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True Success and Accomplishment—Right Motivation and Faithfulness

Many of us may wish we could be like Moses and Paul and accomplish great things for God. But what were their motivation, spirit and attitude as they sought to serve the Lord? In this final message, we will consider the importance of right motivation and faithfulness in service to the Lord. We will examine the examples of Moses and Paul.

Moses—his motivation, spirit and attitude

Moses was described in the Scriptures as “very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). He was not one who sought to project himself or one who liked to be seen as doing great things.

Moses’ hesitation in assuming leadership

Moses fled Egypt after he killed an Egyptian in a moment of rashness. Forty years later, the Lord called him to lead the people of Israel out of their oppression in Egypt. It was a great task, one associated with status, power and authority. If he succeeded, it would be regarded as a great achievement in the fulfilment of God's purposes. Many would think that such a call by God should be something to lay hold of eagerly, an opportunity not to be missed.

But Moses was reluctant, even unwilling, to shoulder the task. He did not harbour any fleshly desire to accomplish great things in order to attain recognition or status. He had learned humility and had matured during the forty years in the wilderness.

Let us look at Exodus chapters 3 and 4.

Exodus 3 relates how the Lord appeared to Moses in the midst of a burning bush. God told him, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (v. 6). God had given heed to the cry of the Israelites and intended to deliver them from Egypt, and to bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey.

God wanted to entrust this task of leading the Israelites out of Egypt to Moses. But Moses’ reply was, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" (v. 11).

God then gave many assurances to convince Moses that He was in control. He said, "I know the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go" (vs. 19-20). The Lord assured Moses that He would manifest His power, and Pharaoh would let the Israelites go.

But still, Moses did not feel assured; he was very hesitant to shoulder such a heavy responsibility, and he asked, "What if they will not believe me or listen to what I say?" (4:1).

The Lord then demonstrated how He would undertake and manifest His power through Moses with miraculous signs. Moses did not seize the opportunity for greatness, but replied, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (4:10).

The Lord assured him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now then go, and I, even I, will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say" (4:11-12). Yet Moses replied, "Please, Lord, now send the message by whomever You will" (4:13).

Some may wonder whether Moses responded the way he did because he was inadequate for the task and was not ready to shoulder this awesome responsibility. But that was not the case.

It is true that Moses' response at this point in time was not totally wholesome, and the Lord was angry with him for failing to obey His call in spite of many assurances (4:14). It could well be that his failure forty years earlier, when he acted rashly and had to flee Egypt, had a bearing on his present inappropriate response and hesitation in shouldering the task. However, his basic attitude was positive.

Moses had by now matured and had attained a high degree of spiritual stature. This was seen when he finally responded to God's call. With God's empowering, he confronted Pharaoh and led the people of Israel out of Egypt, and then led them for forty years in the wilderness. It was a very heavy and difficult responsibility but Moses fulfilled it very well.

The Lord knew that Moses was ready. That was why He called him at that point in time and entrusted him with this great task. It was a very crucial point in time in the history of Israel and in the fulfilment of God's purposes.

The Lord used Moses in a mighty way, and with good basis. It is clear that there were significant positive qualities in Moses. Otherwise the Lord would not have entrusted this important and enormous task to him. He was a very humble man who harboured no fleshly desire for status, power and accomplishment.

No desire for self-glory

Some may initially manifest humility when God calls them to spiritual service. However, with passing time, especially in contexts where there are obvious indications of God working mightily through their ministry, pride and a sense of accomplishment and self-importance can creep in. This did not happen to Moses.

Let us examine another context that showed there was no trace of self-centredness or desire for self-glory in the heart of Moses. This incident took place after Moses had experienced a series of spectacular manifestations of God's power through his ministry, while leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

Exodus 32 records the context where the people, together with Aaron, made and worshipped a molten calf (vs. 1-4). Although the Lord had wonderfully provided and undertaken for them, they had quickly corrupted themselves and were unfaithful to God.

The Lord was angry with them and said to Moses, "They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!' " (v. 8).

And in verse 10, the Lord told Moses, "Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation."

Note how Moses pleaded with God not to do so:

Exodus 32:11-14

11 Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, "O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?

