

# Evaluating Success

Dr. Ron J. Bigalke

An addiction to success can develop in our lives, when we do not know how much is enough and what to do when we attain our goals.

In evaluating his first twenty years as king, one could easily affirm that Solomon was amazingly successful. Solomon was at the point in his life where he needed to direct his mindset from one of success to that of significance, in order to prevent his achievements from dwindling into failures. If one desires a picture of “success as heaven measures it, of greatness as God views it, don’t look for the blaring of the bands on Broadway; listen, rather, for the tinkle of water splashing into a basin, while God incarnate, in a humility that makes angels hold their breath, sponges the grime from the feet of His undeserving disciples.”<sup>1</sup>

## ACHIEVING SUCCESS

Chapters 9–11 of 1 Kings detail the closing years of Solomon’s life and recount his backsliding. In chapter 9, God issued both a promise and warning in relation to worship (esp. in terms of the Temple). The people were reminded that the building itself (i.e. the Temple) was not a mere guarantee of God’s blessing. Even today, God’s people may be tempted to trust in preceding endeavors or outward displays of success, rather than relentlessly pursuing “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (cf. Phil 3:12-14).

As the two books of Kings reveal the progress of God’s people throughout



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the period of the monarchy, it is evident that Israel trusted more in outward displays of religion as opposed to pleasing God by means of inner transformation (cf. Lev 20:26; Rom 12:1-2; 1 Pet 1:13-16). Being a recipient of immense spiritual privileges can sometimes deceive one into thinking he or she is immune to God's discipline. First Kings reminds us that immense privileges always enlarge responsibilities as opposed to lessening them.

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Similar to all God's leaders, Solomon was granted a choice; that meant his responsibilities were significant, especially because his kingdom could reap the benefits of both economic and political independence. Nevertheless, as Jesus said, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him



they will ask all the more" (Luke 12:48). For this reason, the writer of 1 Kings (9:10–10:29) addresses Solomon's ability to govern the people of God.

Solomon invested much to finance and maintain his building projects. To compensate for his massive debt, "King Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee" (9:11). The cities were evidently part of Asher's tribal inheritance (cf. Josh 19:24-31), which meant that Solomon was surrendering the Promised Land.

Solomon invested greatly in military protection by building a network of regional fortress cities. However, the projects were not without cost, because great finances and manpower were necessary. The cities were built by forced labor (1 Kgs 9:15, 20-22; cf. 4:6). Moses and Samuel warned the people that a

king would tax them excessively, in addition to demanding their labor for personal benefit, and would generally enrich the kingdom at others' expense (Deut 17:16-17; 1 Sam 8:11-17). Solomon's kingdom was mighty, yet his personal ambitions were crushing to his people, and would eventually rupture into rebellion.

First Kings 9:1 asserts that when King Solomon finished building the Temple and the royal palace, all he “desired to do” was accomplished. Solomon began his building projects in the fourth year of his reign (6:1), and it took him twenty years to build “the two houses” (9:10). If he ascended the throne at approximately twenty years of age, then he was in his early forties when he accomplished all he “desired to do.” He was slightly beyond the halfway point of his forty-year reign (11:42).

### **ACHIEVING SIGNIFICANCE**

*King Solomon was living the best years of his life, as he was experiencing the pinnacle of his days as both a man and a king. As he reached halftime of his forty-year reign, Solomon enjoyed the enviable and unique experience of knowing he had achieved all he “desired to do.” At the age of forty-four, Solomon was favored and especially gifted because he was responsible for the “Golden Age” of Israel. History remembers Solomon as one of the most successful kings of his nation.*

Slightly beyond the halfway point of his reign, *Solomon's life appeared—by all standards—to be tremendously successful. Nevertheless, he never emerged from success to significance.*

The second half of Solomon's life was not a success. Solomon's kingdom was remarkable yet wholly superficial.

Solomon failed as a king because he made compromises with God's standards, which resulted in devastatingly enduring consequences.

