

# THE SEDUCTION OF SUCCESS

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## Thrive

Daniel 11 // Craig Smith

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**Craig //** Good morning. Welcome to Mission Hills, fourth of July coming up. It's weird when the fourth of July is on Wednesday, right? Because like which exactly is the Fourth of July? We sort of picked this one arbitrarily. How many of you have the next couple of days off leading up to the Fourth of July? Interesting. How many of you have the days after the Fourth of July off? Yeah, it's just kind of in the middle. They probably just should have given us a ten day break, just make that a national deal, right? I have no power anywhere, just so you know. I cannot make that happen, but I wish it upon you.

I'm really glad you are here today. We are going to be taking a look at something in the Book of Daniel that I think is really important to deal with. I think it's a subject that we don't really deal with all that much, especially in America. We are going to be taking a look at what I think is one of the most dangerous things you and I will ever face, and it's not dangerous because it's more evil or necessarily more destructive than anything else. It's dangerous because it operates without us being aware that it's happening. It's what I'm going to call a seductive danger. By seductive, I mean it has the ability to lead us to a place that we don't want to be without realizing that's where we are headed, something seductive that gets us to that place where we kind of look around and go, how did I get here? If somebody told you that's where you were headed, you would say, no, no, no. I don't want to go there. I have no interest going there. I'm not going to go there, but something that's seductive kind of gets us moving in that direction and we end up going, how did I get here? This is not what I want. This is not what I thought I was headed for.

And so we are going to talk about what I call a seductive danger, and the danger I'm talking about is the danger of success, which is an interesting thing to say because honestly we live in a culture that worships success, and the idea that success could be dangerous is not something that we naturally come to, and understand, I'm not saying success is bad. It's not. In fact God often gives success, but success has the ability to seduce us into some things, and if we are not aware of it, can take us to a place we go, I had no intention of ever being here, so why don't you grab your Bible and make your way to Daniel 11. We'll pick up at verse 2. Daniel 11:1 was part of the previous chapter. We dealt with it last weekend. Today we are going to pick up with a conversation that Daniel is having with an angel. The angel has come to give Daniel an interpretation of a vision he's been given, and this is what the angel says, verse 2.

"Now then, I tell you the truth, three more kings will arise in Persia, and then a fourth who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece."

Basically, what the angel is saying is, hey, Daniel, I know you are serving under a Persian king. His name is Cyrus. We know from Daniel 10:1, that was who Daniel was acting as adviser to, and what the angel is saying, hey, Daniel, there will be several more Persian kings before the Persian empire comes to pass, but he says something kind of interesting. He says, and then there will be a fourth who will be far richer than all of the others. Like why say that? And the answer is because riches are a sign of success. I mean, for the Persian Empire, their riches, their wealth was a visible demonstration of their success in battle. They had gained their wealth by attacking other people, conquering them and taking all of their stuff. And so at the height of its empire, the Persian Empire, the last king was incredibly rich, really, he was incredibly successful. And something happens when you are successful. That is, people start listening to you.

When he has gained power by his wealth, see, success leads to influence, and influence causes a couple of different things to happen. One of them is when we hear people listening to us, we start to think we have something worth saying, which is kind of an interesting thing. That's the celebrity phenomenon, right? There are all kinds of celebrities weighing in on political issues and ethical issues, and you are like, who are you again? Oh, that's right. You did that movie, or you are on that reality T.V. show. They have success and with success comes influence, and when we have people listening to us you start to think, I have something to say. Then honestly, when you see people who are successful, there is this natural human tendency to say, well they must have something to say, right? How else would they have gotten to this point. But here's something we have to recognize. People tend to confuse success with wisdom. It's a natural human tendency. We confuse success with wisdom, but they are really not the same thing at all.

