FIELD GUIDE

THE MENTORING PROJECT

WISE RISK-TAKING: FAITH OVER FEAR



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HANDLING SUCCESS: STAYING HUMBLE WHEN YOU WIN



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INTRODUCTION

Winning feels intense. People say your name and listen when you speak. Maybe you got the promotion, the bonus, or the house on the hill. It's easy to walk through the lobby and believe you built the place. You start to feel invincible.

That's the gap. It appears when you reach the top. It keeps you from seeing the truth: you are still just human. The Bible's teachings challenge our pride. We believe in total depravity, meaning our hearts constantly create idols. Even good things like success can become ways to honor ourselves. You might think your win makes you better than someone who failed. It doesn't.

What do you have that you did not receive?

Everything you have is a gift—the mind that solves problems, the breath in your lungs, the family that supports you. If you claim all the credit, you're taking glory that belongs to God.

Early in my ministry, I gave a talk that everyone loved. I left feeling proud and soaking in the praise. But when I got home, my child had the flu, and within minutes, I was cleaning up vomit on the bathroom floor. God has a way of reminding us who we are. Life is tough, and it doesn't care about your title.

Success is a responsibility. If you have more influence, you have more duty to serve. You don't own your life; you manage it. And the true Owner expects you to use it well.

Don't inhale the applause. It is poison. It makes you forget the grit it took to get there. It makes you forget the people who helped you. Most of all, it makes you forget that you are a sinner saved by grace.

History is full of people who built great things but forgot who gave them the tools. They often ended up alone and hardened. Success can make you lonely if you

think you did it all yourself. You start seeing others as steps to climb, not as neighbors.

This isn't about shortcuts. It's about the struggle to stay humble when others want to praise you. We need to talk about the pride that hides in our hearts and the danger of believing we are self-made. If you've just achieved something big, be careful. The view from the top is nice, but the fall can be hard. Your hands are full—don't let them close into fists. Keep your hands open. Everything you have is borrowed.

Let's look at the myth of the self-made man.

1

THE MYTH OF THE SELF-MADE MAN

The idea of the "self-made man" is one of the most powerful stories ever sold. It says that with enough willpower, early mornings, and determination, you can build your own kingdom from nothing. That story feels good to tell. It makes you feel in control of your life. But from a Christian perspective, it's a proud fairy tale. It's like looking at a house and forgetting who provided the wood, the land, and even the breath in your lungs as you worked. If we want to talk about leadership and humility, we have to admit we didn't build the house—we managed the project for the real Owner.

The Giver and the Gift

If you want to dismantle the ego, you have to run it through the shredder of 1 Corinthians 4:7. The Apostle Paul asks a question that stops every "winner" in their tracks: "What do you have that you did not receive?" This isn't just a suggestion; it is an interrogation. It is a direct assault on the idea of professional meritocracy that we hold so dear. When you look at your "win," you see the hours you put in. But the biblical perspective looks further back. You didn't choose your IQ. You didn't choose your natural aptitude for numbers, logic, or leadership. Those were baked into your DNA before you took your first breath.

Furthermore, you didn't choose the timing of your life. You didn't choose to be born in this century, in this country, or with access to this specific market. If you were born four hundred years ago, your business savvy might have just made you a slightly more efficient peasant. Even what we call "luck" is actually Sovereignty. You didn't control the fact that the right person happened to read your email on the right day or the market shift that made your product relevant. When you strip away everything that was

given to you, what is left is nothing but a creature sustained by grace. When you realize that even your "hustle" is a byproduct of the health and energy God sustains in you, boasting becomes a theological impossibility. You aren't self-made; you are God-sustained.

The Grit of the Grind

Let's be clear: this isn't a reason to be lazy. The "Theology of the Pavement" doesn't mean you can sit back and wait for success. We're called to work hard and keep going until we see results. You put in the effort, made sacrifices, and kept going when others quit. The problem isn't hard work—it's when you start to think your effort is the main reason for your success, instead of seeing it as a tool God used. You're managing the strength God gave you.

