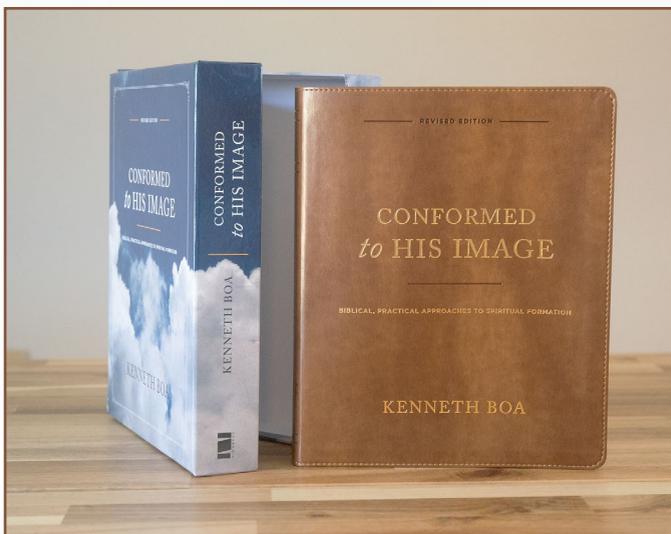
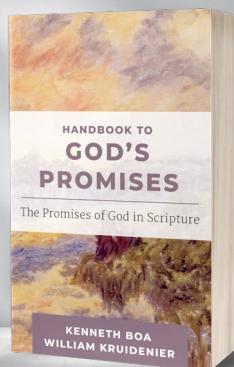


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# KEEPING THE VICTORY

Read Judges 8:34; 10:14

“So the sons of Israel did not remember the Lord their God, who had saved them from the hands of all their enemies on every side.” (8:34 NASB)

An important principle for Bible students is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian believers: If you examine the history of the nation of Israel, you will discover valuable lessons for the Christian life (1 Cor. 10:11). One of Israel's hardest-learned lessons is revealed in the seven cycles of sin-defeat-repentance-victory found in the book of Judges. Israel never learned, from one cycle to the next, to keep the victory. Although God granted His people protection from their enemies time after time, they obstinately refused to stay faithful.

The book of Proverbs strongly warns against the foolishness of rejecting God's wisdom or victory when it is offered (Prov. 1:20–33). In fact, the wisdom of God—which is often the means of escape He provides when we are beset by an enemy—calls out to us. But after being rejected, wisdom says she will “laugh” and “not answer” if we call again.

This is what happened to Israel after Gideon had led the nation to mighty victories over the Midianites. For 40 years Israel lived in peace, but as soon as Gideon died, Israel forgot the wisdom of following the Lord. When the Ammonites and Philistines began to oppress the Israelites, they remembered their Rescuer—and cried out to God. But God responded like “Wisdom” in Proverbs, challenging His people to try to find deliverance in the idols they worshiped: “Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress” (Judg. 10:14 NASB).

Even in this case, God's love overcame Israel's stubbornness, and He provided another de-

liverer after Gideon. But His point, both to them and to us, was made: Do not fail to keep the victory that God gives. God goes before us and defeats our enemies, but His going before us implies that we are following!

