

**Articles and Sermons :: Ministry's Pinnacle of Success by Steve Gallagher**

Ministry's Pinnacle of Success by Steve Gallagher - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2012/10/1 11:00

I was working as a deputy sheriff in the Los Angeles County jail system when the Lord spoke very clearly to me to quit my job and enter fulltime ministry. For the most part, it was childlike faith that compelled me to walk away from my hard-won position on the Department to blindly follow the Lord into an unknown future.

However, there was also a secondary motive lying dormant within my heart: I wanted my life to count for something; I wanted to make my mark; I wanted to do something significant. Such a desire may be natural, but, if allowed to flourish, it can become a relentless, driving ambition within a young minister's heart. Only the Lord's help kept that ambitious spirit from consuming me and utterly corrupting my ministry. With one hand He led me through one painful lesson after another to systematically eradicate it from my heart, while, with the other hand, He gradually instilled into me a love for the people to whom I was to minister. Ministry was not about me at all! It was about others!

You see, left to itself, the fallen nature will not put itself out for the Lord or anyone else without some kind of payoff involved. The Lord is exceedingly patient and is willing to tolerate this selfish motivation in a young minister's life for a time, but this mindset is utterly foreign to His kingdom. Therefore, it must be incredibly painful to Him to see the Christian Church—that outward, manmade structure that houses the actual Body of Christ—so full of and driven by personal ambition.

It should also be noted that this mindset is constantly encouraged and incited by the enemy. It was Lucifer's ambition that brought about heaven's great insurrection when he uttered the monstrous words: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High." (Isaiah 14:13-14) This five-fold declaration of his will reveals the pride and selfishness that fueled his ambition.

It is the same inherent pride within the fallen nature of man to which Satan appeals. Elsewhere I have defined pride as, "having an exaggerated sense of one's own importance and a selfish preoccupation with one's own rights. It is the attitude that says, 'I am more important than you and, if need be, I will promote my cause and protect my rights at your expense.'" "

How foreign is such thinking in the kingdom of the Meek One. There, in that land of bliss, it is not a preoccupation with one's Self, but a great concern with pleasing God and helping others that animates angels and saints.

I believe it was John Newton who once made the astute observation that if the Lord commissioned one angel to go rule the mightiest kingdom on earth and ordered another to go sweep the streets of some dirty city, it would make no difference whatsoever to either angel which task he was told to do. Once a person receives a revelation of the Almighty, the desire to please Him increasingly dwarfs any small-minded craving for man's recognition.

So how exactly does the Lord transform prideful, self-centered human beings into saints who He can entrust with the spiritual care of others? It is the lifelong process of sanctification whereby the believer allows the Lord to take him through the kinds of experiences which empty and deplete his Self life in favor of the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

A century ago, Amy Carmichael compared a godly minister to one of the fountain pens that sat in a pen holder on her desk. To be useful, each pen had to be kept clean and ready to be filled with fresh ink at a moment's notice—when she needed it. Of course, the pen sitting on the desk was not accomplishing anything; it was merely sitting there. And the pen obviously couldn't suddenly stand up and begin writing on its own. No, its only value was in its readiness to be used when needed.

The self-willed teachers who thrived during Jeremiah's time had a completely different mindset. Their attitude was that ministry was primarily to benefit them. Rather than humbling themselves before God, submitting themselves to His will and waiting to receive an impartation from Him, they simply "stood up and began writing" a message of their own making. The Lord told Jeremiah, "I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied. But if they had stood in My council, then they would have announced My words to My people, and would have turned th

em back from their evil way and from the evil of their deeds." (Jeremiah 23:21-22) The disheartening number of self-appointed ministers corrupting the Body of Christ today is enough to make angels sit down and weep!

True success in ministry is not regularly preaching to thousands or hosting a radio program that is broadcast around the world; anyone with natural talent and selfish ambition can do those things. It is character, not exploits, that determines success in God's kingdom. When we stand before the Lord, we will not be judged by numerical statistics but by how much we have allowed God to conquer our fallen nature and fill us with Himself.

The "empty pen" may not gain much glory to itself. The street-sweeping angel may not get much attention. But such vessels are the ones God most effectively uses to accomplish His great purposes amongst mankind. Saints who are content to be used by God if and when needed are those who truly reach "Ministry's Pinnacle of Success."