In this particular instance, because of their great success, other nations, and people are listening to this Persian king, and what he decides to do with his influence is to stir up trouble against the king of Greece, which turns out to be a terrible, terrible mistake. Verse 3 says this:

And then a mighty king will arise who will rule with great power and do as he pleases. This is a description, even though it's several hundred

years in advance, what Daniel is saying, he's seeing the rise of a man named Alexander the Great, the Greek king. So what happened is this, Persia looked around, and they saw this little nation of Greece. It wasn't a big deal at the time. Something about them sort of offended the Persian king. Because of his success, people listened to him. He used his success to say, we should show that guy a lesson, and they poked him. It reminds me a little bit about the Crocodile Hunter. You guys remember the Crocodile Hunter? Like I can't believe he lasted as long as he did because every episode he was like, this is a really dangerous thing. I'm going to poke it with a stick. That's basically what happened here, okay? They are like, I'm going to poke this thing.

So they poked the bear. The problem when you poke a bear, sometimes the bear wakes up, and he comes after you. And that's exactly what happened. Alexander, he attacked not only Persia and destroyed the Persian Empire, but he really conquered all of the known world in just three to four years. It was an incredible military feat. We begin to see a pattern here because what happened here is that the Persian Empire was successful, and success led to arrogance and then arrogance led to destruction. And now Alexander arises, and we begin to see the same kind of pattern. He will rule with great power. That's another sign of success. He will do what he pleases, which is Bible talk for "arrogance."

He will do whatever he wants. He won't feel like he needs advice. He won't feel like anyone can slow him down or stop him. Why would I listen to you? I'm the success. That's arrogance. So with the Persians we saw that success led to arrogance and arrogance led to destruction. Now we see success lead to arrogance, and the question is, is that also going to lead to destruction?

Verse 4, after he has arisen, his empire will be broken up and parceled out toward the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, nor will it have the power he exercised because his empire will be uprooted and given to others.

Yeah. It led to destruction. In fact the first phrase "after he had arisen" can be translated to as soon as he had risen. The point is, kind of at the moment that he reached the top of the ladder, the pinnacle of his success, he died. He died of some fever. He died very young, and it meant that he didn't have any heirs that were ready to take the throne, so his kingdom kind of fell apart, and his generals began to fight over it, and eventually four generals emerged as the dominant powers. That's the four winds of heaven that Daniel is foreseeing, his kingdom parcel and the four winds of heaven. It didn't go to his descendants. He didn't have them.

And it didn't have the power. His kingdom is destroyed. His empire is uprooted. We see this pattern. Already, just in the first couple of sentences of this chapter, we see this pattern emerging. Success leads to arrogance and arrogance leads to destruction. It happened for the Persians, for Alexander. Success led to arrogance and arrogance to destruction, and what we'll see as we continue through this chapter is that, that pattern emerges over and over and over again. It's almost a drumbeat that God just keeps hitting, so much so that we are like, we got it. God's going to go, I don't know that you do. Let me show you again. I get it. Success, arrogance, destruction-- I'm not sure that you do, and he hits it again and again. What we are going to see through the rest of this chapter is, it's prophecy. Daniel was given this hundreds of years before the events took place. What we are going to mostly see is a description of a series of things that would happen between the remnants of Alexander the Great's Empire. Eventually you had two kingdoms, the kingdom of the North and the kingdom of the South, and they were constantly fighting and making treaties and breaking them, and all kinds of things were happening.

And all of the things he's talking about came to be fulfilled in very precise ways, and we could easily spend all day today and the next couple of weekends talking about the historical predictions and their fulfillment, but I don't think that's what we are supposed to focus on. Rather than focusing on the precision of the predictions, I think what we are supposed to focus on is this pattern. Success to arrogance, arrogance to destruction. As we read through it, look for those drumbeats. Listen for them.

Verse 5, the king of the South will become strong. That's success. But one of his commanders will become even stronger than he and will rule his own kingdom with great power. That's more success. After some years, they'll become allies. The daughter of the king of the South will go to the king of the North to make an alliance, but she will not retain her power. Destruction. And he and his power will not last. Destruction. In those days she will be betrayed together with her royal escort and her father the one who supported her. Destruction. One from her family line will arise to take her place. He will attack the forces of the king of the North and enter his fortress. He will fight against them and be victorious. Success. He will also seize their gods, their metal images and their valuable articles of silver and gold and carry them off to Egypt. That's arrogance. I mean not only did he defeat their army, but he took their religious symbols, and he took them back home to put them on display to say, look, I'm even more powerful than their gods. That's arrogance.

