

FRUITFUL FRUSTRATIONS

I Kings 8:17-20

From his youth David had been a victorious warrior. Although he had participated in many battles, David actually disliked war and enjoyed peace. When a season of peace came, he retired to his chamber for a period of meditation. Success usually turns the mind of a man inward toward selfish enjoyment, or outward toward further expansion. In David's case it turned his mind upward. As he sat musing in the regal splendor of his beautiful and luxurious palace of cedar, he was haunted by a vision of the ark of Jehovah being sheltered only by a frail canvas tent. He promptly decided that something had to be done about that. He was no longer willing for God to have the second best. He resolved that he would build a temple for God that would be a worthy sanctuary for Him.

To David it seemed a disgraceful incongruity that the ark should be left to abide "within curtains," while he occupied a house ceiled with cedar. Surely that recoil was ennobling. His reflection and secret resolution led him to summon Nathan, the far-seeing and faithful prophet of God, to whom he unfolded his desire to build a suitable temple in which to enshrine the ark of God, and in which His worship should be conducted with due solemnity. To David's expressed desire Nathan replied, "Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee." But that night there came to Nathan a message from God, telling him to return to David and tell him that the work of building a house to the Lord was not to be his, but was to be reserved for his son to do. God's will in this matter had not been sought by either David or Nathan, and He works only after the counsel of His own will.

While God may approve a good intention, He may disapprove of our undertaking to accomplish it. David thought that he was the very one to build the house of God. Nathan must have thought the same thing because David was king, had rest from war and had riches. But God revealed to him and to the prophet his unfitness for the enterprise.

As an expression of his gratitude to God, David purposed in his heart to build a temple for Him, but he was not permitted to do so. David was permitted to do many things, but not to build the temple. The object at which he aimed was to be achieved, but through another agency than himself. David was bent upon a good service, but he was not permitted to perform it. It was a case of his purposes outrunning the possibilities of his life. His supreme desire never came to fruition.

Building the temple was no small task. For its construction cedars had to be brought from the forests of Lebanon, a hundred miles to the north. The delicate carvings required skilled workmen and long hours of labor. Seven full years were required to build it. One cannot help wishing that David might have dreamed his dream and set out to fulfill it in his youth. There is something magnificent and yet pathetic about an old man dreaming dreams, for time waits for no man. How many of our purposes fail in fulfillment not because they are unworthy, but because they become a part of us when it is too late! Frequently our castles are air only because, before we can lay our hands upon stones, the night is upon us and we cannot do any work.

As David vainly wished to build the temple, so all noble souls plan various projects which the limitations of this life forbid. Our plans are numerous and grand, but our performances are few and small at best. It is a difficult road from desire to realization. That is why we often regard these unrealized aspirations as a disheartening phase of experience.

David's purpose appeared to be not only reasonable and honorable, but most commendable. His purpose seemed to be in harmony with the Scripture: "When he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there." Moreover, David's purpose seemed altogether pure and generous, but he was forbidden to build the house. For this particular service God saw in David an unfitness which had escaped other eyes. He had been a man of war, and as such had shed human blood. There was an impropriety in the red hands of war building the temple of peace and mercy, so God excluded His servant from the ministry. There was an incongruity which God recognized, that had escaped David's attention, between shedding blood and building a sanctuary for God. He simply would not have the hands which shed so much blood erect a house for Him. The reason why David was not permitted to carry out his heart's desire was perfectly clear to him, and the reason therefor at once appealed to his sense of congruity. He understood why God would not give him permission to build a house for Him.

Circumstance is a factor with which all of us must reckon. Perhaps as a youth you longed for a good education, but the economic situation at home, the call of your country, or a premature bite of the love-bug made it difficult or impossible for you to acquire it. Perhaps you have had other plans wrecked by unforeseen developments and demands. Maybe your noble purposes have been frustrated by sickness, lack of funds or some adverse providence over which you have not had any control. Circumstances frequently cry out to us in the words, "Thou shalt not build the temple."

Note the most serious obstacle that stood between David and the realization of his dream. David explained the situation in these words: "But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build a house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight" (I Chronicles 22:8). Thus David found that the deeds of his past rendered impossible his dream for the future. Who of us has not known what it is to face those very odds? So often our yesterdays mock our dreams of tomorrow.

There are always reasons for our failures, so the thing for us to do is to search them out. The reasons for failure are legion. Some fail simply because they are misfits. Many of the misfits in life are due to the fact that people drop into the first thing that is offered them, instead of trying to discover God's plan for their lives. Nobody is a failure who is where God wants and means for him to be.

Patrick Henry failed as a merchant, but he was a great success as a lawyer. J. G. Holland was never able to succeed until he became a magazine writer. Phillips Brooks failed as a teacher, but became tremendously successful as a preacher.

Others fail because of aimlessness. Still others fail because they lack staying power. Some people are like sky-rockets in that they go off with

noise but do not last. Parents used to tell their children, "Brag is a big dog, but Holdfast is better." Then, there are many who fail because of self-reliance instead of dependence on God.

Nevertheless, failure need not be futile. Augustine was right when he said that we could make a ladder out of our vices if we would tread each deed of shame beneath our feet. So the blotted past is not wholly vain, if rising on its wrecks at last, to something nobler we attain. Surely then our failures can be stepping stones to success, if we open the core of each one of them and ask what it would have us to learn.