Think of it like a farmer. He has to plow, plant, and pull weeds. That's real work. That's the grit. But he can't command life into the seed. He can't order the soil to wake up. He manages the process, and God gives the increase. So when you succeed at work, yes—be grateful for the hours you put in and the sacrifices you made. But don't worship the work itself. Working hard is good, but turning it into your god is pride wearing a clean shirt. It's like thinking you made the sun rise and the rain fall because you held the shovel.

Daniel 4 gives a brutal case study. Nebuchadnezzar was the ultimate "winner." He built an empire, stood on the roof of his palace, and credited his own power for the glory of his majesty. Listen to his vocabulary—it's all "I" and "my." No room for the Giver. He forgot he was a man on loan. And while the words were still in his mouth, the verdict came down. He lost his mind until he finally acknowledged that the Most High rules the kingdom of men.

That's the Nebuchadnezzar trap. When you start believing the "self-made" lie, you get brittle. You become obsessed with your own glory, and other people quietly turn into rungs on a ladder. It breeds isolation because the self-made man can't really trust anyone who didn't "earn it" the way he did. It breeds anxiety because if you built it all yourself, you have to hold it all together yourself. And it breeds collapse, because sooner or later the market turns, the body weakens, the applause moves on, and the identity

built on performance shatters. The only way to survive success is to live with open hands, remembering you're a manager—given tools for a season—accountable to the true Owner.

2

THE CHASM OF PRIDE

There is a specific kind of silence that waits for you at the top of the mountain, and it isn't the peaceful kind. It is the silence of the fortress. When you finally arrive at the destination you've been chasing—that high-performance leadership role or the peak of your career—you often find that the very grit that got you there has also pushed everyone else away. Success doesn't only build a kingdom; it builds a wall. You spend your life trying to be "significant," only to realize that significance, when it is rooted in the ego, is one of the loneliest places on earth.

The chasm of leadership isolation isn't an accident. It is a direct consequence of the "self-made" lie. If you truly believe that you are the one who built the pavement, you will naturally start to look down on anyone who hasn't. You begin to treat your success as a filter, and anyone who doesn't meet your standard is viewed as a liability rather than a neighbor. This is the friction of the elite—the moment your achievement stops being a tool for service and starts being a weapon of exclusion.

The Friction of Comparison

Success has a way of making us forget our basic biology. Ecclesiastes 3:20 reminds us that we are all made of the same dust, but the "win" tells you that your dust is somehow gold-plated. This leads to the slow poison of comparison. When you win, you don't simply celebrate the achievement; you start to measure your height by how many people are standing below you. You stop seeing the people around you as image-bearers of God and start seeing them as rungs on a ladder.

They are either assets to be leveraged or obstacles to be cleared. This shift is subtle, and it usually happens in the dark corners of the heart long before it shows up in your emails. You become a boss instead of a brother. You become a "visionary" who is too busy for the messy, inefficient needs of real people. This is the tragedy of leadership without a theological anchor. You gain the world, but you lose the ability to actually live in it with others. You find yourself surrounded by people who nod when you talk and laugh at your jokes, but you know deep in your gut that they aren't nodding at you. They are nodding at your title and the bonus you might give them. In your quest for total control, you have created a world where no one can tell you the truth, and a man who can't hear the truth is a man who is already falling.

The Identity Trap

The most dangerous thing about a winning streak is that it eventually becomes your identity. When your worth is tied to your win-loss record, you aren't a human being anymore; you're an algorithm. You are only as good as your last quarter, your last promotion, or your last big deal. This is the identity trap. It feels vibrant and empowering while you're on top, but it creates a chasm that opens up the second you lose your "winner" status.

I've sat with men who were titans in their industry—men who had built empires—and when they finally retired or hit a market downturn, they were absolutely hollow. They didn't know who they were without the title on their business card. If you build your house on the pavement of your own performance, you are building on sand. When the storms of the fall come—and they always do—the collapse is total. You realize that you've spent twenty years building a monument to a version of yourself that can't actually sustain the weight of your soul. Your "winner" status was a loan, and the Master has called it in. Without the Cross to anchor your identity, the loss of your success feels like the loss of your very existence.

