

## The Worst Kept Secret of Success

*Joshua 1:7-18*

**Introduction:** Success and prosperity are words that are thrown around often in our culture. We live in a time and place with freedom to dream and to strive to accomplish those dreams. We have freedom from tyranny, freedom from a caste system, and freedom from one religion dictating to the majority how they should live. This means that at this point in time, America is a place infatuated with success and prosperity. But how do we define success? How do we get there? What is the end goal of success and how does one get there? Success is defined as accomplishing a goal that is set, attaining to or gaining achievement in whatever field we set out. Often success is defined or gained in terms of gaining **educational advancement, fame, financial yield, or some other accomplishment**. The problem is that we typically define and apply success in terms of **self**: *self help, self-improvement, self-accomplishment, leading to self-fulfillment, self-accomplishment, and self-actualization*.

Looking up what is popular today in terms of "secrets to success", this mindset can quickly be seen. *Forbes* magazine published an article in Oct. 2013 four means to achieve ultimate success, which is defined as *happiness* (self-fulfillment). They were: 1)The power of positive thoughts 2)Put good things in your mind 3)learn to endure failure 4) get priorities right. If one would do these four things, it would make a person successful, or in this case, happy.

Not to be outdone, the *Wall Street Journal* came out with an article by Scott Adams in Oct. 2013 stating that the means or secret of success was failure, lots and lots of failure. Here, he did not define what success was (another failure?), but said failure was necessary to get the good things out of life.

Even Oprah Winfrey, who is an American model of a success story, asked professionals in different fields to try to funnel down the means of success, however one would define it. Here is what some came up with:

- **Not to Sweat the Small Stuff**

The thing that's grand about spending your time thinking about the universe is that it makes you feel insignificant. I don't mean that in a bad way. If you understand that we've now discovered entire solar systems that contain planets similar to Earth, and that those are just the ones we know about, since most of the stars we've looked at are within about 300 light- years of Earth and the distance to the center of our galaxy is nearly 100 times that— then you realize that the laundry you've left undone and the dumb thing you said yesterday are about as significant as slime mold.

—Alyssa Goodman, PhD, professor of astronomy, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics

- **Pace Yourself**

A therapist once told me something that's as true now as when I first heard it: "You can only go as fast as the slowest part of you can go."

—Singer Bonnie Raitt, who took a seven-year hiatus from the studio before releasing her new album, *Slipstream*

- **The Secret to Trying New Things**

People say it's gross that I eat grubs and goat liver, but if you haven't tried it, how do you know? Our brains tell us lies, and if we listen, we cost ourselves surprises. When trying something new, cast off your fear and expectations.

—Andrew Zimmern, host of Travel Channel's *Bizarre Foods America*

- **Simple Ways to Look Polished**

Start with a great haircut, neat nails, and well-shaped eyebrows (if eyes are the windows to the soul, eyebrows are the frames). Invest in a tailor—and in a few no-fail items that will help you look pulled together: a crisp white shirt, a pencil skirt, a great-fitting shift dress (just add shoes and go!), a tissue-weight scarf, and the perfect jacket. Whether it's a black blazer with a structured shoulder and nipped-in waist or a little leather jacket that looks great over anything, the right jacket projects confidence. And isn't that what polished really means?

—Adam Glassman, O Creative Director

This was accompanied with "**know when to quit**", "**learn to delegate**", "**know when to quit**", "**fake it til you make it**", and "**make yourself heard**." Now each of these may be useful for a time and may have some truth to them, but each falls short of a proper goal and means of success.

In Joshua 1:7-9, God defines for Joshua what **true success** is and how to attain it. This is why success is the worst kept secret. It has not been hidden from us for thousands of years, but has been neglected for thousands of years. When we understand true success, we can live prosperous, courageous, and fearless lives.

## I. **Preparing for Success:** Authority of God's Word

**Joshua 1:7** Only be **strong** and very **courageous**, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

There is a subtle shift in the focus of the command gave Joshua. In verse 6, Joshua is told to be **strong and courageous** to inherit the land that had been sworn to Israel's fathers. This would seem to put the emphasis of strength and courage on physical and military conquest, which is true. Joshua had to actually take the people over the Jordan and physically destroy the Amorites in the land. But the shift is significant. God repeats the command, but adds emphasis (**ONLY** be strong), and shifts from military might to something deeper and harder to quantify. It had everything to do with Joshua's commitment to God's Word, to keeping it, and knowing it. This meant that Joshua needed a measure of *understanding* as well as *virtue* to accomplish.

Joshua possessed a written record of God's Word. In Exodus 17:14, Numbers 33:2, and Deut. 31:9, it states that Moses wrote the law down. This meant that there was an immediate collection of the revelation of God. This teaches us a few things about how Joshua viewed the Word, and in turn how we should:

### A. **Understanding needed**

- **Word was written to be read and understood** - Joshua 1:8 said that God's Word was "the book of the Law". It was written in real language so that it was not a symbol for the people to look at, but a book to be read and understood.
- **Word was authoritative** - It did not take centuries for Moses' words to be accepted, but they were immediately seen as having come from God, not just from man. They carried the weight of God behind them.
- **Word was given by God through man** - Moses was the agent by which the Word was written, and though he himself was fallible, what was recorded was the Word of God.

