

Six Benchmarks for Success

2 Kings 18:1-8

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on

Introduction

Well, we just came off from a full day conference yesterday on the exciting role that we parents can have in raising up a generation of leaders. And as a conclusion to what was said there, I want to take a look at six benchmarks for measuring the success of a leader, or for that matter, measuring the success of anyone.

In verses 1-3 of this chapter we see the general evaluation that the Lord gave of Hezekiah's life. And I think we would have to say that it was a stunning success when you measure it against the six benchmark tests that we will be taking. But let me read it first. **“Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah, king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi, the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done.”** He was a good king - a king like David. And verses 4-8 then show why he was such a good king. It wasn't because he was sinless. David sure wasn't sinless. We've been seeing that. But both kings were especially loved by God because they passed these six benchmarks with flying colors.

I. The Integrity Check – doing right even when it's not convenient (v. 4)

The first benchmark was the integrity check. And this test is about doing the right thing even when it is terribly inconvenient. Hezekiah was a man who passed most integrity checks the first time he met them. Now at the bottom of the outline I define an integrity check as “a special test which God uses to evaluate intent.” Let me give you an example. Matthew Ropp confessed that he failed an integrity check the first time he faced it, and then quickly corrected himself. And he grew through that experience. He had ordered some software at a special online discount store, and part of the rules was that the software was non-returnable. Unfortunately, when the program arrived, he noticed that it was a Mac version, not a Windows

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version. So he couldn't use it, and he couldn't return it. Those were the rules. It was shrink-wrapped. But he decided that he would take it to a local software store to see if they would exchange it. As he entered the store, he got nervous that they wouldn't exchange this program for a Windows one if he told them the truth, so he lied without thinking about it. He said, "I got this as a present and don't know what store it came from. Would you be willing to exchange it?" And they were willing. But he immediately knew that he had failed this integrity check that was providentially placed before him. And he felt sick about it. The store had given him a credit, and he would later need to go to pick up the Windows program once it came in. But now it was even harder to do the right thing because there would be the embarrassment of telling them that he had lied. He not only would need to swallow the loss on this expensive program, but it was humiliating to admit that he had lied. He struggled with it and struggled with it, but finally was determined to trust God (point number 2) no matter what happened (point number 4). He went into the store, talked to the manager and told him that he had lied and that the Lord had convicted him about it, and that he was prepared to buy the Windows version and take a loss on the Mac one. The manager told him not to worry, he would be happy to exchange it anyway. And he was rejoicing in God's provision and blessing (point V). And every day of your life, each of you is faced with similar tests to this one. How you respond to those tests will make a huge difference on your own character development or hardening of your spirit. It goes one direction or the other. It will make a difference on whether you are ready for Lord to bless you with more blessings and stewardship responsibilities.

At the bottom of the sheet I list seven different types of integrity checks that are commonly experienced by Christians. I threw those in there because we are only going to look at one type of integrity check. But I at least wanted you to know about them. The story I just told shows that the second time around, Matthew Ropp passed the first two tests. And having passed those, he was much, much stronger when he was tempted on subsequent times. So even our failures can be used by God to strengthen us. I would encourage you to be aware of all the various types of integrity checks that might come your way. That's preventative medicine – be aware of them. And fathers, this is a part of your leadership training. Help your children to recognize the different kinds of integrity checks that God providentially allows to happen and to be more and more consistent at passing those. A lot of times we are blindsided and taken off guard and do the wrong thing without even thinking.

Anyway, let's look at Hezekiah's integrity checks in verse 4. Verse 4 says, **"He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden images and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan."** Hezekiah destroyed idols as we must destroy idols. And in this he wasn't too different from the good kings before him. But he went one step further – he also removed the high places. What had made this difficult for previous kings who failed the test was that these high places were politically correct. In fact, the people didn't even think of them as idolatry. Let me explain. Hezekiah was not the first king to remove *idols* from the high places of Israel. However, he was the first king since David to remove the high places themselves that were dedicated to Jehovah. The former good kings such as Jotham and Amaziah saw nothing wrong with worshipping Jehovah in the high places. Over and over in this book the Lord evaluates those kings as being good kings, but then goes on to say, **"However, the high places were not removed."** Those kings didn't see what the big deal was.

It's sort of like Government Schools. There are a lot of good Christians who are like those good kings. They serve the Lord faithfully in many ways, but they send their children to government schools. And they don't see that it is a compromise. In fact, some of them will argue that you should send your children to government schools to be missionaries. They think they are doing a good thing, and they think that the Hezekiah's who want to be sold out to the Lord on everything are going way overboard.