The Total Depravity of Success

This brings us to the hard reality of total depravity. We usually talk about depravity in the context of "bad" things, but the heart is so broken that it uses even the "good" gifts of God to build monuments to itself. Success is a good gift. Influence is a good gift. Capital is a good gift. But because our

hearts are idol factories, we take these gifts and turn them into a religion where we are the high priest. We use our success to justify our pride, our coldness toward others, and our independence from God.

We think that because we have "covered" our needs with our own bank accounts, we no longer need to ask for daily bread. We stop praying like beggars because we've started living like kings. This is the most lethal part of the chasm. It's the quiet, respectable sin of self-sufficiency. It doesn't look like a scandal; it looks like a well-managed life. But it is a rejection of the Sovereignty of God nonetheless. You are acting as if you are the source of your own life, which is the original lie from the Garden.

Winning feels like heat, but if that heat isn't redirected toward the glory of the King, it will eventually burn down everything you've built. The only way to survive the chasm of pride is to stay tethered to the truth that you are a sinner saved by grace, regardless of what the market says. You have to intentionally walk back down the mountain and seek out the friction of community where your title doesn't grant you immunity. You need to be a neighbor again. You need to remember that the pavement you're walking on was built by the One who also has the power to take it away. Keep your hands open. The view from the top is a loan, not an inheritance.

3

SUCCESS AS STEWARDSHIP

There is a fundamental lie that success declares the moment the check clears or the promotion is announced: *This is your reward.* We've been conditioned since grade school to believe in a transactional universe where you put in the effort and the "win" is the prize you get to keep in your trophy case. But in a redeemed mind, there are no trophies. There are only tools. When you find yourself with more influence, more capital, or a larger platform, you haven't been given a retirement package from your duties to God. You've been given a reassignment.

The chasm between ownership and stewardship is where most "winners" lose their way. Ownership says, "I earned this, so I get to decide how it's used to maximize my comfort." Stewardship says, "The Master has entrusted me with more of His gold, and He is going to expect a rigorous accounting of how I managed it for His interests." If you don't make this shift in your heart, the increase in your life will eventually become a weight that sinks you rather than a foundation that supports the Kingdom.

The Vocation of Influence

We need to stop seeing "vocation" as something that only applies to pastors or missionaries. If you are a CEO, a manager, or an elite athlete, your position is your vocation. It is the specific ground God has called you to work. But here is the grit: your position is not a reward for your past performance; it is a strategic reassignment from the Master. God doesn't give a man influence so he can feel important; He gives it to him so he can protect the vulnerable, advocate for the truth, and create order out of chaos.

When you walk into the boardroom or step onto the stage, you are there as a diplomat for a foreign King. This changes the temperature of your leadership. You stop asking, "How does this make me look?" and start asking, "How does this serve the Master's agenda?" Influence is a

dangerous drug if you think it's about you. It makes you brittle and defensive because you're always trying to protect your "status." But if your status is just a tool on loan, you can afford to be bold. You can afford to tell the truth when it's unpopular. You can afford to be wrong. Your position is a stewardship of the King's reputation, not your own.

Managing the Increase

What do you actually do when the bank account or the platform grows? Most people's first instinct is "lifestyle creep"—the slow, quiet process of upgrading every part of your life until your expenses match your new income. But for the steward, increase should lead to "service creep." The more you have, the more you are responsible to distribute. This requires a rugged kind of practical wisdom that resists the gravity of our consumer culture.

Managing the increase means setting a "finish line" for your own needs. If you don't decide beforehand what is "enough," you will spend your entire life chasing a number that is always out of reach. You have to realize that the extra capital in your hands isn't there for a bigger house; it's there because God wants to fund a specific work through you. Maybe it's a mission, maybe it's a local charity, or maybe it's providing stable, dignified jobs for people in your community. Whatever it is, the increase is a responsibility to be managed, not a surplus to be consumed. You are the pipeline, not the reservoir. If the water stops flowing through you and starts pooling, it eventually turns stagnant.