For some years, he will leave the king of the North alone. Then the king of the North will invade the realm of the king of the South but he will retreat to his own country. His sons will prepare for war and assemble a great army, which will sweep on like an irresistible flood and carry the battle as far as the fortress. That's success. Then the king of the South will march out in a rage and fight against the king of the North who will raise a large army, but it will be defeated. Destruction.

When the army is carried off, the king of the South will be filled with pride. That's arrogance. And he will slaughter many thousands, yet he will not remain triumphant. Destruction. For the king of the North will muster another army, larger than the first, and after several years, he will advance with a huge army fully equipped. In those times many will rise against the king of the South. Those who are violent among your own people will rebel in fulfillment of the vision, but without success.

Then the king of the North will come and build up siege ramps and will capture a fortified city. The forces of the South will be powerless to resist, even their best troops will not have the strength to stand. The invader will do as he pleases. That's what? Arrogance. No one will be able to stand against him. That's success. He will establish himself in the Beautiful Land -- that's Israel, and will have the power to destroy it.

He will determine to come with the might of his entire kingdom and will make an alliance with the king of the South. And he will give him a daughter in marriage in order to overthrow the kingdom, but his plans will not succeed or help him. Destruction. Then he will turn his attention to the coastlands and will take many of them, but a commander will put an end to his insolence and will turn his insolence -- that's arrogance. He will turn his insolence -- his arrogance, back on him. After this he will turn back toward the fortresses of his own country but will stumble and fall to be seen no more. Destruction.

His successor will send out a tax collector to maintain the royal splendor. That's an interesting statement. He will have to send out a tax collector to maintain the royal splendor? Not to build better roads for the people, not to raise an army, not to fight battles, but to maintain the splendor. In other words, to maintain the appearance of success, right? Here's an interesting truth. Maintaining the appearance of success is expensive, right? Maybe you have known somebody that they seem to spend money left and right, and what they are trying to do is make themselves look successful with the things they have and the kind of vacations they take and that sort of thing, right? Maintaining the appearance of success is expensive. That's one of the reasons that success can be such a seductive thing. Because it leads us into making decisions that take us off track of the thing that made us successful in the first place. Because we have to maintain that appearance.

I think this happens even in the church world. A couple of months ago I was with a group of pastors back east. I was hearing from -- he was an executive pastor. He was kind of new to a church, and he was just sharing frustration about where the church was, and as he began to unpack it, I just couldn't believe the story. I'm not even going to tell you what part of the country, because I don't want anybody trying to find this church, but it was a church that experienced a lot of success in year's past. They were the largest preeminent church in the area. They had a great facility they build and everyone went, yeah, they are killing it. They are awesome. This is fantastic. That was ten years ago, and then they started into a decline. I think he said they were a third of its size they were when they built that building.

He had only been there for a few months. He said our congregation took a vote. What are we going to do? We are no longer as successful a church as we were, and so they voted as a congregation to spend -- I think he said \$80 million to renovate their building.

I know.

My first reaction was, you had \$80 million -- where did you get access to that kind of cash? And second, you are going to spend it to renovate -- it's not because they were out of space. It's not because they were in overflow. It was because they wanted to maintain that appearance of being the preeminent successful church in the area, and that's exactly what's happening here. Maintaining the appearance of success is incredibly expensive. Whether that's a church, or whether that's a country, or even in our own lives. Making sure that everyone knows that we are successful, and holding on to that, that can lead us down a road that we don't want to come to the end of.

In a few years, however, it says, he will be destroyed, yet not in anger in battle. He will be succeeded by a contemptible person who has not been given the honor of royalty. He will invade the kingdom when its people feel secure, and he will seize it through intrigue.