12 "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people.

13 "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' "

14 So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

When God indicated to Moses that He wanted to destroy Israel and make of him a great nation, Moses did not rejoice. He did not seize the opportunity and privilege offered him, which would involve great honour, recognition and status from a

spiritual perspective. Instead he entreated the Lord not to destroy Israel, although he himself also suffered as a result of the grumbling and unfaithfulness of the people.

The primary concern in Moses' heart was the Lord's name and glory. He had no desire to make a name for himself, to project himself, or to consider his own advantage. He asked the Lord, "O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people?" and, "Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains?' " And he reminded the Lord of His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: "Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore."

Moses was concerned for the Lord's name, His glory, His purposes and intentions, and His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God had promised the patriarchs that He would multiply their descendants as the stars of heaven.

Moses was indeed a faithful servant of God. And God answered his prayer. This demonstrates that there is power in the prayer of one who has the right kind of spirit and motivation.

If we have the same kind of character and spirit as Moses, we too can rest assured that our prayers will not be powerless. It does not matter whether or not we are able to pray eloquently, for effectiveness in prayer basically springs forth from the meaning in our hearts and the quality of our lives.

The apostle Paul—a truly successful servant of God

Paul is one of the greatest and most successful servants of the Lord. His teaching and preaching ministry resulted in many turning to the Lord. Many were built up in their faith, and God was pleased to establish many local churches through him. He is indeed a man of great spiritual stature and deep spiritual insight. His epistles and his exemplary life have left an indelible mark on church history.

Paul's basic motivation, approach and attitude

What were Paul's basic motivation, approach and attitude in life? He learnt to humbly submit himself to do the perfect will of God, whatever it might be, whatever it might involve. He gladly chose, as he described himself in his epistles, to be a bond-servant of the Lord (Rom. 1:1). We can see this attitude from the moment of his conversion, when the Lord Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

Acts 22:10

"And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.'

When he recognised that it was the Lord Jesus who appeared to him, he responded, “What shall I do, Lord?” This question revealed an attitude of humble submission to the Lord. And that was Paul’s basic posture and attitude from then on.

The Lord told Paul to go to Damascus where he would be told all that he had been appointed to do. Since then, the Lord continued to guide him and help him recognise what was required of him. And throughout his life, Paul was obedient to the Lord’s will.

We have seen that true success is directly related to the Lord’s will being fulfilled in our lives. Using this as a measure then, Paul can be described as having succeeded to a very high degree, for the Lord’s will for his life was fulfilled. This comes through in his testimony to Timothy near the end of his life on earth:

2 Timothy 4:6-8

6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;

8 in the future 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.

The deep longing of his heart

After Paul’s conversion, worldly fame and glory, and man’s recognition for his accomplishments no longer mattered to him (Phil. 3:3-8). His consuming desire was “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil 3:10).

“That I may know Him”

These words show that Paul’s primary longing in life was to know the Lord deeply. It is not a longing for more head knowledge, but for more personal knowledge of the Lord and a deeper relationship with Him.

“And the power of His resurrection”

There is a proper place to long for power in our lives—the power of the Lord—if our attitudes are correct. We must recognise that we need God’s enabling and empowering to fulfil His will. We cannot fulfil His will in our own fleshly strength.

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul exhorts believers to be filled with the Spirit. It is imperative that we know the ministry and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. However, we must be motivated by a desire to be faithful to God, and not a desire for a sense of power.

"And the fellowship of His sufferings"

When Paul speaks of seeking "the power of His resurrection", he is not referring to seeking the enjoyment of this power, for he goes on to add, "and the fellowship of His sufferings".

Paul did not run away from difficulties and suffering; but he did not rush headlong into them either. He was prepared to endure whatever pain and hardship the Lord saw fit for him to go through. He longed more and more to enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings because this is a very meaningful dimension of healthy Christian living. Just as the Lord Jesus suffered for our sakes as He fulfilled the will of God the Father, Paul knew that faithful service to the Lord and obedience to His will would involve suffering and pain. The faithful disciple of the Lord must deny himself, take up his cross, and daily follow the Lord.