The Quiet Hand

The most effective way to kill the "look at me" spirit—the vanity that success always tries to feed—is the practice of the quiet hand. Success makes you want to be seen. It makes you want to be the "benefactor" whose name is on the wing of the hospital or the donor wall of the church. We love the feeling of being the one with the answers and the resources. But Jesus was very clear about the danger of public righteousness. He told us that if we do our good works to be seen by men, we've already received our reward in full. And let me tell you, human applause is a very poor currency compared to the approval of the Father.

Secret generosity is the antidote to the ego. It is the practice of giving in a way that ensures you get absolutely no credit for it. It might mean paying off a neighbor's debt anonymously, supporting a ministry without your name on the list, or doing the "low" work in your church that no one notices. When you serve in secret, you are reminding your own heart that you are a servant, not a celebrity. You are hacking away at the pedestal the world is trying to build for you.

The "Theology of the Pavement" is about the grit of the hidden life. It's about being more concerned with your character in the dark than your reputation in the light. If your faith only works when people are watching, it isn't faith; it's performance art. But when you practice the quiet hand, you find a freedom that the "self-made" man can never know. You don't have to maintain an image. You don't have to keep track of who owes you a favor. You can be a manager who is happy to see the Owner's work getting done, even if no one knows you were involved.

Finishing the Race

Success isn't yours to keep. You can't take the title, the bonus, or the followers with you into the grave. All you take with you is the record of your stewardship. When the final mile comes, you want to be able to stand before the Master with empty hands—not because you lost everything, but because you gave it all away. You managed the increase, you used the influence, and you served with a quiet hand until there was nothing left but the "well done" of the King.

This is the rugged hope of the steward. We aren't trying to build an eternal kingdom here on the pavement; we're trying to be faithful with the bricks we've been given for the afternoon. The win feels like heat, but the service feels like peace. Stop trying to own your life and start managing it for the One who actually holds the title deed. The chasm is wide, but the grace is deeper. Walk the path, do the work, and keep your hands open.

4

WHEN THE WORLD CLAPS

There is a specific kind of danger that arises when the room stops being critical and becomes complimentary. In the early days of the grind, the friction of the world keeps you honest. You have critics, you have competitors, and you have the constant pressure to prove yourself. But once you win—once you reach that level of **high-performance leadership** where people start clapping every time you open your mouth—you enter a dead zone. The air gets thin. People stop telling you when you have food in your teeth, and they certainly stop telling you when you have pride in your heart.

Handling praise is a far more dangerous skill than handling failure. Failure hurts, but it rarely rots the soul. Praise, on the other hand, is like a slow-acting poison that tastes like honey. If you inhale it, it begins to distort your reality. You start to believe that the "vibrant" version of yourself that the world sees is the actual truth. You start to think that the applause is a measurement of your worth rather than a temporary reaction to your performance. To survive the clapping of the world, you need a rugged, theological reflex that keeps your feet on the pavement.

Deflecting the Glory: The Reflex of Soli Deo Gloria

In our circles, we love the phrase *Soli Deo Gloria*—Glory to God Alone. We put it on our coffee mugs and at the end of our emails. But for the successful man or woman, this cannot be a slogan; it has to be a survival mechanism. You have to learn the habit of deflecting glory the moment it hits you. When someone offers a compliment, the natural human instinct is to "inhale" it. You breathe it in, let it expand your chest, and let it settle in your ego. This is how the rot begins.

Learning to accept a compliment without letting it rot your soul requires a high degree of spiritual alertness. You don't have to be weird or dismissive. You don't have to respond with a fake-humble "Oh, it was nothing," which is often just a plea for more praise. Instead, you accept the kind word with a "thank you," but internally, you immediately pass the weight of that glory to the One who actually owns the bricks. You treat praise like perfume: it is a pleasant smell to be enjoyed for a second, but it is absolutely lethal if you try to swallow it.

The moment you start to "keep" the glory for yourself, you become a thief of the King's property. You are taking credit for the talent you didn't create, the timing you didn't orchestrate, and the grace you didn't earn. Deflecting glory means acknowledging that you are a pipeline, not a reservoir. The water of success flows *through* you to serve others and glorify God; it is not meant to pool up around your feet so you can admire your own reflection. If you can't learn to pass the praise upward, you will eventually drown in your own vanity.