“Joshua knew Moses, the writer of the Pentateuch, personally. Joshua knew his strengths and weaknesses as a man; he knew that Moses was a sinner, that Moses made mistakes, that Moses was just a man. Nonetheless, immediately after Moses’ death Joshua accepted the Pentateuch as more than the writing of Moses. He accepted it as the writing of God. Two or three hundred years were not required for the book to become sacred. AS far as Joshua was concerned, the Pentateuch was the canon, and the canon was the Word of God. The biblical view of the growth and acceptance of the canon is as simple as this: *When it was given, God’s people understood that it was His Word. Right away, it had **authority**.*”<sup>1</sup>

- **Word was given to know God and His will** - This was clearly the means by which Joshua would understand how and where to find success, which was understanding God's will and following it, not the other way around.
- **Word was ground in reality** - The Book of the Law was the history of God's work for mankind, and included many events that Joshua was actually a part of. The Book was historical by nature, telling what actually happened, not simply covering themes and myths about the past.
- **Word was needed to live to God’s glory** - In order for God to be glorified in their obedience, they needed to understand what would cause God to be happy, what would bring Him pleasure. Again, this is the opposite of what people tend to think about God and the source of happiness.

## B. Virtues needed

- **Strength** -The people would need to have the strength of resolve to understand God's Word. Strength would entail overcoming one's own laziness, selfishness, and pride and adopting a willingness to do whatever God commanded.
- **Courage** - Courage would be needed to stand up for what God said, even when others would think it foolish. It would take courage to stand when no one else would, to stand alone if need be, and to have resolve to be complete in obedience.

**NOTE:** This is true of us today. The Bible is **authoritative**. It is given to us by God (2 Pet. 1:20-21), it is useful everyday (2 Tim. 3:16-17), and it is effective (Heb. 4:12-13). It is revelation, given outside of us, to inform us of God, His will, and His purposes, including salvation. It is thus **sufficient** for life and godliness, as it does its work to transform our thinking, changing our heart, and leading us to obedience through the Spirit (Rom. 12:1-2; 6:17; John 16:7-12). God's Word is where success and prosperity lie. It is why we read the Bible **literally, historically, and grammatically**. it is written for all to know, communicating the transcendent God in knowable ways. It is a written record of history, ground in a real land, with real people, covering real events. It is given to us with real language, holding to the laws of grammar so as to be clear. It is literal, meaning it does not represent something else, but says what it means and means what it says.

This is the Word we uphold. This is the Word that we believe is **inerrant** (it is without error in any of its parts in its original autographs) and **infallible** (it can be trusted to do what it says). This is why we make much of God's Word, why it is the focal point of study, and why we cover the entire thing. This is clearly going to be attacked in both direct and subtle ways. This is why we need **strength and resolve** to hold the Bible high in our thinking, and seek to do all that it says.

## II. **Progressing toward Success:** Practicality of God’s Word

<sup>1</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *Joshua and the Flow of Biblical History*, p. 40.

**Joshua 1:8a** This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it.

What does it look like, then to do all that God's Word says? There is a progression that God gives to Joshua, a progressive recipe for success:

**A. Know the Word** – God told Joshua to "be careful to do" all that He commanded. This was a bracket statement, which showed its importance to God. The Word was given in literary form so that we would know it, not that it would remain hidden. This means that the word was given to be **read and studied**. There is no shortcut to this venture. God's Word is given for us to understand, but it is not easy to understand. It takes **time** to commit to understanding parts and the whole. Though one could read through the Bible by reading less than 3 pages a day for a year (depending on the font size of your Bible), we have a difficulty carving out time to read it. It is clear, however, that ignorance to God's Word leads to faithless living, small perspective, and sinful tendencies. True growth in the Christian life CANNOT happen without intake from God's Word. So the question is: ***What keeps you away from knowing God's Word?*** Busyness? Priorities? Laziness? Pride? What needs to be overcome for you to be strong and courageous in God's Word?

#### **B. Speak the Word**

**Deuteronomy 6:6-9** And these words that I command you today shall be on your **heart**.<sup>7</sup> You shall **teach** them diligently to your children, and shall **talk of them** *when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise*.<sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.<sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

This is an interesting part of the progression, and possibly where many of us fall short in our quest of glorifying God. The Book of the Law was not to depart from Joshua's mouth. He was to make it part of his daily conversation, should infiltrate his vocabulary, and be a regular part of his lingo. This is the mark of good parenting (see verses above) as well as discipleship. Its true that what we talk about is a result of what we read/think about. There is a reason that there are "water-cooler conversations" at work. What people watched the night before becomes the topic of conversation the next day. We talk about what we find valuable, interesting, or life giving. It's a must in having success in God's Word. When I verbalize what I'm learning, it crystallizes in my thinking. This is also why we need each other, to process issues of God's Word, to ask questions, and to draw out implications. Its why we must be in relationship to truly firm up our understanding of God's Word.