We must be prepared to suffer in the path of obedience to the Lord and in faithful service to Him. A deeper experience of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives will help us develop a deeper knowledge of God and to be ready for greater depth of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. Indeed, it is a great privilege and an enriching experience to be able to enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. It draws us into a richer experience of fellowship with the Lord and knowledge of Him, and of what is truly meaningful and beautiful in the spiritual dimension—a deeper identification with what the Lord Jesus went through at the Cross on our behalf. This ongoing process of ever deepening knowledge of God, the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and the fellowship of Christ's sufferings will, in turn, help us in our service to the Lord and contribution to the advancement of His kingdom.

Pleasing the Lord and exalting Him

We have seen that Paul's one ambition in life was to be pleasing to the Lord. This is his testimony in 2 Corinthians 5:9: "Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him". The Lord Jesus always does what is pleasing to the Father (John 8:29). Paul, following the perfect example of the Lord Jesus, humbly submitted himself to do the perfect will of God. Is this also our ambition?

In Philippians 1:20-21, Paul testifies that his basic approach and motivation in life was to always exalt the Lord with all boldness "by life or by death". He did not exalt himself.

Philippians 1:20-21

20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

Paul's obedience and faithful service

Paul testified in Acts 20:24:

Act 20:24

"But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

This verse reveals Paul's attitude in the midst of all kinds of difficulties and trials, including contexts in which his life was threatened. He was prepared to go through whatever was needful, even to give up his very life, in order that he might finish his course, a course not of his own choosing, but one bound up with the ministry entrusted to him by God.

After many years of faithful service, Paul was able to testify to King Agrippa that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). He was basically obedient in whatever God desired of him.

Generally, Paul maintained this attitude consistently. This does not mean that there were no failures or lapses in his life. But he was prepared to go through anything, however difficult, unattractive, or humiliating from a human or worldly perspective.

This kind of spirit and attitude is clearly the opposite of having personal desires for recognition and status.

Therefore, when we say we want to be like Paul, let us bear in mind what he had to go through and the attitude with which he went through them. Let us not suppose that Paul's life was a glamorous one. It is the opposite. This comes through as we read his testimony in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13.

1 Corinthians 4:9-13

9 For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor.

11 To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless;

12 and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;

13 when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now.

In verse 13, we see that Paul was prepared not only to be slandered, but also to become as "the scum of the world". The word translated "scum" has the meaning of

refuse, what is discarded as rubbish, dirt, filth. It is also used to describe condemned criminals of the lowest class. In a similar vein, Paul was also prepared to be treated as “the dregs of all things”. The word translated “dregs” also has the meaning of dirt. When you scrape a dirty vessel, the scrapings are also known as dregs. Paul too was prepared to be a “spectacle to the world” (v. 9)—to be exposed to public ridicule—and to be a fool for Christ’s sake (v. 10).

Verses 10 to 13 also reveal other experiences of Paul. He toiled without honour; he was hungry, thirsty, roughly treated, reviled, slandered and persecuted. While these things were taking place, he was not downcast and did not complain but continued to rejoice in the Lord. He counted it a privilege to be able to be identified with the Lord in this way. This spirit and attitude come through when we read this passage together with 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 6:4-10 and 11:23-27.

In these three passages in 2 Corinthians, Paul testifies how he was afflicted in every way, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, exposed to all kinds of dangers and was regarded from the world’s perspective as unknown and as having nothing. He was “always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus” (4:10), yet he was able to minister life to others. In fact, it was because the principle of death was at work in his life that he was able to minister life to others (4:10-12). In the midst of all these difficulties, he was always rejoicing and making many rich spiritually (6:10).

The principle of “the dying of Jesus” refers to our identifying with the meaning and purpose of the death of the Lord Jesus. It is the principle of death to self-life and to personal desires that are contrary to the will of God, including desires for recognition and commendation by others. It is very important that this principle of death operates in our life so that we may experience life for ourselves as well as minister life to others.

