

Turning Point – To Success from Failure

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INTRODUCTION

Today's message is the first of two parts. Together, we will encounter some life-changing "aha moments" that deserve our full attention!

Let's start off with part of the conclusion and from here we will work toward the rest of the conclusion (in part 2), where I will bring everything together and share with you a "success formula" for you to memorize and apply to life.

So, here is part of the conclusion: God alone – who is unchanging – has the right to determine success, and here is why:

- God is sovereign. Think for example, about Job: a successful man who lost his health, wealth and family; i.e. the things by which the world might describe "success." God restored Job's health, happiness and prosperity beyond his initial state.
- Your ruler and my ruler could be different; yours could be in centimetres and mine in inches. So when we speak of success, we actually have, outside of God, no consistent measurement of success.
- Your criteria to success may not be the same as mine, or anyone else's, for that matter. Success for one might be a lavish lifestyle and for another a good round of golf. Success might be having a roof over your head and a meal to eat. How does our criteria measure up to God's criteria?
- Even worse, measurements of success that are rooted in a mentality of comparison demands that you swap what God sees in you with what you see in someone else in relation to yourself. Sadly, in this sense, success is on the outside of who you are, and who you are is God-determined.

There are four positives and two negatives that we need to talk about in this message series.

"To succeed in life you need not only initiative, but also 'finishiative'" (Zaida Blaine).

How to Tell When are You Failing

There are so many indicators of failure, but let me put the three of them to you in such way that it can already contribute to your successes:

1. A sincere Christian life is lived by the Book and honours God in absolutely everything he/she does.
2. A mature Christian is always disciplined.
3. A devoted Christian, as a person of integrity and faithfulness, will finish what he/she started.

Plan to Properly Succeed

Proverbs 19:21 reads, “Many are the plans in a person’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails” and Proverbs 16:3 reads, “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans” (NIV).

Immediately we are confronted with the question if God’s plans and your plans are the same plans? If they are not, then you have a problem: whose plan is going to be the priority plan?

What if plans speak to the meaning and purpose of life? Perhaps plans are more important than goals? Saint-Exupéry put it this way, “A goal without a plan is just a wish.” Life’s goals cannot be more important than life’s purpose.

What Solomon is saying in these proverbs, is that a purpose is greater than a plan and that any plan you or I make has got be rooted in God’s purposes. So by committing what we do to God also makes Him the plan-maker according to His purposes. This makes biblical sense, but not necessarily worldly sense. Without the purposes of God in mind, we are actually wandering around ... what are we doing and why are we doing it? This is why I wondered , “what if plans speak to the meaning and purpose of life?”

Surely, there is a greater meaning and purpose to life than a Porsche, financial prosperity and a house in the countryside? Here is the “thing” ... they will all fall away because they are temporary. We have to ask ourselves how long a success is because many worldly successes are actually vain, in that they usually settle for the “here and now” and may or not be linked into the purposes of God.

But there is more to it, and prime, is the restoration of your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The meaning and purpose of your life is wrapped up in the glory of God. If you grasp this, then you understand what eternal success is. Christ's mission to us was, is still and will always be successful.

God has an eternal purpose; a plan for you to be here, alive on the 14th of June 2020. The key to a successful plan is in being completely sold out to Jesus. After all, a plan separated from the purpose of God is wishful thinking.

Work on Your Attitude

Paul writes in Philippians 2:14-15, “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.’ Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky” and in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Simply put, your attitude is the way you think or feel about something. But a far fuller understanding of “attitude” extends the simple definition to include your behaviour as well as your beliefs.

Many people want to be like Paul moving from religious zeal, brutal violence and persecuting the church through a Damascus road experience toward doing extraordinary things for God.

Now with this in mind, remember that Paul – in the greater purposes of God – was arrested jailed, stoned, beaten, shipwrecked, had to flee for his life and was eventually decapitated: his head was cut off! Yet, despite everything that happened to him, Paul instructs us per our reading in Philippians 2 and 4 to check our attitude! Paul's attitude toward Christ and the conviction of his belief was such that nothing stopped him from preaching the Gospel.

And all the planning that was required to preach the Gospel, was also rooted in the purposes of God. Success is not the absence of trouble and hardship; success is also rooted in your attitude and behaviour.

It would be sad, if our attitude was easily influenced by all the bad that there is in the world. A good attitude says, “it will be achieved in spite of.” A good attitude says, “I will endure no matter what.” A good attitude realizes that scar tissue is stronger than regular tissue.

As Billy Graham said, “You can't control the length of your life. You can control the depth.” A God-honouring attitude adds depth and meaning to the purpose of life.

Manage Distractions

Read with me 1 Corinthians 7:35, “I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord” and Mark 4:19, “but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful” (NIV).

If you are distracted then you are not focussed. If you are not focussed then you (thoughts, motives, attention etc.) are divided. Plain and simple.

My dictionary says that a distraction is something that divides your attention and/or prevents you from concentrating.

- Divided attention can, in a sense can be “die-vision.” The bombshell here is that you will generally first do, what is important to you. There are things that must be done, caring for the children, working, going to church etc. But the quality of your doing is strongly affected by where your priority lies as well as your motivation and purposes.
- Now, let's talk about concentration (not medical causes). If you cannot concentrate, then we need to talk about either self-discipline or priorities. You can, for example, go to church to meet with and worship God, or you can go to church and fall asleep mid-sermon as your concentration wanders.

Logically, when you are undistracted, there is an absence of interruptions or an ability to manage those disruptions either before they occur or in real time.

However, managing distractions demands that you focus, despite what is going on around you. It demands that you deal with interfering thoughts. Managing distractions requires of you, self-discipline and proactiveness. For example, when I set out to record this message:

- My wife managed my phone.

- I retreated from the sounds of the house to the quietness of our dining room, after explaining to my family that I will not be available for 30 minutes.

What do you suppose is interrupting you from focussing on the things of God and living a God-centred life? What is interrupting your life and hindering your availability to God? Are you going to deal with them by yourself or with the help of God?

Conclusion

As I said in the beginning, there are four positives and two negatives that we need to talk about in this message series. This morning, we have discussed two positives and one negative.

We have also discovered that success is a highly variable “thing” and that Christians and the world do not necessarily share the same understanding of success. While one may be a person of integrity and faithfulness, disciplined and honouring God in all they do, another may be defining success in terms of where they live, having the latest iPhone and MacBook, keeping up with the latest trends etc. There is a difference between extravagance, excessiveness, expensive and successful.

Next week we continue with the final instalment of this short message series by discussing the last two positives and last negative, following which I will share with you my formula for success.

Amen.

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