#### **C. Meditate on the Word**

**Psalm 1:1-2** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;<sup>2</sup> ***but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.***

Possibly the most forgotten part of Biblical acquisition, meditation is often lost in the pace of life that we lead. Meditation is the act of chewing, the idea of stewing, processing, and thinking through the truth. Often we are more interested in knowledge and facts, and so we can become inundated with information, but rarely do we stop and think through what we just heard. Meditation has application as its goal. It means we hear God's word, talk about it, and think about it all day long. Sometimes some of my clearest thoughts about what I've studied are acquired lying awake in the middle of the night, or in

the shower in the morning. These are focused times with little distraction, and there is time to ruminate on what I know to be true.

Unfortunately, we often don't make the time to think about God's Word. This is not only because we don't value silence and alone, but also because there are so many other things that call for our attention. Meditation is something we must discipline ourselves to do. It means being **intentional** with our time, intentional to be alone, and intentional to **think**. This brings the truth to life, making things that were flat and in black and white into the 3-D color world.

#### D. Do the Word

All of this culminates in our desire and execution to do according to all that is written, not moving from the left or to the right. We always live out what we believe, and the work of our hands flows from the motives of our heart, which comes out of the intentions of our mind. We seek to courageously do all that God commands, so we start at the beginning of the progression. Without this part, we are simply **fat Christians who know a lot of good stuff**. It's the doing of the Word that causes us to have joy, to glorify God, and to be instruments in His hand. But without knowledge, we have no ability to know what God's will is for us, and we are like **little kids who run around and play** but don't know how to navigate life. It takes both knowledge and action, because our goal is to glorify God in all of it.

### III. **Payout of Success:** Vitality of God's Word

**Joshua 1:8b-9** - For then you will make your way **prosperous**, and then you will have good **success**. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be **frightened**, and do not be **dismayed**, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Success is glorifying God by being careful to do all that He has commanded us. This type of success is counter-cultural, counter-intuitive, and counter to our sin nature. But when we can wrap our minds and hearts around this definition of success, we can find true prosperity.

#### A. Living in prosperity

Living a prosperous life is a result of yielding our lives to the truth and authority of God's Word, and that prosperity means that we live in light of every promise God has given. For Joshua, prosperity was clear: they would mean living out all that God had promised and possessing all the promised land. That was the clear application of prosperity in this context. Yet for us, it is not the possession of land or militarily conquering an enemy, but it is still living in light of God's promises. We are promised that God the Spirit would be with us and indwell us, that Jesus will be with us, and that God will be for us. We are promised that our lives are dead in this life and we are hidden in Christ, and when Christ appears, we will appear with Him in glory (Col. 3:3-4). The promise of prosperity for a Christian is not in this life. That does not mean we will not or could not have blessings from God to share. It means that the promise to EVERY believer is in the future, and prosperity comes from living in light of that truth. This is what made Paul not only successful, but prosperous, even though he ended up in prison and was neglected by those whom he loved. This is why Paul could confidently say, while in prison:

**2 Timothy 4:6-8** For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> ***I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*** <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the **crown** of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will **award** to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

For Paul, and for us, prosperity is something future, something to be grasped and realized later, since we take hold of it by FAITH, and faith is not something we can see, taste, and touch now. It means we must

have a radically different view of these things, since it affects how we view God. If we believe that obedience to God will lead to MATERIAL, TANGIBLE, and WORLDLY gain, then we will be shaken and view God as a cosmic ATM, instead of who He really is: the all-loving, all-gracious, and almighty God who calls us to conform to Him, not the other way around. When we properly view God this way, we can live a life that is without **fear and discouragement**, especially when life does not circumstantially turn out the way we thought it should (or that we thought we deserved).

## B. Living fearlessly

Uncertainty breeds fear. When we are unsure of an outcome, or unsure how we will feel from the outcome, fear is not too far behind. God is clear that life will not be easy in Him, but will involve suffering, trial, and persecution. He does not tell us exactly what all of that will look like, and in fact, He says trials will come in variety of ways (James 1:1-3). Since we don't know what they will be, when they will come, or to what intensity they will play out, we are left with some amount of uncertainty, which means we must constantly walk by and in faith. Faith means we trust God, His Word, His sovereignty. Faith means we can look beyond circumstances to what God is doing: perfecting us to be like Christ. Faith means we can look to the future, to a day when God will do away with sorrow, pain, and suffering.

Living by fearless and courage means that we can stand on the truth in the midst of a world that will not (cannot) understand, we can withstand the mocking brought on by ignorance, and take on the persecution from people who are themselves fearful of the light. This is no different than Joshua faced. It was not easy for Him to lead people in the truth. It was not easy for him to tell the people to cross the Jordan river and THEN circumcise everyone (Joshua 5) or to have everyone march silently around Jericho for 7 days (Joshua 6). To some, this sounded crazy, non-sensical, and foolish, but Joshua knew this was the Word of God. Joshua knew that fear and discouragement would cause **compromise and failure**.

There is only one true secret of success: it is to trust God and yield ourselves to all that He has commanded, knowing that this is our greatest means and end of success, as well as our greatest joy.