

Brothers, God now has no other goal than to bring you to an utter end. God wants you to be disappointed about your self, to lose hope in your self, and to confess that you are incurable and worse than anyone else. God wants you to know the self. How many times in the past have you aspired to victory, yet always failed in the end! It was for no other reason than this: God wanted to bring you to know yourself. You mourned, struggled, strove, sought, prayed, worked, labored diligently, and used hundreds and thousands of other means in the hope that you could overcome sin and be sanctified completely. But you invariably failed. Although sometimes you might have had a small amount of success, it never lasted. Although you did whatever you could to maintain your success, your success took wings like a bird. You thought your struggle to succeed was unsuccessful because you were worse than everyone else. Brothers, these experiences were for one reason only: God wants to help you to know your self. You fail not because you are too bad, but because you are not bad enough. Brothers, you should know that to mourn is your self, to struggle and try hard is your self, to pursue prayer is your self, and to work and labor diligently is also your self. It is all your self that is working, and it is all for your self. How much of it is in complete dependence upon God? How many really know that they are incurable and as a result depend on God? By struggling and seeking in such a way, what are you really after? Is it not something for the self? Yes, you are seeking victory over sin and evil, and you are seeking sanctification, but what are they for? Is it not for the self to be happier, more glorified, and more boastful? If you have not reached the point where you are fully aware of the weakness and deceitfulness of the self, God will still allow you to stumble and fail. This makes you realize that you are powerless and that you do not deserve any honor or glory.

Brothers, God wants us to be in union with Him, relying on Him, carrying out His will, and giving Him the glory in everything. If you do not know the true character of the self and think that the self is good and capable, naturally, you will not be able to depend on God or give Him the glory. Naturally you will be self-confident and self-glorifying. Even until today, you still do not know how weak the self is. That is why God allows you to fail again and again. Every failure is His indication that you are weak. But you

GOD LEADING MEN TO THEIR END

would not believe it. You are not disappointed at your self but are still full of expectation. You think that the last failure was because you exerted too little effort and that if you exerted more energy next time, you would succeed. But you have failed so much already! There have been so many ups and downs with you! But you still do not know how weak you are. You still cannot receive the lesson God wants to teach. Rather, you are still planning to make a final endeavor to gain a final victory. After experiencing so many failures, you still do not know how to be completely and helplessly disappointed. You still do not know how to forsake your self efforts and cast yourself completely into God's hand. You still may not know how to trust in Him by stopping your own scheming and managing while, at the same time, not having any knowledge of what to do. Since you have not learned your lesson, greater and more numerous failures must come upon you before you will know the self. Brothers, until you cease your own working, you should not expect God to deliver you.

We know that those who rescue people from water will not start saving them immediately after they fall in...Only after the drowning one has struggled for a while, exhausting his own means to save himself, and only after his strength is all gone, reckoning that he must die, will the rescuer dare approach him and bring him back to shore with one hand under him. God allows His children to struggle now in order that they might see the uselessness of their struggling. He allows them to approach a dangerous position day after day. He is now waiting for them to be exhausted and deem themselves about to die. He is waiting for them to surrender to Him and reckon that unless God saves, they cannot sustain themselves even one more second—unless God saves they will die. Only then will He stretch forth His hand of deliverance. Whenever believers give up relying on themselves, God will save them fully. God's only goal is to make the believers realize that the self is completely useless with regard to God's life and His work. Apart from depending on God, they have no other work or living.

GOD WANTING THE BELIEVERS TO REALIZE THE DECEITFULNESS OF THE SELF

God also wants the believer to realize the deceitfulness of the self. Many times the mouth speaks of dependence on God, but in actuality it is dependence on self! Many times there is some dependence on God, but more dependence on self! When the believer is in this condition, God has no choice but to allow him to fail some more. This will show him how much he is still secretly depending on his self. Every failure makes the believer realize that

he has fallen to that state only because he has made reservation for his self.

How deceitful we are! How intense is our heart for the self! Is it not true that in everything we do and in all our motives, there is the mixture of the self? Perhaps we have consecrated ourselves to God, and we think that we are more faithful than others. Yet we do not realize how wild and unbridled our heart and mind are toward the world and its people. God must bring us to the place of failure, to expose our hidden and secret motives through our conduct, before we realize how deceitful we are. Our mouth may say that we are living fully for God, and outwardly we may act as if we are serving Him wholeheartedly. Actually, all these are for our own boasting, glorying, and receiving the praise of others. God wants us to know the self; He wants us to realize that these are our motives. Therefore He allows us to fail so that in our failure we may judge ourselves and learn to realize that even when we have not failed, we are still for the self and are stealing God's glory.

Many believers are still living according to the deceitful self! Many believers are still taking *self* as the principle of all their living! Nearly everything is for the self and from the self. One category of believers—the deceitful believers—is more dangerous than all. It seems that they can never break away from their self. If they learn one more thing or know one more matter, it is all for glorifying the self. This is true not only in spiritual matters, but in secular matters as well. If they have learned something or understood something, they will take this as a reason for them to boast about their self. Oh, the deceitfulness of the flesh! Who can fully know it? God must break and demolish such believers and strip them of all their smooth environments so that they will be deprived of all their means to expand themselves. God has to deal with them in the most severe environment; otherwise, they will still exalt and boast about themselves.