And you get a hint of that in verse 22. People had complained enough about Hezekiah's removing the high places that even the enemy knew about it. This is the enemy Rabshakah speaking: **"But if you say to me, 'We trust in the LORD (Yahweh) our God,' is it not He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and said to Judah and Jerusalem, You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?"** He is saying, "Isn't it common knowledge that Hezekiah has been unreasonable and has opposed the work of godly Jews. He's taken down these high places to Jehovah. He is too critical. God's not going to bless that kind of legalism." You can see the attitudes of the captured Jews in this criticism.

Sometimes God's call to destroy involves taking on sacred cows; or shaking up the status quo. Being Biblical is not popular today and the pressure is always on to accommodate the modern high places of our culture – especially if they are so devoted to Jehovah. And when you get criticism from fellow believers or relatives for your radical biblical stands, it is easy to

do like the former kings and leave the high places alone. And the vast majority of the church today has failed this particular integrity check.

The other thing that was highlighted in this verse is the bronze serpent that God had Moses make in the wilderness. Verse 4 says that Hezekiah, “**broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan,**” which means snake or diviner. Here was something the people could point to chapter and verse on to justify what they were doing. In Numbers 21 God had commanded Moses to make this serpent. You may remember the story. As a judgment God had sent serpents into their midst and many people died from the snakebites, and Israel cried out to God. God wanted to test their faith, and told Moses to cast a bronze serpent, set it on a pole and tell the people that if they looked at it they would be healed. And some people thought, “Yeah, right! Like looking at a bronze snake is going to heal me!” And they died. Those who looked lived. Now here is the thing - there was no power in that serpent. It was simply faith in God’s command. Would they do what He asked them, no matter what? And God did bring healing to those who looked. But over time people began having faith in the snake instead of having faith in God. They turned a good thing into an idol.

And in our lives, there may be things that are perfectly good in their own right, and in their own place, but which over time begin to rob our time or our devotion and which begin to take hold of our hearts. When that happens, we must get rid of it. One man gave up golf for several months because it had become an idolatrous pursuit. There is nothing wrong with golf. But for him it had become an idol. When he felt that God’s priorities had become his priorities and he could handle the golf, he began to play golf occasionally again. You may have your good things that have turned into idols. It may be football rather than golf. It may be electronic games. It may be wasting unbelievable amounts of time surfing the web. It may be too much television. Evaluate your life. Be honest with yourself and with God and resolve to get rid of anything that keeps your focus from the Lord.

Whether it is outright idolatry like the sacred pillars, or whether it is simply small compromises for the sake of the gospel like the high places, or whether it is good things like the brazen serpent that have turned our hearts away from the Lord, resolve to destroy them. Now this highlights only one kind of integrity check, but if you will look at the footnote in your outlines, I want to quickly mention the various types of integrity checks:

The first one is obvious temptation. **Temptation** tests our moral convictions. Are our moral convictions there for people or for the Lord; are they there as principle or for convenience? How much are we willing to

sacrifice in order to resist temptation? When we become more consistent in passing these, God can trust us with further blessings.

The next integrity check is restitution. **Restitution** tests our honesty. When we hit a parked car, do we report it or drive on? And why do we report it? Is it because we are afraid that we will be caught, or because we love the Lord? When our children break something, do we require restitution to teach them the importance of this integrity check? We should.

The next integrity check that Biblical leadership books talk about is loyalty. **Loyalty** to imperfect leaders tests our true view of authority. Do we only submit to our husbands when they are perfect? That's an integrity check failure. Do we leave a church when a church is not perfect? God will bring tests to see how we will handle the imperfections of authorities. And how we handle them shows whether we are being honest about our trust in the cross of Christ and the power of the Gospel.

The next integrity check is values. When our Biblical **values** are challenged, it is a test of our commitment to our Biblical philosophy. When some pastors get picketed by homosexuals, suddenly they find themselves softening on their values. When finances are tight, we might find ourselves softening on our philosophy of money. How strongly do we believe in cleaving to our spouse till death do us part when we are spitting mad? And what are we modeling to our children about our value of private property when we find something and take the attitude of "Finders keepers, losers weepers"? We constantly have challenges to our values that will test whether they really are values or not.

The next integrity check is persecution. **Persecution** tests our steadfastness and perseverance. Do we fall apart when we get persecuted?

Then there is the integrity check of vision. When our **vision** is fiercely opposed, it tests whether we really believe that God has given this vision or not.

