

REFLECTIONS ON FAITH AND WORK

Gratitude, Grace and Corporate Success

The experiences of the people of Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament, offer important insights about the struggles of life that we face, even though our social and economic context have changed dramatically. Despite the intervening centuries, some aspects of human existence and the human personality have not changed at all, so that lessons from the Bible are still directly relevant today.

◆ **It's So Easy to Forget**

One of the recurring themes of the Old Testament is God's warning to His people not to forget their experience as slaves in Egypt, or His mercy to them as they wandered in the desert for forty years, or His miraculous intervention in their battles for possession of the "Promised Land." The theme of the Old Testament is "God is the hero," not those who experience his grace. God deserves the praise and obedience of his people

The Israelites, however, quickly forgot these warnings, especially when they experienced success. Kings began to think that Israel's power was due to their shrewdness and acumen, spiritual rulers lost focus and began creating their own empires, and the people were easily coaxed into adding other gods to their spiritual pantheon as an "extra insurance" policy. One powerful example of this is Moses' second address to the Israelites, recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy. Here is an excerpt that deserves our attention:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow larger and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God. . . You may say to yourself, 'My power and strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' (8:10-14 17.)

It is tempting for us to dismiss this passage as not applicable to our lifestyles and budgets. It is easy for us to "poor mouth" ourselves and our financial status, although in comparative terms, most of us are very privileged. We don't see ourselves as wealthy people, when in fact we live at a standard unknown in most of the world. The herds, flocks, silver and gold of the Israelites are the retirement accounts, private schools, beach houses and two-car garages of today. We, too, "eat and are satisfied."

◆ Not Claiming the Credit

Moses' words, following the warning excerpted above, are as follows: "But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth . . ." (8:18). This warning is an important one for us as well. It is a sad truth that the more successful we are, the more inclined we are to take full credit for our success. Our job skills, our ability to be successful at work, are a gift of God. Success in the marketplace is not an occasion for self-congratulation, but rather a time for thanking God for His grace.

God knew that once the Israelites left the desert and entered the Promised Land, they would face a new kind of challenge - perhaps an even more demanding challenge than survival in the harsh, sun-soaked wilderness. The new challenge would be living in comfort in the lush green valleys of Judah and Galilee, in finely built homes, with plenty of security and good food, and remembering that these were all gifts from God, and not the product of their own plans or even their own hard work.

Living as a people of grace was hard in Old Testament times and it is hard now. We are so quick to take credit for the grace that comes our way. We are so quick to forget that it is God's goodness to us that allows us to succeed in our work. **Learning** to live a life of gratitude, expressing daily thanks to God for His grace, is one of the marks of a follower of Jesus Christ.

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