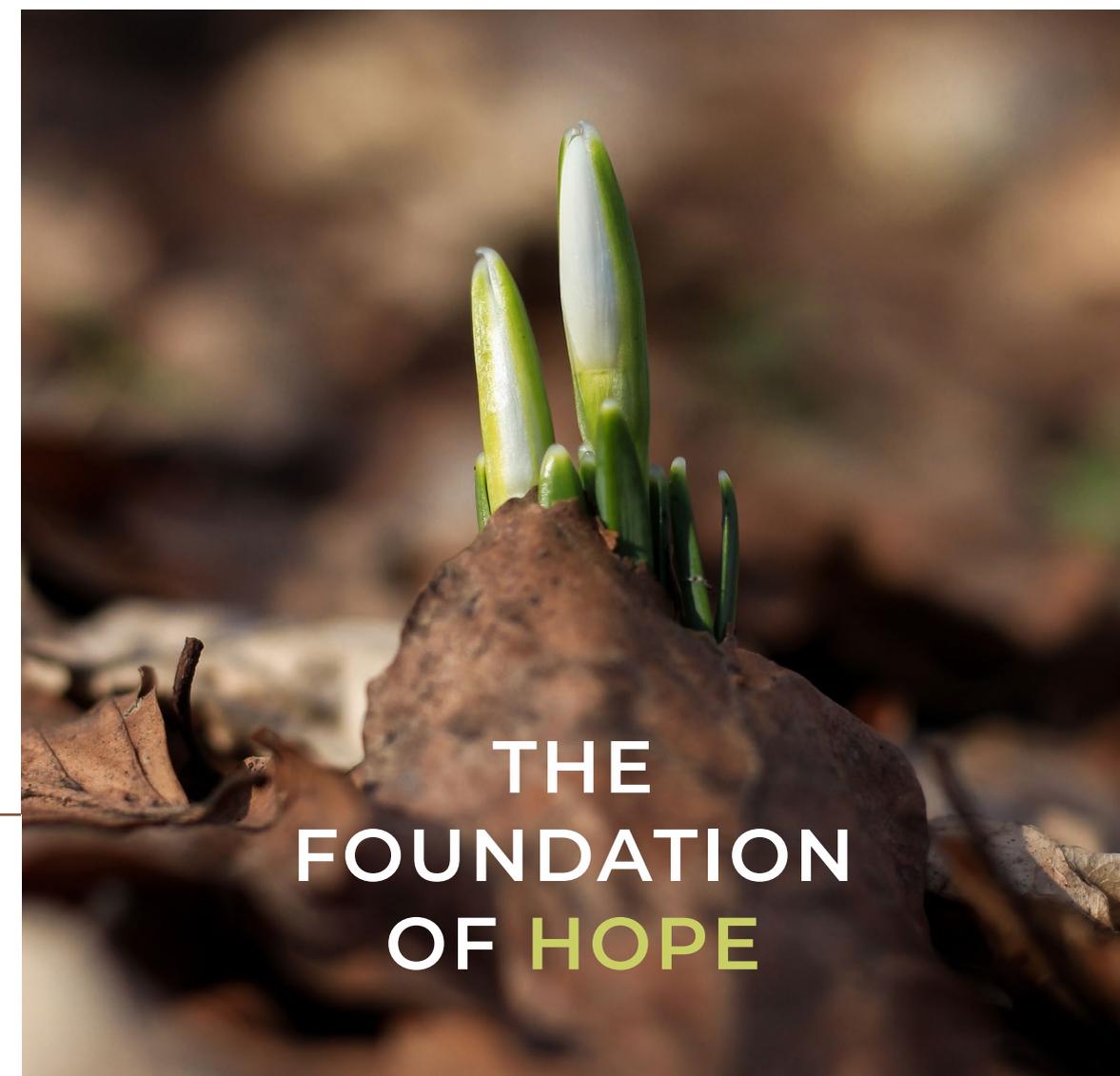
If God has shown you wise steps to gaining victory, or has gone before you and defeated your “enemy,” do not lose the victory. God's part in our battles is to provide the way of escape; our part is to grasp it—and keep it.

**GOD'S PROMISE:**

He will lead you into victory,  
but you must stay close to Him.

# REFLECTIONS

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



## THE FOUNDATION OF HOPE

Lord Jesus, Your death and resurrection are the foundation of my faith; the source of my meaning, hope, and purpose; the wellspring of my salvation; the assurance of Your truth; and the basis of my eternal life with You. Life without the resurrection would be a brief episode between nonexistence and oblivion. There would be no long-term, abiding, transcendent hope. Human life and history would be a tragedy of epic proportions. Without Your resurrection, Your life would have been a terrible waste of extraordinary human potential. We would still be in our sins and there would be no real hope as we hurtle toward bodily decay and death. But thanks be to God that You were declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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## POWER AND INFLUENCE, PART 3

## IMPROPER STEWARDSHIP OF INFLUENCE

*Nebuchadnezzar* by William Blake, 1795, Tate Collection. Public domain.

**GOD FREQUENTLY ALLOWS PEOPLE** to come to the end of their resources in order to get their attention. Tired of clamoring for our attention, fighting through all the noise with which we surround ourselves on a constant basis, it is as if God hides Himself from us, allowing us to come finally to a grinding halt. Richard Foster writes with great clarity about such periods of dryness. He offers insight into what God is attempting to produce in us:

Through all of this, paradoxically, God is purifying our faith by threatening to destroy it. . . . We know more deeply than ever before our capacity for infinite self-deception. . . . Our trust in all exterior and interior results is being shattered so that we can learn faith in God alone. Through our barrenness of soul God is producing detachment, humility, patience, perseverance.