And the last integrity check is the leadership test. When our **Leadership** is challenged, it tests our willingness to lead the people God has called us to lead and to be accountable to the body that God has called us into. God called Paul to fix the problems in Corinth, and there were some there who basically told Paul to bug off – "We're not interested in your presence here." A lesser person would have just left the church and found a church that was interested in him. But Paul was so driven by God's call upon his life that he continued to lead even when his leadership was challenged. And we could apply the same to fathers who want to stop leading when their leadership is challenged. These integrity checks are tough ones to pass, but

God ushers us into increased responsibility and blessing when we do so.
Teach these integrity checks to your children.

II. The Trust Check – a test of our trust in Scripture (v. 5)

The second benchmark by which Hezekiah was measured was trust. He passed the trust checks that came into his life even when it might have been easier to negotiate the world's way. Verse 5 says, **“He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any who were before him.”** His trust enabled him to do things God's way in verse 4, even when everyone thought he was nuts or legalistic. His trust of God enabled him to engage in ventures like what we will be looking at in verses 7-8. One of the most marvelous stories in the bible is recorded in verses 17 and following when Rabshakeh tries to reason with Hezekiah that trusting God is futile. And his senses told him that he was in deep trouble. He was surrounded with a huge army with no hope of relief. In chapter 19 Isaiah assured Hezekiah of God's deliverance. Hezekiah couldn't see how it was going to work out, but he laid his case before the Lord and asked God to deliver. At the end of chapter 19 the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 of Sennacharib's troops. So Hezekiah's trust in God helped him to step out in obedience when everything seemed to be going against him. His trust caused him to go to God and refuse to compromise even if it meant his life. As Job said, **“though he slay me, yet will I trust Him.”** (Job 13:15).

What things in this past year have shown that you trust God? Are there any goals that you have for this coming year that prove that you are taking God at his Word? Or are your goals so low that any unbeliever could do the same? If your goals require God's grace to implement, they indicate faith. Faith is what distinguished the people in Hebrews 11 as heroes in God's roll book. It wasn't that they were perfect. None of them were perfect. But they had faith that led them to action and led them to obey despite problems. A life of faith means we will take on challenges that are beyond our capabilities. But God is going to bring things into our lives that test our faith.

III. The Consistency Check – the degree to which we constantly cleave to God (v. 6)

A third benchmark is the consistency check. To what degree do we consistently cleave to God? Verse 6 says, **“For he held fast to the LORD.”** It's wonderful when people repent and do the right thing the second time

around or the third time. But when you are looking for a computer hard drive, you want consistent integrity. When God is developing a Christian, he wants to see fewer and fewer ups and downs and more and more consistency. That should be what you are shooting for. Of course, none of us perfectly achieve it. You aren't a machine, so don't expect consistency overnight. Consistency is something we grow into. But God will bring repeats of previous tests to see if we have developed a consistent pattern to dealing with them. When we have, we are ready for Him to trust us with more blessings. He doesn't have to make us repeat those tests.

The phrase, "held fast" is translated elsewhere as "to stick to," "to cleave to." It is used to describe the tongue sticking to the roof of the mouth, underclothes sticking to the body, clods of dirt sticking together or of husband and wife joining or cleaving to each other. This is the word used by David when he says to God, "**My soul follows close to You.**" What distinguished Hezekiah as being like David was not the degree of Reform that He brought. Other kings brought about tremendous reform as well. No. What distinguished Hezekiah as being like David was that he kept clinging to God.

What about you? Do you let the least little thing get between you and the Lord or do you stick to Him? How consistent are you in Sabbath keeping? How consistent are you in family devotions? How consistent are you in prayer? This is a test that you should run regularly to evaluate the success of your Christian life. If you are sometimes holding fast to the Lord and other times lagging far behind, there is some adjustment that needs to be made.

IV. The Virtue check - Following and Obeying (v. 6)

But (point IV) there will be times when God will show you things that are not comfortable to follow, and yet you will follow and obey anyway. This is the virtue check. The Greek word for virtue means to be willing to obey even when you don't know what has been commanded. Verse 6 shows this to be the next benchmark of those who are men and women after God's own heart. It says, "**he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses.**" There is a slight difference in meaning between following and obeying, though they ultimately amount to the same thing. To follow indicates a predisposition to go where God wants you to go and to do what God wants you to do, even before you know where He is taking you. You are willing to follow Him and

find out. On the other hand, obeying is the actual carrying out of what God wants, at the time that you find out what it is. Let me illustrate.

When I was in seminary, a group of us students were talking about an ethical issue and another student walked in. When he found out what we were talking about he shut his ears and walked out saying that he didn't want to hear it because then he would be responsible. That is a perfect illustration of the opposite of virtue. Virtue wants to find out God's will. It's willing to sign the check and let God fill in the amount. It hungers and thirsts for righteousness. It prays, "Thy will be done."