If you are interested in where we are in the historical timeline, what Daniel is predicting a couple of hundred years in advance, is the rise of a man, and we have talked about it a bit in the last few weeks, his name was Antiochus IV. He wasn't actually the rightful heir. He was a contemptible person. Everybody in the ancient world, Jewish people as well as other races talk about this man with absolutely nothing but contempt. They hated this man. He had not been given the honor of royalty. He was not in line for the throne. His nephew was, but through political maneuvers, he managed to get his nephew kicked off, and he became the king. Daniel seeing all of this in advance.

Verse 22, then an overwhelming army will be swept away before him. That's success. And a prince of the covenant will be destroyed. In 171B.C., Antiochus plotted for the murder of the Jewish High Priest Onias. I think we can probably all agree, that's arrogant, right? It's not only you attack a country, but you murder a high priest. That's a sign of contempt against their God. It's arrogance. Verse 23, after coming with an agreement with him, he will act deceitfully, and with only a few people he will rise to power. When the richest provinces feel secure, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did. That's successful. He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers. Here we begin to see another one of the dangers of success. When other people are experiencing it, see, they have the resources to reward us for loyalty. There is a draw for us to get behind them, to be loyal to them. Maybe they'll reward us.

He will plot the overthrow of fortresses, but only for a time. You see the hint there that success is short-lived. His destruction is inevitable. Verse 25, with a large army he will stir up his strength and courage against the king of the South. The king of the South will wage war with a large and very powerful army, but he will not be able to stand because of the plots devised against him. Those who eat from the king's provisions will try to destroy him. His army will be swept away and many will fall in battle. Antiochus won tremendous battles. The two kings with their hearts bent on evil will sit at the same table and lie to each other, but to no avail because an end will still come at the appointed time.

And in the midst of all of this sort of back and forth and this chaos and these plots, honestly, it feels a little bit like a soap opera, right? Like a soap opera played out over several hundred years over an international scale in God says in the midst of all of that there is a reminder that the end is going to come, but at the appointed time. There is a countdown clock running. There is a timer, and it's a reminder that God is in control even when it feels like He isn't. God is in control even when it doesn't feel like He is. What God says to His people at this point is, don't be fooled. Don't give up hope. I know it looks like the success of these people is threatening your well being. It seems to be threatening my sovereignty, but it's not true. I'm watching the clock. It's all under my control.

Verse 28, the king of the North will return to his own country with great wealth. Success. But his heart will be set against the holy covenant. He will come against the people of God. That's arrogance. He will take action against it and then return to his own country. Interesting historical note, what happened was, Antiochus attempted to take Egypt. He didn't quite succeed. There were some negotiations, and he left, and on his way home he came through Israel, and he came near to Jerusalem, and he heard that there was a party going on in Jerusalem, and when he asked what they were celebrating, what he heard was that they were celebrating the fact that Antiochus was dead. A rumor had spread that he had died down in Egypt, and so they threw a big party to celebrate it, so basically, he got thereto his own funeral celebration. He was not happy.

His response is not what we would call measured or reasonable. He slaughtered thousands of people in Jerusalem. That's what it means that he took action against it, and there's arrogance there. Verse 29, now at the appointed time he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before. Ships of the western coastlands will oppose him, and he will lose heart.

This is a reference to the Roman armies. Roman generals brought ships in and stopped him on his way south. This is the first time we see Rome interfering in this part of the world. He wasn't sure what to do about them, so he turned around, and he went home. Then he will turn back, and he will vent his furry against the holy covenant. He got back to Jerusalem, and he remembered the party they threw last time, and like a petulant child, he killed hundreds if not thousands more. Then you have this interesting statement. He will return and show favor to those that forsake the holy covenant. Something different happened this time. On his way back he remembered the people that opposed him and celebrated his death, and he began to attack them again, but this time, he encountered another very different group of people from Jerusalem. He had a group of people who kind of met him and said, we are on your side. We are team Antiochus. Don't come after us. We're with you. The way it's phrased is, they had to forsake the holy covenant. In other words, to support Antiochus, what they had to do was they had to break the Law of Moses, to basically renounce their faith in God to get behind Antiochus, and at that point, the question you have to ask is, what would lead them to do this? The answer is, success.