Most surprising of all, our very dryness produces the habit of prayer in us. All distractions are gone. . . . The soul is parched. And thirsty. And this thirst can lead us to prayer.<sup>1</sup>

During such times of adversity, we are usually sufficiently humbled to get a better grip on the truth that life is not about us, but about the One who created us. Rarely will we learn this lesson apart from the pain and frustration of having come to the end of our own resources.

Daniel 4 shows us a powerful man who lost everything until he learned the lesson that power is a trust, not a prerogative. Seldom has a man who possessed so much fallen so far.



Power is a trust,  
not a prerogative.

King Nebuchadnezzar's list of accomplishments is nothing short of awesome. He was the son of Nabopolassar, founder of the Chaldean dynasty, and he ruled the Babylonians from 605 to 562 BC. His was the longest and most powerful reign among those of the Babylonian kings during the Neo-Babylonian period (626–539 BC). Under his capable rule, Nebuchadnezzar consolidated the empire and brought Babylonia to the summit of its influence and prosperity.

As crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar successfully campaigned against the Assyrians, Egyptians, and Syrians. When he captured Judah in 605 BC, he brought Daniel and other Judean leaders to Babylonia. After ascending to the throne in that same year, he began an extensive rebuilding program in his capital city. His engineering accomplishments included the ziggurat, two defense walls, the gateway to Ishtar, new canals, many shrines,

and new temples dedicated to Bel-Marduk and other deities. He also restored and constructed buildings and temples in other key Babylonian cities. One of his accomplishments (the Hanging Gardens of Babylon) is listed among the Seven Wonders of the World.

Nebuchadnezzar enjoyed years of dazzling military and economic achievements. He was at the zenith of power and influence. From a worldly perspective, he had it all. Yet, he was about to lose it all through his disregard for the Source of his power and influence. Even when God attempted to speak to him through a terrifying dream, Nebuchadnezzar shut out the voice of God's spokesman, Daniel.

When Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, he warned the king that God would soon humble him unless and until he acknowledged that the Most High alone is "ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes" (Dan. 4:25 NASB). Notice especially Daniel's urgent counsel to King Nebuchadnezzar: "Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: wipe away your sin by doing righteousness, and your wrongdoings by showing mercy to the poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity" (v. 27).

But the king ignored Daniel, and one year later we find him strutting on the roof of his royal palace, filled with pride because of his

many accomplishments (Dan. 4:30). That's the point at which the worldly perspective was eclipsed by the heavenly one. We read that while Nebuchadnezzar was boasting, "a voice came from heaven" (v. 31); God came to this powerful ruler and showed him the Source of all power, both in heaven and on earth. Like so many other influential leaders who preceded and followed him, Nebuchadnezzar fell prey to the illusion that it was he who had accomplished these great things. Tragically, he failed to recognize that God had allowed him to rise to power.

Any leader can learn an essential lesson from this great and powerful ruler. Any leader, no matter how accomplished or successful, is at any given time only a moment away from destruction. King Nebuchadnezzar lost everything and became like an animal. He was functionally insane for seven years. This image of the great Nebuchadnezzar eating grass like a cow should be a vision every leader fixes firmly in his or her mind. God graphically reminded this leader that, compared to Almighty God, he was like a beast in the field. At the end of the seven years, God restored his sanity and providentially returned him to power that easily could have otherwise been usurped by others. The lesson was costly, but Nebuchadnezzar never forgot the truth that the Most High alone does as He pleases. In fact, the words of Nebuchadnezzar are even more enlightening considering the journey God took him on:

I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever;  
For His dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
And His kingdom endures from generation to generation.  
All the inhabitants of the earth are of no account,  
But He does according to His will among the army of heaven  
And among the inhabitants of the earth;  
And no one can fend off His hand  
Or say to Him: "What have you done?"  
(Dan. 4:34b–35 NASB)

God never bestows positional and personal power as an end in itself, but always as a trust to be exercised with stewardship for the benefit of others. Those who misuse this trust by squandering it on extending their own egos through oppressing and manipulating others will ultimately give an account to the One who gave them their power in the first place.

Daniel advised King Nebuchadnezzar to use his positional power in the service of others through acts of kindness. Leaders today should use their God-given influence in the same way.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 22–23.

## NEXT MONTH:

POWER AND INFLUENCE, PART 4  
The Influencing Power of Information