I have had people tell me about an area that I had discussed as sinful, and said "That's not an area the Lord has convicted me on." This person didn't deny that I was right. It was obvious that this was sin. In effect what he was saying was that the Lord just hadn't twisted his arm and made him cry uncle yet. Well, that is a lack of virtue. If you need to be convicted before you will obey, you don't have virtue. Virtue is a predisposition to follow. Both following and obeying are needed.

But the next two benchmarks are positives. What positive results have you seen of God's grace in your life?

V. The Lord's Presence and Blessing (v. 7)

Point V speaks of The Lord's Presence and Blessing. Verse 7 goes on: "**The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went.**" This is the first C that we looked at yesterday, isn't it? Most translations include the word "And" as the Hebrew does. The "and" indicates cause and effect. As we pursue the benchmarks listed in these verses we realize two things: we realize God's presence in our lives ("the Lord was with him") and we realize His blessings in our lives ("he prospered wherever he went.") Wouldn't that be cool – to prosper wherever you go and whatever you do. That's what happened to Joseph. Everything he did seemed to be prospered by the Lord.

Let me tell you something. Over the many years of God's dealings in my life I have experienced over and over that God brings integrity checks that make me decide: Oooohh! Am I going to obey the Lord or not?" And when I choose the tough way and I obey Him, God ushers me into new blessings and new levels of victory. On the other hand, I have experienced major set backs when I have failed to implement these steps. And yes, even pastors can fail these benchmark tests. You get up and you go at it again.

Do you know God's presence in your life? There are times when I can say, "Yes," and there are other times when I know that I need to tune up my

life. Now, God has promised His presence. To those who are willing to go into all the world and fulfill the Great Commission, Jesus promises, “**Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**” Think of it this way, when God led the Israelites into battle He promised to go before them. But if they were following, they could expect His presence. But what of those who stayed behind? If God is up here, and they are way behind, could they really expect His presence and blessing? I don’t think so. The safest place for anyone to be is the center of God’s will because God’s presence is there. And the sense of God’s blessing and presence is a benchmark that you can analyze yourself with.

VI. Conquering (vs. 7-8)

The last benchmark is victory or conquering. Verses 7-8 describe Hezekiah’s victories. When Hezekiah went into battle, it wasn’t in reliance on his own strength. Chapter 18-19 gives the marvelous story of how even this physical battle was in reality a spiritual battle. The angel of the Lord came and destroyed the enemies in response to Hezekiah’s prayer. But Hezekiah’s conquering in verses 7-8 is connected closely with all the other benchmarks. It says, “**The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. He subdued the Philistines, as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.**”

What areas have you conquered for king Jesus in this past week and past year? None? Well then, that ought to be a goal for you. God gives us grace upon grace because He expects us to advance from strength to strength and from glory unto glory. Every year we should be advancing beyond where we have been in the previous year. And if you don’t have concrete, measureable goals in your life, you won’t have the foggiest idea of whether you have advanced or not.

This is a marvelous summary of Hezekiah’s life. And I hope it challenges you to pursue God as Hezekiah did for the rest of your life.

Conclusion

In conclusion let me remind you of my acronym, GOES FARTHER from yesterday.

Leadership that GOES FARTHER

Growing – Successful leaders will work on themselves and never quit growing!

Organized – Successful leaders will structure their lives, their time, and their future! They take dominion over life rather than letting life take dominion of them!

Efficient/Productive – Successful leaders are hard workers and hard players who always go the extra mile!

Self—Controlled/Disciplined – Successful leaders have a balance between enjoying life and deferred gratification! And it takes self-control to keep either side of that equation.

Future-Oriented/Optimistic/Visionary – Successful leaders are driven by the future and confidently look for opportunities that God is presenting!

Ambitious/Initiative – they don't wait for someone to tell them what to do!

Relational/Networker – though they may be shy, they value people!

Teachable/Life-Long Learner – they are incredibly curious and eager to learn! They are life-long learners.

Humble/Realistic – they can roll with the punches without getting bent out of shape!

Enduring/Patient – they don't give up or easily get discouraged!

Resilient/Flexible – they have learned how to adapt to ever changing circumstances and get back up and try again!

I think that Hezekiah (though not perfect) was a leader who GOES FARTHER. Christ has given His all for you; He wants you to give Him your all (however weak and feeble that might be) to Him. If you are willing to destroy, trust, cleave, follow and obey, He *will* be with you, He *will* bless you and He *will* lead you to victory. I challenge you to be men, women and children of Hezekiah in this coming year. Amen.

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