Solomon's life demonstrates several truths. *First, success has the inherent potential to become addictive.* Solomon accumulated greater fame and wealth, yet he lacked a compelling purpose and strategy for the future. His lifestyle became that of self-serving excess.

*Second, success can become deceptive* because it may obscure one's true being and circumstances. All the wealth that surrounded Solomon obscured the fact that his heart was drifting from God.

Near the end of his life, Solomon wrote that a life not focused upon God is meaningless and purposeless. “Vanity of vanities,” he remarked; all is utterly futile without the Lord God (Eccl 1:2). A greater accumulation of “stuff” cannot substitute for a relationship with God.

*Third, success can become illusory.* Certainly, no one reading the end of First Kings 10 would imagine that all the resplendent success would disappear within a few brief years, yet that is exactly what occurred.

*Evaluating our lives at halftime is especially urgent when experiencing tremendous success.* Of course, none of us can “boast about tomorrow,” because we “do not know what a day may bring forth” (Prov 27:1). Thus, we should live each and every day circumspectly. Choices made in the present determine whether we can say, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7); and, also will ascertain whether we hear the Lord remark, “Well done, good and faithful slave” (cf. Matt 25:21).

*God's eternal decree has always been to call a people—holy and separate—*

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unto *Himself* from the world, and that this elect group would live their earthly lives as saints (“unique ones”)—holy and separate—unto Him. Therefore, a primary reason for “pressure” (“tribulation”) exerted upon Christians is to produce perseverance (endurance), as the believer is dependent upon the Lord God (Rom 5:3-11). As “proven character” becomes evident in the Christian’s life, confidence in God is intensified and thus hope “does not disappoint” (v. 4-5).

Apparent success can diminish what will genuinely endure, if we do not measure our lives by God’s standards. Authentic success can only be determined over longer periods of time. *Genuine success is measured only by perseverance*; in this sense, the life of the believer is not a sprint but a marathon. The aspiration and goal in life should be to persist in the goal of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:10-14).

Solomon is one of the foremost examples of the truth that our greatest threat can be our own self. Solomon’s successes occurred more extensively and rapidly than anyone in his generation. When Solomon was experiencing the pinnacle of his reign, his contemporaries certainly imagined that his kingdom would endure for a thousand years. Yet the king drifted from God, and his self-indulgence kept producing ignominious results, until he recognized the “vanity of vanities” arising from his own actions (Eccl 1:2).

Solomon never encountered an enemy on the battlefield, yet he lost the greatest battle ever: the one with himself. Solomon’s choices inflicted enduring anguish upon his kingdom, and ultimately,

his legacy was that of suffering for those subsequent to him. By his own actions and qualities, Solomon demonstrates that a gifted intellect is not a substitute for an obedient heart (cf. Eccl. 12:13-14).

You and I are also vulnerable in the exact same manner as King Solomon. We would be intensely arrogant and foolish to imagine that we are somehow impervious to the influences that culminated in Solomon’s downfall. First Kings 1–11 is divinely intended and revealed to spur us to examine whatever potent temptations exist in our own lives, and thus compel us to depend upon God for our endurance (cf. 1 Cor 10:11-13).

King David set a standard for obedience (e.g. Ps 32; 51). David’s sins are glaring faults upon an otherwise faithful servant. When the prophet Nathan rebuked David, the king repented and lived his life pleasing before God, as he understood the blessedness of forgiveness and trust in the Lord. *The standard of King David is not perfection, but sin that is confessed; and when it is, there is repentance and wrong made right.* The grace of God should never be considered an opportunity to sin, because persistent disobedience displaces the longsuffering of God (cf. Rom 6:1-4; 1 Pet 4:17). Christians are not perfect, but let us pray that when we are aware of our sin, we would repent and finish well the work that God has entrusted to us. (769)

### ENDNOTE

- 1 Dr. Paul Rees, as quoted from *Bible Expositor*, in Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations* (Rockville, MD: Assurance Publishers, 1979) 1371-72.