are a spiritually mature person when you take steps to correct the faults no one else sees, to repair the relationship with the Lord when everyone else thinks your relationship is fine.

In taking such action, you regain inner assurance and spiritual confidence. The future is not something you decide; rather "with God we will gain the victory and he will trample down our enemies" (v. 12, NIV).

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