They saw Antiochus' success. In spite of some minor setbacks, he was incredibly successful. He was incredibly powerful. He was incredibly wealthy, and the natural tendency is to go how can I oppose someone like that? I'm not stupid. I don't want to commit suicide. So, I need to get behind him. I need to join that team, and here we begin to see another side to the power of success, the seductive power of success. You see our success, when we experience success, our success tempts us to arrogance, but other's success tempts us to compromise. You think, I think she's going to be the next CEO. I think she's going all the way, so -- I need to get on her good side, and you know what, what she's asking me to do, it's not really, really, really wrong. It's just like kind of, sort of really wrong, so maybe -- maybe if I do this thing, she will know that I'm on her team. What happens is we make these little steps of compromise.

Because we see where this person's going. We don't want to be in front of them. We don't want to be steam rolled over. We want to seem to be supportive because they'll get to a place where they can return the favor, or at the very least, I won't earn their anger or wrath, so we make compromises to get behind them, and that's what's happening here. They have forsaken their faith in order to support success. Verse 31 says, his armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. Then they will set up the abomination that causes desolation.

Antiochus forbid the daily sacrifices in the temple, and beyond that, he put up an altar to the Greek god Zeus on the temple grounds which rendered the ground unconsecrated, so it couldn't be used for sacrifices even if Antiochus allowed it, but he wasn't allowing it, and there were Jewish people enforcing it. They were enforcing his new rules and his laws, and honestly, his religion, because they had forsaken the covenant.

Verse 32 says with flattery, he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant. Those people who said, we are team Antiochus. We are going to get behind you. We are not stupid. We see where the success train is headed. We want to be onboard. With flattery he continued to corrupt them because that one little step turns into another step and another step and pretty soon you are in a place you would never have dreamed of. If anybody had come to these Jewish people and said, hey, in a couple of months, you will have abandoned your faith, you will have compromised your principles, and you will become a traitor to your own country and you will be supporting a foreign dictator against your own people, they would have gone, there's not a chance. I'm not doing that. And yet, that's where they are because other's success seduces us into a compromise and takes us to a place we never thought we were headed.

But -- there is another group of people here. It's interesting the way they are described. He says, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him. The people who know their God. It's interesting. He doesn't say the people who have stronger faith. He doesn't say the people who -- you know, have bigger spines, stronger spines, or more guts. He says the people who know their God. The question we are supposed to ask at this point is, know what about their God? What is it they know about God that allowed them to escape or resist the seduction of Antiochus' success?

Is it possible that what they knew about God is the truth we have seen time and time again in the Book of Daniel, which is that God rebukes arrogance.

We have seen it over and over again. God rebukes arrogance. Success leads to arrogance and God does not let arrogance stand. God rebukes arrogance, and it leads to destruction. I think what these faithful Jewish people knew that allowed them to resist the seduction of his success is, this isn't going to last. We know who God is. We know how He feels about human arrogance. We know what He does with human arrogance. We know that destruction is coming. It's inevitable. It may not be today. It may not be tomorrow, but there is a day coming, and it is inevitable. It's going to happen. So they resisted. But not just them. Also verse 33 says, those who are wise will instruct many. They told other people, don't be fooled. Don't be seduced into this. He is going to come. This train is going to get derailed. It's going off the tracks. It's just a question of when. You don't want to be on board that train when that happens, so they instructed many, but for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered.

Refusing to get behind somebody's success can be costly for a time. When they fall, they will receive a little help and many who are not sincere will join them. At a certain point those who resisted Antiochus actually managed to achieve a bit of independence around the precincts in Jerusalem. And as often is the case, when there is a little bit of success, people are like, hey, I'm onboard. I'm on your team. People joined them, but it says they were not sincere. They didn't believe in their God. They didn't trust in their faith, but you seem to be succeeding, so I guess we'll get behind you, because the problem is people are fickle when it comes to success. Oh, you are successful? I'm with you. You're successful? I'm with you. And you get this whiplash going on.

