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Devotional

## **Not In Our Hands**

*Ligonier Ministries*

Visit any bookstore and one is almost certain to find a relatively large section devoted to “self-help” literature. From books prescribing ten easy steps to improving one’s marriage, to writings that outline steps to guarantee success in business, to works that promise a technique that is certain to land one’s best career position, there is no shortage of books written as if prosperity is something that is entirely within our power to achieve. Even the church has its share of popular authors who take such a

view, telling us that success is wholly within our grasp if we just do a, b, and c without neglecting x, y, and z.

These authors often turn to Scripture to support the promises they make, outlining the “biblical way to blessing” and other such things. Certainly, there is an appropriate way of doing this, for the Bible promises blessing to those who seek the Lord and keep His commandments (Deut. 28:1–14; Matt. 6:33). Yet to set forth formulas that guarantee success in this world if we just follow a few simple steps is to misunderstand the biblical teaching on divine blessing and the sovereignty of God. Though we can be confident that the Lord has good things for those who serve Him, today’s passage teaches us that the kinds of blessings we receive and the degree of prosperity we achieve are not ultimately in our hands.

Scripture repeatedly commends wise planning and hard work, both of which can increase our odds of success, humanly speaking, but there is no guarantee that all our designs and efforts will pay off. We remain subject to two powerful forces: "time" and "chance" (Eccl. 9:11). Of course, the Preacher who wrote Ecclesiastes does not view chance as a force operating outside of God's oversight. After all, Ecclesiastes has a strong doctrine of divine providence that understands the Lord as having established a set time for every matter under heaven (3:1-8).

Instead, Ecclesiastes 9:11 speaks of things as they appear to the human eye to make an important point. No matter how carefully we plan or how hard we work, the swiftest might lose the race; the stronger army can be defeated; the

smartest person does not always earn the most money; the most learned may not receive favor; and the wisest can go hungry (v. 11).

An innumerable array of apparently random circumstances and events can thwart our best intentions.

Our inability to see the future means we cannot anticipate or prevent all of the evil that might conspire against our labors (v. 12). Ultimately, our success is not in our hands but lies in what God has ordained.

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