The Pavement of Humility: The Liturgy of Small Tasks

One of the most practical ways to stay grounded when the world is putting you on a pedestal is to seek out "small" tasks intentionally. Success has a way of exempting you from the mundane. You reach a point where you have "people" for the groceries, "people" for the errands, and "people" for the messy details of life. You start to inhabit a world where everything is sanitized and optimized for your convenience. This is a spiritual death trap because it removes the daily friction that keeps your ego in check.

You need a liturgy of the mundane. If you are a CEO who has just closed a multi-million dollar deal, you need to go home and take out the trash. If you are a leader with a massive platform, you need to be the one who stays late to stack chairs or wash the dishes after a church potluck. These aren't just chores; they are acts of war against your own pride. They are physical reminders that you are still just a man or a woman made of dust. The pavement of humility is literal—it's the grit of doing the work that is "beneath" your title.

When you intentionally involve yourself in the small, thankless tasks of life, you are recalibrating your heart. You are reminding yourself that you are a

servant, not a celebrity. It is very hard to maintain a "Nebuchadnezzar" complex when you are scrubbing a toilet or changing a diaper. These moments of lowliness are a grace from God. They break the spell of the "self-made" myth and force you to re-engage with the basic reality of being a human being. A leader who is too big to serve is too small to lead.

The Danger of the Inner Circle: Finding Truth-Tellers

Perhaps the greatest threat to a successful person is the "Echo Chamber of the Elite." As you move up, your inner circle tends to shrink and become more homogenous. You surround yourself with people who share your vision, people who are invested in your success, and—most dangerously—people who are afraid of you. If everyone in your life has a reason to stay on your good side, you are in a very precarious position. You are effectively flying blind, and the only thing worse than having critics is having a fan club that calls itself a board of directors.

You desperately need friends who do not care about your title. You need people in your life who knew you before you were "somebody" and who are entirely unimpressed by your win-loss record. These are the friends who will look you in the eye and tell you when you're being a fool, when you're being arrogant, or when you've started to inhale the applause. This kind of friendship is rare because success makes people intimidated. You have to go out of your way to invite this kind of friction. You have to give people "permission to wound" your ego.

An inner circle that only nods is one that is helping you build a tower that will eventually collapse. The "Theology of the Pavement" requires the presence of brothers and sisters who will pull you back into the dust when you start to drift into the clouds. If no one in your life can tell you "no," you don't have an inner circle; you have a royal court. And history shows us that royal courts are the breeding ground for the kind of pride that precedes a spectacular fall. True **stewardship of influence** means being accountable to people who love your soul more than they love your success.

The Posture of the Successful Steward

At the end of the day, handling praise is about maintaining a posture of perpetual gratitude. Gratitude is the antidote to pride because it acknowledges the source of the gift. When the world claps, your response shouldn't be a cold, stoic rejection of the kindness, nor should it be a warm, ego-fueled embrace of the glory. It should be a quiet, joyful recognition that God has used a flawed instrument to do a good work.

You walk the pavement with your head up but your heart low. You accept the "win" as a responsibility, not a right. You look at the applause as a reminder of the Master's expectations, not a confirmation of your own greatness. The grit of the Christian life is found in the ability to be successful without being "important." It is the ability to hold a position of power while maintaining the spirit of a servant. This is the narrow path, and it is the only one that leads to a "well done" that actually matters.

5

THE CROWN THAT LASTS

Races eventually run out of track. No matter how many quarters you've crushed, how many platforms you've built, or how many rooms have stood to applaud your name, you will eventually reach a border that your title cannot cross. Earthly success is a strange thing; it feels like an inheritance while you're in the middle of it, but in the light of eternity, it's more like a morning mist. It feels solid and permanent until the sun of God's glory actually starts to rise. At that point, the "vibrant" career and the "limitless" growth start to look exactly like what they are: temporary assignments on a very small piece of ground.