Faithful men of God like Paul are examples to us. Their attitude and motivation in life are very different from those of the people of the world. There is the conspicuous absence of any desire for worldly success, recognition and status, which, sadly, many Christians do harbour in their hearts. “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ”, Paul exhorts Christians in 1 Corinthians 11:1. If we want to move in the same direction, we must deal with our fleshly desires thoroughly.

Assurance of success... abiding in Christ and He in us

If we adopt a spirit and direction similar to that which we see in Moses and Paul, we will live successful lives, and will contribute to the advancement of God’s kingdom. It is not just a “maybe”; we *will* live successful lives and *will* contribute to the advancement of God’s kingdom, because God will have the freedom to be with us and to work in and through us. This is the critical issue.

We see this principle worked out in Joseph’s life. “The Lord was with Joseph, so he became a successful man” (Gen. 39:2). If we live like Joseph, we will likewise be

successful and will prosper, whatever the circumstances we need to go through, whatever may take place in our lives, because the Lord will be with us. Our confidence is in God. As we learn to submit to Him, to cooperate with Him, to give up the self-life and all that is of the flesh, He will bring about a life of true success and true accomplishment.

We should learn deeply what the Lord Jesus wants to teach us in the analogy of the vine and the branches in John 15. It is very rich and deep in meaning, and can be appreciated at different depths. One precious truth this passage teaches us is the assurance of a fruitful life.

Let us concentrate on verse 5, where the Lord Jesus says:

John 15:5

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

Just as the branch must abide in the vine to draw nourishment from it and bear fruit, we must abide in Christ if we desire a fruitful life. If the branch is separated from the vine, it withers. Likewise, if we are separated from the Lord, our life will lose its meaning and vitality.

But what does it mean to "abide in Him"? Abiding in Christ refers to believers having a meaningful fellowship with the Lord. It has to do with the condition of our heart—our motivation, our direction in life, our willingness to submit to Him, to obey Him and to be conformed to the character of Christ. When these positive qualities and attitudes are present in our lives, we will have meaningful fellowship with the Lord. To the degree they are present, to that degree will be the depth of our abiding in Him and He in us.

Some may wonder: Isn't the Lord Jesus already dwelling in us from the point of our conversion, when we received Him into our lives? Why then does He talk about Him abiding in us?

It is true that the Lord Jesus is already in us if we are God's children, but in this verse, He is referring to the freedom with which He can manifest Himself in our lives and work through us. In verse 4, He exhorts us, "Abide in Me, and I in you." It is when we learn to properly submit to the Lord that He has the freedom to work in this manner. The outcome is that we *will* bear much fruit.

A life in which we abide in Him and He in us can never be dull, because God is at work in and through us, and He sovereignly undertakes what we go through. There will definitely be much meaning and richness in such a life, regardless of our circumstances and whether we go through difficult times or seemingly uneventful days. We should not be troubled even if our lives do not seem to be fruitful. We should concentrate on the inward reality, not the outward manifestations.

God's training

God will bring us through His training process to mould our lives and characters so that our abiding in Him will be increasingly deeper and richer. We must therefore cooperate with God in His training programme for us and be willing to go through it well, whatever it takes. This is the way to attain spiritual health and stature, one that is grounded in true knowledge and God's way. The Lord Jesus alludes to God's dealings in our lives when He speaks of the pruning of the branches in John 15:2: "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."

God wants to train all who seek to be truly successful. The direction, the process of training, and the inward requirements are essentially the same for all, though the outward manifestations and the way things work out may differ.

Similar goals; differing manifestations

Basically, God requires us to have a healthy spirit with the right motivation, attitude, character and goal. And He is seeking to bring about this inward reality in us.

It does not matter what the outward manifestations may be; the inward realities are what really count. And if we have the inward reality of a healthy spirit with right motivation, attitude, character and goal, we will move towards a life of true success and fruitfulness.

As we seek to work on the positive, we must also give up our wrongful desires and deal with all negative elements in our spirit.

If we go through the various situations of life prayerfully, the Lord will reveal to us our deficiencies. And as we deal with these deficiencies, we can come closer and closer to the posture of wholehearted commitment to Him. The posture of wholehearted commitment to the Lord is the hallmark of a successful life and we must seek earnestly to make good progress towards increasing depth of quality of such a posture.

