

"And David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him." II Samuel 5:10.

Very few stories of success in life are more thrilling than the story of David's career. We ought to be very grateful to God for the inspired and challenging record of his life. Starting out as a lowly shepherd lad, pampered by his father, despised by his brothers, and overlooked by Saul, he rises, nevertheless, to become the king of Israel, and "a man after God's own heart." The going was far from smooth for him, but he stuck it out, through thick and thin, ever advancing with God, for the spirit of progress was embodied in his life. In our text we find a summary of David's success. "And David went on, and grew great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him." This verse tells us three things about his progressive living.

I. The Manner of His Progress.

He "went on." What can be more important than going on, continuing, and not fizzling out? Perhaps more people fail because they quit than for any other reason. Christ issued an important warning along this line in His story of the builder who rushed into his work without due consideration and preparation, and failed; then the people scornfully remarked, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." On the other hand, we see the man who plods on, regardless of how tough the going gets, or of how slow he may be advancing. He just doesn't give up. He doesn't know how to quit. He keeps on. And we admire him, for there is something glorious about going on.

David was like that. He kept going forward. He went on, often, in the face of defeat and failure, for his career was quite checkered. David had much to discourage him. He did not have an easy time. He was face to face with a great failure. He had under his protection a certain city of great importance to himself and to his men. But the city that he was to defend had been raided, captured and destroyed by fire. He had failed at his task and failure was hard for him to bear, just as it is hard for you and me.

Think of what David's failure cost him. The first price he had paid for failure was the loss of popularity. David had a wonderful capacity for winning the confidence of people. Approving him, they approved what he did. But now all this had changed. Instead of enjoying popularity, he encountered antagonism. His trusted soldiers almost mutinied, and even threatened to stone him to death. Whereas, they had formerly applauded him, and complimented him, they now seemed to think that he was no account. A second price that David had to pay for his failure was the loss both of his goods and of those whom he loved. His property had been in this city. His wives and children had been there also. But his property had been destroyed and his loved ones had been carried into captivity along with those of his soldiers. David was by no means sure that he would ever see those loved ones again. Was a leader ever under a more severe trial than that? Surely David never found himself in a more desperate situation in all his career. At one sudden and unexpected blow he was deprived of everything—home, family, property—and what made it all so hard was the fact that even his friends disowned him and lifted up their hands against him. How terrible to lose one's material possessions, his loved ones and his friends! Even the stoutest heart might weaken under such a blow.

Did David give up and quit? Not at all. What did he do? "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." I Samuel 30:6. David did not encourage himself by getting his feelings hurt and washing his hands of the whole business. He refused to encourage himself by threatening to quit. He did not tell himself that everything was alright when he knew that almost everything was wrong. Having faced his losses, having faced his defeat, having looked over his liabilities, he began to take stock of what he had left. If we are going to encourage ourselves, we must not look simply at

our losses and our failures, but also at the possibilities that are still ours. Even though he had made a terrible failure, David told himself that it need not be final. He believed in the possibility of a new start.

David brought his desperate plight into the presence of God. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." That is a source of encouragement that is always open to all of us. It is a source that never fails. Impoverished and distressed as David was, he encouraged himself by thoughts of God, faith in God, communion with God, and complete surrender to God. If men turned against him and failed him, he could, at least, rely on God. If the way were blocked to human assistance, he would unblock it with divine strength, and go on, in the face of the seemingly impossible. That is the true spirit of progressive living.

All of us need inner resources of faith and hope for dark days. Such days are sure to come. Somehow, at times everything seems to go wrong. From causes beyond our control things become involved and painful. There are times when all human power fails, when every ingenuity is futile, and when cleverness is as naught. When such emergencies arise, we shall find that we can turn to God and have the most intimate fellowship with Him.

"He knows, He loves, He cares,
Nothing this truth can dim,
He gives the very best to those
Who put their trust in Him."

It is easy for us to indulge in self-pity, but self-encouragement is hard. Those who know God and live close to Him are the ones who can do exploits. Paul knew how to encourage himself and how to encourage others. There he stood on the ship in the Mediterranean Sea, which had been the plaything of the storm for days. The battered vessel was rapidly going to pieces. The sailors were hungry, terrified and hopeless. Paul cried, "There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; . . . Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." Acts 27:23-25. Of all human benefactors few are more helpful than those who are able to put heart and hope into the despairing. There is no telling what a word of encouragement will do. It may save a person from heartbreak and tragedy. A distinguished scholar, who was among the regular hearers of Dr. John Watson at Liverpool, said to him on one occasion: "Your best work in the pulpit has been to put heart into men for the coming week." Encouragement is a divine art which all of us can acquire, if we will. All of us can and should be members of the great Society of Encouragers.

