

7. HIGH AND MIGHTY

What is the greatest adversity that could befall or trapped on the majority of Christians? Sickness? Financial loss? Family problems? Surprisingly, one of our worst adversities may be prosperity - a difficult trial dressed in designer sheep clothing.

When we go through difficult trials and tests, we cry out to God and cling to Him for His help and strength. But when everything seems go in our ways, we quickly tend to forget how we receive our prosperity from whom and why.

If I may ask you guys to ask yourselves what you would do if you had 40 million dollars cash in the bank with your name that you can do whatever you want to do, would you ask God for help use that money properly and wisely? Or you would do whatever your heart leads?

It is not because we are so wonderful and God couldn't get along without us, but because by His grace and mercy and love are for us. He chooses to bless us with good things. In other words, we can get our heads big without realizing the true source of the blessings.

Not many people can handle prosperity in financial status, power and fame. Time after time, we see people who put into the positions of rich and famous only to see they make loud falls.

When we have nothing to show for in status, our integrity doesn't demand much. Because everything is bare and nothing much to hide behind. But when we have a lot in financial, social, and spiritual status, our integrity toward our God and men demand much more. In short, integrity scales with prosperity.

A. THREE EXAMPLES OF STUPID BIG TIMBERS

1) Samson - The most powerful wimp

We find starting faults in his uncontrolled passion and never-obedient attitude toward God's commands except the last dying wish to the Lord. Even though he was a judge over Israel for twenty years, we don't find one incident recorded in the Bible that he prayed to the Lord for God's will.

2) David - Too much time in his hands

When other kings were in the battle fields their soldiers, he also should be in the battle fields. But he allowed himself to be lazy and made himself vulnerable to be tempted and ended up having adultery and murder. Until prophet Nathan confronted him which was over a year period, there is not one recorded prayer or psalm from David.

3) Solomon - The wisest fool

He was the wisest and richest man ever lived. Not keeping his eyes on God who made him to be the wisest man ever lived and also gave him all the riches brought him down to the pit of stupidity. Too much rich, too much absolute power, and too big head ended him up in worshiping foreign idols instead of his God.

Proverbs 30:7-9 Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): 8 Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches-- Feed me with the food allotted to me; 9 Lest I be full and deny You, And say,

"Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.

B. THREE EXAMPLES OF GODLY MEN WITH PROMOTION

1) Joseph - From rag to rich

From the ranks of Egypt's former slaves and prisoners to Prime Minister of the nation of Egypt without compromising his integrity and faith in God in the idolatrous nation Egypt.

2) Daniel - Standing tall

Born in obscurity, then taken to Babylon for schooling as a young captive, then promoted to be the right hand man of king Nebuchadnezzar. He faced more opponents against him than his friends, the absence of his homelands and all the odds against his faith in God. Not once, he compromised, not once he tried to save his own skin over his integrity.

3) Billy Graham

Undoubtedly the most well known Christian preacher of our modern day history, whenever he gave an altar call, thousands of people running down stairs to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, yet Graham remains in so humble that he only receives modest salary and living in a modest home. He wouldn't walk into a hotel lobby or elevator alone that somebody might accuse him having an affair with some other woman.

These three people are just like the other three in human form. But they had something the others didn't have, the fear of the Lord that translates to 'INTEGRITY'.

Prov. 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

None of Joseph, Daniel and Billy Graham's promotion to their ranks demote God from being Lord in their lives. They understood the Real Source of the blessing.

C. PROMOTION THAT ONLY COMES FROM GOD

This morning, we are going to learn how Nehemiah handled his promotion to Governor position.

Nehemiah 5:14 Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions.

Did you notice how Nehemiah word this verse? He said that he was appointed to be their governor. He didn't appoint himself. I like the way Calvary Chapel's ordination certificate reads: "We recognize the divine ordination on this man..." No one is worthy to be selected by God with their own qualifications. But God is the One who can exalt a man to the position He chooses.

Ps. 75:6-7 For exaltation comes neither from the east Nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, And exalts another.

Nehemiah didn't allow himself and his group of people become the lords over the people of Jerusalem. He didn't take salary from the Israelites, but he chose to support himself and his group with his own.

It is not just pastors who get called into the ministries. All of you who are involved in the ministries of Calvary Chapel Bullhead City are called by God and equipped by God. It has nothing to do with you and me, rather it has everything to do with Him.

D. FOUR AREAS OF TEMPTATIONS AGAINST LEADERS

We can see four areas of temptations that come with being a leader.

1) PRIVILEGES

Every promotion comes equipped with its own special set of privileges, rights, benefits and special favors. And there are few who can resist using them without abusing them. But not only did Nehemiah not abuse his privileges, but also he even went a step further.

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We heard a saying that absolute power can corrupt a man absolutely. Obviously Nehemiah was an exception.

It is so important to have an accountability person or group when someone gets to have a great power in the ministry or organization.

In our Calvary Chapel of Sahuarita, as I told you before, we have the board of directors, three men, who are not afraid to tell me what I am doing is wrong. They have right to say, "No" to the motions I make to the board regarding major decisions in the church. By our bylaws, the majority of the board can make decisions. But I choose to go by unanimous vote. I don't want someone to tell me later, "I told you so."

2) POLICIES

Nehemiah 5:15 But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

No matter what the position, promotions involve stepping into someone else's shoes and policies. And that means one of two kinds of pressure: to do what always has been done - maintain - or try something new.

Nehemiah is faced with three corrupt policies passed on from his former governors: enforcing heavy taxes, extorted food and money and allowed their servants to oppress the people.

Let's not be afraid to change and be changed. Jesus changed a lot of the pharisees' ways and our old nature to His glorious nature.

Nehemiah 5:16 Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work.

How did Nehemiah act upon what the former governor used to do? He didn't act like them.

3) PROJECTS

Nehemiah 5:17-18a And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine.

In every promotion, there are many projects get undone. But Nehemiah's project was building the wall and his promotion didn't blind him from it. Nehemiah could easily have gotten wrapped up in parties and protocol and forgotten about the wall. But he didn't.

4) PEOPLE

Nehemiah 5:18b Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people.

The meat and potatoes of every leadership position involves dealing with people, serving them, handling their needs and entering into their hurts. But there are still many leaders who don't think twice about running roughshod over everyone to get what they want.

Average American executive's corporate lives is three years. CEOs, presidents and vice presidents come and go. They bring up their own pet projects and don't care to do what already have been happening. So they trash the former CEO's projects, former president's projects and start their own. Crank, push, cut a few people's positions (including those people's families' means to survive), get their numbers look good and move on to bigger and better positions with golden parachutes. It is looking after number uno, themselves only.

Nehemiah resisted that temptation, and he stayed sensitive to the needs of people.

Nehemiah 5:19 Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Dwight Eisenhower once said, "In order for a man to be a leader he must have followers. And to have followers, he must have their confidence. Hence the supreme quality for a leader is unquestionable integrity... If a man's associates find him guilty of phoniness, if they find that he lacks forthright integrity, he will fail. His teachings and actions must square with each other."

Being demoted is tough, but surviving a promotion can be even tougher.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Let's not forget that any promotion or any recognition does not come from our own, but God.

If we think that the promotion or recognition we just receive has anything to do with ourselves, we are deceiving ourselves. God gave us life, breath in our lungs, and wisdom in our hearts to recognize it is by Him. So what is there for us to boast about?

2) We must remember that our personal integrity is the walking testimonies that show God's goodness to the non-believers.

Our actions speaks louder than our own verbal testimonies. Let our integrity points those who don't know Jesus to the cross.