

Where was God when you failed?

Incredible! Staring at the screen with mounting expectation and wishing my eyes were playing a fast one on me didn't seem good enough to change this reality. Again and again, I scrolled up and down the web page, hoping to see some consolation. There was none. No choice I had but to face it: I had failed!

The weeks preceding this competition were doused in anticipation. I had stressed and strained myself in preparation. I studied, thought, wrote, and prayed. The first prize was good dough - some seven hundred and fifty thousand bucks. Added to the national acclaim attached, this wasn't worth losing.

On D-day, I entered the venue with confidence. My fellow contestants I viewed as no threats to my ambition. This was my beat, I thought, I could do it better than anyone else. Where my human knowledge could disappoint, one had a hope in God. I had prayed and prayed again. Faith in God for claiming the prize was solid in me as Zuma Rock. But alas, I lost it! And the failure was woeful - my name was nowhere to be found among the best ten in both zonal and national categories.

So where was God when it happened? Where was the all-knowing, the infallible and faithful one when all my efforts vanished into thin air? The answer to these queries had come to me four days before this bad news came. In a moment of meditation on the scriptures, I found God's

answer through a biblical analogy. The passage was Judges 20: 18-48 and I captioned it "Defeat under God's Watch".

Verse 18 disclosed that God's counsel was sought before Israel went to war. The Lord permitted them and even gave instructions on who should lead the troops. Yet, the army suffered a big defeat. Twice, they fought with God's permission and twice they lost. The moral for me was that sometimes God chooses to stand by and watch us fail. You ask why? I don't know. But what I do know is that all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

There could be a vital lesson God wants you to learn from that defeat in preparation for a greater victory. It may be painful to you at the moment, but if you look beyond prevailing circumstances to the bigger picture, you'd discover your challenges or failures as stepping stones to greater things. If you lose hope and give up; if you throw in the towel in despair, then utter vulnerability to the Devil becomes inevitable (and that is the fate of former Christians who now boldly proclaim atheism or agnosticism). Israel bounced back and achieved a victory that was mind-boggling. At the third trial, God not only asked them to go but promised victory (which He did not promise in the first two battles).

Another vital dimension is that supposed defeat could turn out to be God's way of saving you from deadly complacency and neglect of The Creator. It could be a way of ensuring -for your good- that your

devotion is to God and not to the things He can offer you. Abraham, that great sage of old, became the revered man of faith and friend of God because he had faith enough to trust The Creator even when his future seemed bleak. The secret of his success was that "...he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11: 10). His foundation was laid not on immediate gains he could obtain from the Lord, but in the eternal life and security that only The Almighty could give. Anyone who gets to the point of such absolute dependence, such blind trust of The Master never gets frustrated.

So why does God allow you (His child) to fail? It's because he loves you and wants you to lay your foundation not on ephemeral success but on the giver of success himself. He may explain why he let you lose; He may choose not to tell you why, and He owes you no explanation in that case. He is God. To the atheist, agnostic or nominal believer, this makes no sense. So the first step to attaining this peace in spite of storms is going to Jesus in prayer and surrendering one's life to Him. Confessing and forsaking our sins as well as letting Jesus become Lord over our lives gives an eternal assurance that neither money nor fame can buy.

God sometimes uses failure to make us temperate and to learn control over our desires. Humans are naturally prone to getting indulgent and complacent when life is all rosy and they get all they want whenever they want them. Solomon, one of the wisest men that ever lived, ended badly because he could not tame his desire. He believed he needed to enjoy any and everything- that was his undoing. Hear him: "and

whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them; I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour..." (Ecclesiastes 2:10). Little wonder then that Solomon (in 1Kings 11) loved many strange women and they turned his heart away from God.

Do we then settle for mediocrity and refrain from working our way into prominence? No, do the best you can; be the best you can be; aim higher than the skies, but never forget that every good gift, every great achievement is from God. Never neglect Him in all that you do. He never forces Himself on you, yet Jehovah has the final say.

A guaranteed formula for defeat is blaming others for our failures. Pass the blame for your failings to your boss, your family, friends, the national economy, political instability or society generally and the world may excuse you, but remember that you alone will suffer the frustration that your victim mentality brings.

For me, that supposed defeat made me look inwards and re-assess my ability. "Maybe you're not as good as you thought", I told myself. So what do I do? I'll work harder and believe God even more. Soon, I'll bounce back and become better than the world's best!

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