One of the greatest expressions of determination to go on in the face of defeat has been attributed to Marshall Foch, of the first World War. At a certain critical phase of that great struggle, he is reputed to have said something to this effect: "My retreat is cut off; my right wing is shattered; my left wing is broken; I shall advance." But it remained for General Douglas MacArthur to provide the noblest illustration of this truth, at all, when, in the darkest moment of World War II, after he had fled from Bataan at governmental orders, he issued that first public statement to the world, "I shall return." And he did return, for you cannot stop the man who refuses to quit, who goes on in the face of defeat.

But David not only went on in defeat. He went on in success, as well. Some people are content to rest on their laurels, to overcome a difficulty, to win a victory, and then quit. But David never ceased in his going on. For him it was not enough to be a successful warrior, a great king, and the sweet singer of Israel. There was the vision of building a temple to God, as his greatest work, and he died with this vision in his heart, and God commended him for having it. So, every one of us can

look forward with joy and determination to going on in every good work. We need to go forward individually, in spiritual development, in growth in grace, and in Christian service. We need to go forward in the overcoming of temptation, in victory over our sins, and in cultivating the spirit of Christ. We need to go forward in the spread of the gospel as never before. On every hand we may see the need and hear the call of the Master for us to go on, in His name.

II. The Measure of His Progress.

In regard to David's progressive living, we are told that he "grew great." In spite of all opposition, he went forward in the path of duty. He "grew great" in his kingly power, in his honors, in his victories, in the eyes of his foes, and in the estimation of his subjects. He "grew great."

There is a greatness that is a curse, rather than a blessing. If it comes at the expense of one's better self, or at the expense of others, then greatness is to be avoided rather than coveted. One may think that he can become great by doing evil, by being selfish and fraudulent, but, in the end, he finds that he is not great after all. Saul, David's predecessor, was like that. In the estimation of some he became great, but he ignored God and His way of life. Consequently, he lost his better self, and came to the end of a life, a wretched might-have-been, crying for the ghost of a lost opportunity and another chance. Napoleon became great in the eyes of the world, but, after visiting Napoleon's tomb, Ingersoll expressed the conclusion of most of us when he wrote, "I thought of the widows and orphans he had made, of the tears that had been shed for his glory. I would rather have been a French peasant and worn wooden shoes."

But David was not great in this selfish, worldly fashion. He became great in the true sense. He grew great in his soul. In prayer and meditation he built himself up in God. Have you read his Psalms lately? Read them through again prayerfully. They will be food for your soul. For example, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." Only a great man could have written those words.

David was not only great inside. He was also great in his service to others and in his service to God. People loved him. When, as an old and weary warrior, he expressed a longing for a drink from the old well at Bethlehem, the old well of a thousand memories, three of his valiant men broke through the line of the enemy, and brought back the water, at the risk of their lives. David was so touched by this brave act of love that he refused to drink, but poured it on the sand, a libation to them. David had grown great in the things that really matter in life, faith, love and hope. So the measure of one's greatness, after life is over, will not be determined by his position or his possessions, but by how much he loved and served God and humanity.

III. The Means of His Progress.

"And the Lord God of hosts was with him." What an enlightening statement! God was with him. That was the secret of his progress and success. This statement, "And the Lord God of hosts was with him," is a compliment to David. It is a tribute to his humility and his faith. He trusted God, consulted Him, and obeyed Him. As a result, he gradually became greater and greater. His growth was gradual. That which is to abide must be slowly achieved. David's greatness never made him vain and forgetful of God. He stayed in tune with God.

This statement is also a reminder of God's faithfulness. "The Lord God of hosts was with him." He was with him all of the way, through thick and thin, good and bad, sorrow and joy. Men were not always with him. One of his own sons, Absalom, led a revolt against him, but God stayed by his side. Even though David was not always

faithful to God, God never deserted him.

We need to remember that God is no respecter of persons. What He did for David, He will do for us. The same method of securing the divine presence and assistance is open to all. If we would walk in the right way and become great and enjoy the blessed presence of the Lord, we must walk with Him. He longs to make us great in our souls and great in His service. Though the way may be difficult, it will be possible for us to walk in it, for the Lord will be with us.