How should Christians view doing well in career, achieving status and recognition in society and having material wealth?

The people of the world regard these things as very important. They are gripped by them and equate them with success. It is clear that this ought not be our perspective and approach to life. However, we need not, and should not, totally reject these things. We should not regard them as worldly, evil, or intrinsically harmful, because these things are not wrong or evil in themselves. A faithful walk with God can go together with doing well in career or studies, or having recognition and position in

society, or being entrusted with wealth by the Lord. However, we must ensure they are indeed the Lord's will for us.

I shall briefly refer to four biblical examples of men to whom God entrusted wealth and status.

Job

Job was well respected in society; he had status and was a wealthy man. God appreciated him greatly because he was a blameless and upright man. Job lived a life of faithfulness to God. Although he was severely afflicted and lost his children, wealth, and possessions during the trials, God blessed him again with wealth and status after that period of testing. This shows that possessions, wealth and status were part of the Lord's will for him.

Joseph

Joseph was exalted to become the ruler of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. But it was not a position that he coveted. It was clearly the Lord's will for him to be in that position of power and wealth.

David

When David was on the throne, he had recognition, authority and wealth and it was the will of God for him to be the king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:1, 11-13). It can, at times, be God's will for some of His children to be in such positions.

Daniel

Daniel was regarded as a man of high esteem, for God deeply appreciated him. He was faithful in all his ways and lived an exemplary life. With God's help and enabling and the wisdom that God gave him, Daniel attained a high position in society and was a good testimony for the Lord. It was the Lord's will for him to be in such a high earthly office.

What makes it wrong is the pursuit of these things

What then is the issue? What is it that makes these things the world equates with success unhealthy and negative? It has to do with our hearts' longing and approach. Do our hearts long for these things and reach out for them? Do we pursue these things as our goals and view them as marks of success and accomplishment in life? Do we seek fleshly indulgence and the fleshly enjoyment of material things? It is the erroneous perception and improper longing to lay hold of these things that make such pursuits wrong and unhealthy. For example, there is nothing wrong with having money; the problem is the love for it.

As Christians, we should consecrate our lives to the Lord, to be true and faithful to Him. We should set our hearts on the things above, and the prayer and longing of our hearts ought to be, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done". Should the Lord see

it fit for us to attain status and material wealth as part of a faithful walk with Him, we need not feel uneasy about it. We must, however, take note of three points:

First, these things are neither the basis nor the measurement of true success.

Second, these things must be held with open hands and with a true willingness to give them all up at anytime. We must not be gripped by them.

Daniel, in his faithful walk with the Lord, could be in a very high earthly position or in the lions' den. Regardless, he was prepared, not only to give up all his wealth and status, but also to face death for his faith.

What counts is being faithful to God. The correct posture of concentrating on being faithful to God will ensure that our life will be a truly meaningful life of success and accomplishment in the spiritual realm, whatever the context we may be in. Regardless of how things may appear, something positive will be taking place in the kingdom of God.

It would be incorrect to say that nothing positive was happening during the period when Joseph was a slave or a prisoner, or when Daniel was in the lions' den. In fact, those periods of time could very well be among the most positive and fruitful periods of their lives. How Joseph and Daniel went through those times glorified God and are powerful testimonies in the spiritual realm. There is much that we can learn from their lives and from their preparedness to be faithful to God whatever the cost. And the way God undertook for them is a great encouragement to all who desire to be faithful to God. However, trusting God's undertaking does not mean believing that He will always deliver those who trust Him from physical pain, suffering or even death (Heb. 11:36-38). This was the attitude Daniel's three friends demonstrated when they faced the prospect of being thrown into the furnace of fire (Dan. 3:18).

Third, we must have a genuine willingness never to have any of these things the world equates with success and be equally contented with or without them. Is this true of our lives? This was the attitude of the apostle Paul, which he reveals in Philippians 4:

Philippians 4:11-13

11 Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

The apostle Paul "learned to be content in whatever circumstances" he was in (v. 11). Whatever the Lord saw fit for him, he was fully satisfied. His heart was at rest.