Winning in the light of eternity isn't about accumulating more; it's about realizing that everything you've accumulated is already on its way back to the dust. The "Theology of the Pavement" isn't only about how to walk while you're successful; it's about how to finish the walk without clutching a bunch of trophies that were never yours to begin with. We spend our lives building a legacy, but a redeemed heart knows that the only legacy that survives the fire is the one we didn't build ourselves. It is a rugged, unsentimental transition from being the "owner" of your win to being a servant who is ready to give an account.

The Ledger of Grace: The Unprofitable Servant

We have to deal with the ledger. In our "self-made" culture, we keep a mental spreadsheet of our hard work, our sacrifices, and our results. We start to think that God is lucky to have us on His team. We think that our success has somehow put the Creator in our debt—because we've been "impactful," He owes us a specific kind of life or recognition. But the Gospel is a brutal auditor of that kind of vanity.

Jesus tells a story in Luke 17 that most "high-performers" absolutely hate. He describes a servant who comes in from plowing the field or tending the sheep, and the master doesn't sit him down and give him a plaque. The master tells him to get dressed and serve dinner. Jesus concludes by saying, *"So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"* The phrase "unprofitable servant" or "unworthy servant" is the ultimate ego-killer. It means that even if you lead a perfect company, build a massive church, or solve a global crisis, you haven't done God a favor. You've simply done your duty with the strength He provided and the tools He loaned you. The ledger of grace doesn't have a "merit" column for you to fill. Realizing you are an unprofitable servant is the only way to find true humility in the middle of a win. It reminds you that the "heat" of your success is a gift of His providence, not a payment for your performance. When the pressure to be "extraordinary" is removed, you are finally free to be simply faithful.

The Final Approval: The Trophy that Won't Rust

Every earthly trophy is currently in a state of decay. The "Entrepreneur of the Year" plaque will eventually end up in a landfill, and the name on the building will eventually be sandblasted off to make room for the next guy. If you are living for the approval of the world, you are living for a currency that is constantly devaluing. The applause of men is a fickle thing; they will shout "Hosanna" on Monday and "Crucify him" by Friday. If your peace depends on the crowd, you will spend your life as a slave to their expectations.

The only trophy that won't rust—the only one that actually matters—is the "well done" of the Master. This is the final approval that defines the successful steward. Notice the wording: it isn't "well won" or "well earned." It is "well done, good and faithful servant." The King isn't looking at the size of the win; He is looking at the integrity of the stewardship. He is looking at how you treated the "small things" while the world was watching the big things.

Living for the "well done" changes the way you handle the pavement today. It gives you the courage to make decisions that might cost you an

earthly "win" but will gain you an eternal "well done." It allows you to be the leader who tells the truth even when it hurts the bottom line, and the manager who treats people like neighbors even when the board is demanding rungs on a ladder. When you realize that the only audience that matters is the Sovereign Judge, the "heat" of the world's opinion starts to cool. You aren't performing for the lobby anymore; you're performing for the Throne.

Resting in the Finished Work

Perhaps the greatest danger of success is that it makes you think you are what you do. It traps you in a cycle of "more" because you think your identity is something you have to manufacture every morning. You think that if you stop winning, you stop existing. This is the "Identity Trap" in its most lethal form. But the Gospel offers a rest that the "self-made" man can never understand. It tells you that the only success that actually defines you is a success you had nothing to do with: the finished work of Christ on the Cross.

Your win-loss record is a temporary metric; Christ's win over death is an eternal reality.

The Cross is the ultimate win. It is the only "achievement" in history that can actually sustain the weight of a human soul. When you rest in the finished work of Christ, your career stops being a platform for your ego and starts being a playground for your gratitude. You don't have to win to be "worthy" because Christ has already won on your behalf. You don't have to be "significant" because you are already a son or a daughter of the King. This is the only way to be successful without being a jerk. It is the only way to have influence without having a "God complex."

When you realize that your identity is hidden with Christ in God, you can finally relax. You can do the hard work, endure the grit, and manage the increase without the desperate need for it to mean something about *you*. If the business fails, you are still a child of God. If the promotion goes to someone else, your crown in heaven is still secure. Resting in Christ's win allows you to be the most rugged, persistent, and humble worker on the pavement because you have nothing to prove and everything to give.