But that's the seductive power of success. Verse 35, some of the wise will stumble so they will be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time. Again, destruction of the arrogant. It's unavoidable. It's inescapable. The king will do as he pleases. That's arrogance. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods.

We talked about this. Antiochus at a certain point renamed himself Antiochus Epiphanes which means God manifest. His new name is, God is in the house. That's how arrogant the man was. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed. He will be successful, but it's got an expiration date on it.

For what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his ancestors or for the one desired by women. So the Greek Gods, he completely ignored. Nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his ancestors, he will honor with gold and silver and with precious stones and costly gifts. Arrogance. He will attack the mightiest fortresses with the help of a foreign god and will greatly honor those who acknowledge him.

If you are on team Antiochus, you can expect there's going to be worldly blessing. There's going to be gifts. There's going to be rewards. He will make them rulers over many people, and he will distribute land at a price. At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. That's success. He will invade the Beautiful Land -- that's Israel. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. His success is not universal. He will extend his power over many countries. Egypt will not escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt with the Libyans and Cushites in submission.

But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful mountain -- beautiful holy mountain, and yet, he will come to his end, and no one will help him.

If you were here a few weeks ago, you may remember this description. In the midst of this battle, Antiochus developed some kind of an intestinal illness. The description of it was pretty horrific. It weakened him so much that he slumped over while his chariot was going full speed, and he fell out of the chariot and broke, apparently, almost every bone in his body, and he died, and the Jewish historians were quick to go, yep, there it is. That wasn't a coincidence. That wasn't an accident. That was God rebuking arrogance. That was destruction that comes inevitably. Success leads to arrogance. Arrogance to destruction. That's what happened, and I think they were right. That is what happened because that's the pattern we see over and over again. Like you see it there, right?

Over and over and over again, success leads to arrogance and arrogance to destruction. And at a certain point you are like, okay, God, I got it. He's like, no, no, no. One more time. Success leads to arrogance, arrogance -- okay, I get it. I don't think you do. Success leads to arrogance, okay God, really, I do get it. And you go, God, why are you saying this? Why do we have such a repetitive passage? Why do you keep hammering that over? And God is basically saying because you don't get it. You don't get it because you keep making the same mistakes over and over again. There is something in human nature that can't seem to learn this lesson, that God gives success, and yet we misinterpret success, and that leads to our arrogance, and that arrogance inevitably leads to destruction. This is an incredible danger, and every one of us faces it on a regular basis.

Success is seductive. It's not bad. Success is not evil. Success is not inherently wrong. God gives success, but it is dangerous because unless we are very careful, success will seduce us into a place that we would never have imagined we would go at the beginning of walking that road. And it operates in two different ways. We have seen them in this passage. On the one hand, our success, when we experience success ourselves, it can seduce us into arrogance and foolishness. We have some experience with success. I just encourage you right now to think, like where do I have

success in my life? Maybe it's at work. Maybe it's in a ministry. Maybe it's in the political arena. Maybe it's in your family. Maybe people say to you, hey, your kids are really turning out well. You must be a pretty good dad, and you are like, yeah, I must be. Right? You forget the role that mom had in it, and the genetic role or the grandparent's role? You have the tendency to say, yeah, yeah, maybe that is me, right?

And see what then happens is that arrogance leads to foolishness. You go, yeah, I really do have something. People need to listen to me. You know, if people question me, who are they? I'm successful, and then we stop being open to input and advice and correction and all those things. You see, our success tempts us into arrogance and foolishness, and every one of you has success in some area of life, and that success can be seductive.

So how do we deal with it? Fortunately, it has a pretty simple solution. The armor that protects us against that seductive danger of our own success is service. The best armor against the seductive power of our success is asking how can our success honor God and bless others? It's how can I serve? How can I turn the success that I have into a platform that gives me the opportunity to give glory to God and to do good for other people. Where I have success, how can I turn that into something that glorifies God and blesses others. That's the corrective against it.