Thank God, failure is not final. Failure at the outset may be success in the end. An accomplished artist said, "No picture is worth anything until it has been spoiled three times." Many have failed at first but afterwards succeeded. Robert Louis Stevenson said, "At best a man can hope to be but a successful failure." James Barrie said, "The life of every man is a diary in which he means to write one story and writes another, and his humblest hour is when he compares the volume as it is with what he vowed to make it."

On the one hand are our ideals, lofty dreams and cherished hopes, and on the other are time, circumstance and sin disappointing and frustrating us. By what philosophy shall we undergird ourselves in the midst of such disappointments? We must hold on to our dreams. Our defeated purposes, frustrated aims and unrealized dreams have an eternal value to Him Who does not look on the outward appearance but on the heart.

To David God said, "Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart." God's "Well done" is the best compensation that heaven can give. He thus commended David for having that worthy purpose in his heart, even though he was never permitted to work it out. This is only a sample of what is occurring hourly. Good men are dying hourly with unwrought purposes.

It should be encouraging to every Christian to know that God accepts the will for the deed, if one cannot accomplish the purpose which he has had in his heart. God knows and accepts the generous purposes of the heart. He knows whatever is felt in the heart, sanctioned by the judgment, determined by the will and anticipated by the imagination. In the eyes of God thoughts are things, desires are deeds and purposes are performances. In his heart and mind David saw a beautiful temple erected to the honor and glory of God, and God accepted the will for the deed, because nothing more than purpose was within the power of His servant.

Doubtless David was greatly disappointed at not being permitted to build the temple, but his good intention counted for much. God said, "Thou didst well that it was in thine heart. Nevertheless thou shalt not build the house; but thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins, he shall build the house unto my name." Thank God such a gracious word of recognition. The world measures us by the work we have actually accomplished, but God measures us by the purposes we have cherished. The world judges by the temple we build, but the Lord judges by the love which desired to build and could not. In God's good time we shall discover that our disappointed hopes, broken plans and unripened purposes that have been so perplexing

and painful to us have had their place in God's higher and greater design, which we cannot understand now.

When it comes to measuring success God has a different test from what we have. He measures us not by our achievements, but by our longings to achieve. He does not judge us by what we have in our hands, but by what we have in our hearts. Browning said, "It is not what man does, but what man would do that exalts him." God is not measuring us now by the victories we have actually won, but by those we would achieve if we could. Men measure success by outward accomplishment only. Before we count any man a success he must put over the task and bring home the bacon. It is delivering the goods only that counts with men. But God in His mercy judges us by what He sees in our hearts.

The test of what is in your heart is just this: What are you doing with that which is in your hand? What evidence did David give that he really longed to build the temple? He did far more than merely say that he wished that he could do such a great deed. When he was told that the temple must be built by another, he did not lose any interest in it. He did not say that if he could not build it and get the honor for doing so, then he would not have anything to do with it. Such an attitude would have indicated that he was seeking to build a temple for his own honor rather than for the glory of God. Whenever any person loses interest in any worthy enterprise because he does not have a prominent part in it, that proves that he is seeking his own glory and not the glory of God.

David did not have such an attitude. When he learned that he would not be allowed to build the temple, he went just as far as possible to make it easy for those who would build it. He was not permitted to do the prominent and conspicuous work, so he gladly did that which was obscure. He was not asking for honor, but for the privilege of helping. He made it possible for others to do what he could not do. He collected the material for the erection of the building. His noble purpose was fulfilled by his son, Solomon, who did what his father could not do. Workers die, but God's work goes on, and no man is indispensable. Just as soon as David learned that his noblest dream could not be realized in his own lifetime, instead of becoming discouraged, he busied himself all the more. What a beautiful scene that was, of the old man gathering the raw materials from which the young man was to fashion the temple which he had dreamed about, but would never live to see! David never brooded over his failure. Instead he bequeathed unto Solomon his unrealized dream and charged him to build a house for the Lord God. The temples we cannot build with our own hands, we can and must build through our children.

Paul and Silas wanted to establish bases in Asia Minor and evangelize the people there, but every road they tried to follow was closed against them. Every door they attempted to enter was closed in their faces. An unseen hand forced them on past these places where they desired to be and they arrived in Troas on the coast. While tarrying there and wondering, Paul had his vision of the man of Macedonia calling him to come over and help. Discerning in this the purpose of God, they hastened to obey. They crossed the sea and entered Europe, and there they preached the gospel of Christ. The success of their own plan might have acquired a province, but its frustration opened the door to a continent.

David Livingstone, dedicating himself to a missionary career, proposed to go to China. But his purpose was not allowed to mature. A war in China closed the door against his earnest hopes and desires. Almost as a last resort, as it seemed to him, he was sent to Africa instead. Possibly he carried some disappointment in his heart, and regarded Africa merely as the "next best thing." But this frustration of his own purpose proved to be quite fruitful. It introduced Livingstone to that service for the Dark Continent which will continue to be one of the great epics of humanity as long as the world lasts.

Man proposes, and it is only natural that he should, but God disposes, and it is such a blessing that He does. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," saith the Lord.