The race is long, and the pavement is hard, but the end of the road is paved with mercy. Success is a stewardship, influence is a loan, and your life is a vapor. Don't waste your time trying to build a kingdom that won't survive the afternoon. Instead, be the servant who manages the Master's gold with integrity, the neighbor who treats every person as an image-bearer, and the sinner who never forgets the grace that brought him here.

When the world claps, let the sound remind you of the King's coming. When the bank account grows, let it increase your capacity for secret generosity. And when you finally reach the end of the final mile, may you find yourself standing before the only Judge who matters, not with a handful of rusting trophies, but with the quiet, joyful satisfaction of a duty done well. The win feels like heat, but the finish line feels like home.



CONCLUSION

There is a story I think about often when the air at the top of the mountain starts to get thin, and the "heat" of success feels more like a fever than a blessing. It's about a man who spent twenty-five years building a global reputation. He was the guy everyone wanted in the boardroom. He was the one who could walk into a crisis, find order in the chaos, and come out with a "win" that would move the market. He sat on a throne of influence and had the "vibrant" life that everyone in the lobby was desperately trying to buy.

Then, at the height of his power, he walked away. He didn't leave because of a scandal or a burnout; he left because he realized that his throne had become a prison. He spent the last decade of his life serving a small, struggling church in a town the maps had mostly forgotten. He went from managing millions to managing the Sunday school budget and fixing the plumbing in the basement. People from his "old life" would visit and ask him if he felt like he had wasted his potential. They looked at the grit of his new life and saw a failure. But he would look at them with a peace that didn't make sense to the "self-made" mind and say that for twenty-five years, he was a man holding onto a kingdom with clenched fists, but now, he finally had open hands. He had realized that success is a magnificent tool, but it is a terrible home.

Success is a temporary campsite, not your permanent residence. If you try to live in your achievements, you will eventually become brittle and lonely. You will spend your life defending a legacy that is already decaying. But if you see your "win" as a shovel God has put in your hands for a specific afternoon of work, everything changes. You can use the shovel with everything you've got—you can dig deep, you can work the ground, you can build something beautiful—but when the sun goes down, you can lay the tool aside without feeling like you've lost your soul. The "Theology of the

Pavement" is the rugged understanding that we are just walkers on a road we didn't build, carrying gifts we didn't earn, toward a Kingdom we didn't create.

This hard season of winning, with all its noise and all its pressure, is actually a gift from God intended to refine your heart. He is giving you success to see if you will use it to build a monument to yourself or a bridge for your neighbor. He is giving you influence to see if you will inhale the applause or deflect the glory to the Giver. Do not let your hands clench into fists around your title or your bank account. Keep them open. Everything you have is a loan, and there is a profound, rugged joy in being the kind of manager the Owner can trust with more because He knows you won't try to steal it.

A Prayer for the Man at the Top

Heavenly Father, the Sovereign Judge and the Giver of every good gift, I pray today for the man or woman standing at the top of the mountain. I pray for the one who can hear the world clapping and who feels the intoxicating heat of the win. Lord, the air is thin up there, and the temptation to believe the "self-made" lie is overwhelming. I ask that You would give them a supernatural portion of marrow—the strength to stay low even when the world is trying to put them on a pedestal.

Lord, guard their heart from the poison of applause. When the compliments come, give them the reflex to pass the glory upward to You. When the ledger grows, give them the wisdom to see it as a reassignment for service rather than a reward for their ego. Break the idol of self-sufficiency in their soul. Remind them, in the quiet moments of the night, that they are still just dust—redeemed, loved, and empowered dust, but dust nonetheless. Give them friends who love their soul more than their success, and give them the courage to listen when those friends speak the truth.

May they walk the pavement of their career with open hands. Let them be the first to pick up the basin and the towel, and the last to seek the seat of honor. And when the final mile comes and the earthly trophies finally rust, let them find their ultimate rest not in what they have built, but in the finished work of Christ. Let them hear the "well done" of the only Master who matters, and let them realize that the greatest success was never the view from the

top, but the faithfulness they practiced in the shadows. In the name of the One who walked away from a throne to save the world, Amen.

THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

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