Now there is another side to it. That is there is another side to the seductive power of success, and that is, if it's somebody else's success, other's success can seduce us into compromise, into those little steps along the way. We go, yeah, this is not really on the straight and narrow, but it's not that big a deal, and honestly, it looks like they are going to be able to reward me or I don't want to be on their bad side, so I need to do whatever I need to do to be a team player, and what happens is, step by step we find ourselves compromising our principles, our morals, and we end up getting off the path. We get on a train that's going to derail, and we don't want to be there when that happens. Here's the thing, in all of this, in all of this political intrigue and battles and wars and rises and falls and success and arrogance, there's one really clear truth that God wants you to hear today, and it's just this, that we thrive when we refuse to let worldly success seduce us. We thrive when we refuse to be seduced by worldly success, whether it's our success or somebody else's.

That's the only path to thriving. Three questions for you. Question number one, where has success distorted my view of myself? Where have you experienced success? Maybe it's in your family? Maybe it's at work? Maybe it's in a ministry, it's in a political arena, it's in sports. It's in academics. Where have you experienced success, and where has that begun to distort your view of yourself, and the second question is, what steps do I need to do to correct that distortion? How do I need to serve? How do I need to turn the success that I have into a platform to glorify God and to serve others? That's your best corrective. How does God want you to use your success to glorify Him and to serve others. And question number three, where am I tempted to compromise to support someone else who is successful?

I think we all face this danger on a regular basis. Where are you tempted to make those compromises? Interesting thing, they are not always moral issues. Sometimes it's a temptation to compromise just to not be true to who God's made you to be. I experienced this just recently. I went away a couple of weeks ago, and I spent a week planning and praying for the 2019 preaching calendar. The first day I said you know what I think might be helpful, I'm going to take a look at some other really successful churches and see how they are preaching? And by the way successful for me is I wanted to see churches that are doing a great job of engaging people and helping them become like Jesus and join Jesus on his mission in the world. That's my definition of success. So I looked at a church I respected in Arizona, Sun Valley, and I said, what does their preaching series look like?

I went, maybe I should preach like they are doing. I looked at that for a while. I was like, well, I respect Life Church out in Oklahoma. Let me see how that pastor's preaching, so maybe I could do like he's doing. That's not working. There's North Coast Larry Osborne out in San Diego. He's a mentor of mine. I'm going to listen to him, some of his sermons and I'm going to preach like him, and I spent the entire first day of this week, and I had nothing. I was so frustrated. I keep going down roads like, eh. And it wasn't until that evening late at night where I heard the Holy Spirit speak to me and say, hey, stop trying to be like them. Just be who I made you to be, and I woke up the next morning and I went, you know what? Those are successful churches. They are good churches, but I'm not wired like they are. I'm not going to try to be like them. I'm just going to be who God's called me to be, and it all came together.

2019's going to be a great year. I'm excited about it. You see what was happening, I was being seduced by success. It wasn't arrogance there. It wasn't bad success, and what I was being led into doing wasn't necessarily wrong, it just -- wasn't what God called me to be, and if I continued to walk that road I would have missed out on a lot of the blessings that God had in store for me along the way of doing what He's called me to do, so honestly, it may not be a temptation to do something immoral. Sometimes it may just be a temptation to get behind somebody successful and in so doing not to be what God has called you to be. Don't be seduced. We thrive as God's people when we refuse to be seduced by worldly success.

Would you pray with me? Jesus, thank you for your grace and your mercy. We confess to you that worldly success is seductive for us. We confess the arrogance that comes when we experience success and we begin to take our eyes off of you, and we take our eyes off of others, and we stop asking the question of how our success can glorify you and do good for others. We confess that, and we ask for your forgiveness, and we receive it gratefully. We turn our hearts to you and to serving. We confess, Lord, that the success of others often tempts us away from what you have called us to be. Sometimes making significant compromises, and we ask for your forgiveness. We receive it gratefully. Lord, help us to fix our eyes upon you, to be lock step with you, and have eyes for nothing else. In Jesus name, amen.