THE LESSON IN THE WILDERNESS

Brothers, God spent forty years to personally guide the children of Israel through the wandering in the wilderness. He allowed them to stumble and sin for the unique purpose of teaching them about their self. Today God is working on you. In the past, He has allowed you to fail time and again in order that you would know the true character of the self. But even now, you have not learned the lesson well. God wants you to realize that you are powerless, thoroughly corrupt, unable to bear any burden, and your heart toward Him is not perfect or chaste...Your past failures should have convinced you of your total vanity. Yet today, you still admire your self. This is why God has to leave you in the wilderness, so

that you will experience more of the failures of the wilderness and realize the corruption, vanity, and weakness of your self in the eyes of God. If you do not learn your lesson today, you will continue to fail.

Several thousand years ago, God gave the law to man. What was God's purpose for doing this? The law was not given for man to keep. The law was given for man to break. The law was established for man to violate. Do not be surprised at this. This is God's goal. This is what the Bible has shown us. God knows how corrupt and unbearable we are. All along, His purpose has been for us to be saved through His grace freely. He knows that we are corrupt to the uttermost and that there is nothing we can present to Him. However, although God knows us, we do not know ourselves. This is why God has to use these ways to teach us, so that we would know what He knows—realizing our own corruption and receiving His grace. God's way is to use the law; He wants us to try to keep the law. If we are good, we will try to keep the law, and if we are corrupt, we will violate the law. In other words, if we violate the law, it means that we are corrupt. The fact that we cannot keep the law shows that our flesh is weak (Rom. 8:3). Only when men see that they are so weak and cannot fulfill the demand of the law will they lose hope in themselves entirely. Only then will they stop trying to save themselves by works and seek for God's grace. This is why the Bible says, "Why then the law? It was added because of the transgressions," that is, it was added to expose man's corruption "until the seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:19). This is the Lord Jesus and His salvation.

We all know that a man is not saved by works, but by grace. But have you ever wondered why we are not saved by works but by grace? It is because we are corrupt, weak, filthy, and *unable* to fulfill God's righteousness, to fulfill God's law, or to have any good works. This is why we need grace. When God saves us by grace, He is saying that our self is corrupt to the uttermost and that there is no other way except for Him to grant us grace. Brothers, we have all been saved. When we entered the gate of salvation, we realized that we were powerless. Why do we still think that our self is so wonderful? Have we still not learned the lesson God has been teaching for thousands of years through the law?

God allowed the children of Israel to fail so that they would know their self. God allowed those under the law to fail so that they would know their self. Now, God allows you to fail so that you will know your self. You may wonder why the cross of the Lord Jesus has no effect on you. You have heard the truth

concerning dying with the Lord and tried to appropriate it by faith. Yet it seems to have no effect on you; you still fail, stumble, and sin. You weep, pray, and strive and yet cannot overcome sin. Why is this the case? Is it because the truth concerning dying with the Lord is only a philosophy? Otherwise, why would it have no effect on you? Brothers, do you still not see your error? Do you really want to die? Do you still believe in the self—hope, trust, resolve, strive, and struggle in the self? Do you not realize how weak you are? This is why God allows you to fail, stumble, and sin, so that you will lose hope in your self completely and surrender to His Spirit fully. Only then will you be victorious. You still do not have a clear understanding of your self and are not willing to reject your own power, wisdom, goodness, and righteousness. Although you have accepted the cross of the Lord Jesus, you have only accepted it in your mind; you have not accepted it in your life. The cross judges, condemns, and crucifies the self. Yet you still believe in the self, trust in it, and admire it. If you do this, how can the cross have its effect on you?

(Watchman Nee, *Collected Works*, Set 1, Vol. 8, pp. 45-51)

APPLICATION

1. Explain the statement: "You fail not because you are too bad, but because you are not bad enough."
2. Have you ever had a failure in your experience of parenting? How do you deal with failure in this regard and what changes might you make in the light of God's goal in your failures?
3. Why did God give the law to man? What is the erroneous way we habitually take the law?

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God Leading Men to Their End

We as believing parents must grasp in all of our living and especially in relation to our care of our children a basic realization—without the Lord we can do nothing (cf. John 15:5). We have repeatedly stressed in this publication that the task assigned to us by our God and Father—to shape and mold, educate and train, and cherish and nourish our children—is a very particular and awesome task. It is not something that we can carry out lightly or superficially according to our own "wisdom and knowledge." We need the wisdom of our Father God Who alone knows how to adequately shepherd us and our children. However, though we acknowledge our need of guidance and blessing, in fact we often neglect the Lord in our actual practice. The source of such incongruous behavior is the subtlety of the self.

The self is a very illusive entity. We can see something of its deceitfulness in the experience of the apostle Peter before the Lord's death and resurrection. As recorded in Matthew 16:15-26, Peter became full of a feeling of self-importance after he had given a very excellent response to the Lord's question, "Who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter had answered unhesitatingly and accurately, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." But almost immediately Peter had an opposing reaction to the Lord's announcement of His impending death and resurrection. Peter began to rebuke the Lord saying, "This shall by no means happen to You!" The Lord's reply is enlightening: "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men. Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." This indicates that our self is fully aligned with the subtle enemy of God. We desperately need to see the untrustworthiness of self, reject it utterly, and follow the Lord wholeheartedly!