He did not reach out for any other thing, so long as he could walk faithfully with the Lord. He could get on well, be it “humble means” or “prosperity” (v. 12).

Paul revealed that “in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry” (v. 12). If he was filled, that was fine with him; if he had to go hungry, he would also continue to rejoice. Whether it was “having abundance” or “suffering need”, he was contented. His heart was not centred on these things. His basic concentration was on the Lord—“for to me, to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). What mattered to him was whether he was exalting the Lord (Phil. 1:20) and whether he was walking faithfully with Him. *His joy and meaning in life was in the Lord. He found his satisfaction in God, in His fellowship, and in being faithful to Him.*

Paul also testified that “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (v. 13). The text here has the meaning that Paul had the strength, not only to do all things, but also to go through all kinds of situations. It is not that Paul was able to do so by himself, but it was through or in the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ was empowering him and strengthening him. That was the secret of his life. He was abiding in Christ and Christ was abiding in him. Is this also true of our lives?

These things can easily become a snare

At this point, I want to sound a note of caution. Although God may see it fit for us to experience some of these things, like doing well in career, having status in society and having material wealth, let us realise that these things can easily become a snare and a distraction. They can dilute our faith and commitment to God. We must be vigilant. Not many are able to fare well spiritually when they have an abundance of material wealth or when they attain secular status and authority.

Remember King Saul—he started with much promise, but note how his life degenerated after he was appointed king. He was unable to cope spiritually with being in that position. One factor that contributed to his degeneration was his clinging on to the kingship against the will of God¹.

King Uzziah is another example. The Scriptures records in 2 Chronicles 26 that he fared well initially and, with the Lord’s help, grew in stature and power as a king. He had a powerful army. But he was not able to cope in that position. He became proud and sinned against God. It led to God’s judgement, and he ended up being a leper till the end of his life.

The evil one tempted the Lord Jesus in the wilderness with “all the kingdoms of the world and their glory” (Matt. 4:8). Likewise, he seeks to tempt us by offering us these things in order to destroy us. Let us not be ignorant of his wiles.

¹ The life of Saul and his degeneration are considered in detail in two messages G10 and G11, both available on the website www.godandtruth.com.

It is very easy to be deluded into thinking that we have already resolved these areas in our lives. We may also rationalise wrongful desires within us by saying that it is not wrong for Christians to have such things, as long as our attitudes are right. We must exercise care not to justify ourselves in this way when there are such wrongful desires within us.

We may be sincerely seeking to grow, to serve God and to honour Him, and yet at the same time, we can be harbouring such wrongful desires. Having such mixed motives is often more prevalent and subtler than we may realise. We may refuse to acknowledge its presence in our hearts or fail to deal with them decisively. We may rationalise, for example, by saying that when we do well in career, or are well recognised in our professions, we will be good witnesses for Christ. But in reality, there could be personal ambition in our hearts to achieve these things and the spirit of the world is already at work in us. If this is the case, the work of the Holy Spirit will be hindered in our lives. This is a major stumbling block to true spiritual growth and success.

Some Christians may not seek these things initially. They may start off with good attitudes. But when they attain these things, they begin to cling to them. This will immediately have a negative effect on their spiritual life and their spiritual health and vitality.

Learning to be contented

Let us examine 1 Timothy 6:7-12, a passage that teaches us to be content and explains why.

1 Timothy 6:7-12

7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.

8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

11 But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.

12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

In verse 7, the apostle Paul tells us that “we cannot take anything out” of the world, emphasising the transitory nature of the things of this world. They are perishable and have no eternal value. Isn’t it foolish then for us to be preoccupied with amassing

earthly wealth? Instead, we should learn to be content even if we have only the basic necessities of life, with “food and covering” as Paul puts it in verse 8.

In verse 9, Paul tells us “those who want to get rich fall into temptation”, and in verse 10 he tells us “the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil”. There is nothing essentially evil or wrong with riches or money. The real issue is that of having wrong desires—the desire to be rich and the love of money. If we harbour such “foolish and harmful” desires, we will be exposing ourselves to temptations and will easily be ensnared. But in spite of clear biblical teachings and warnings, many believers are still ensnared, leading to their “ruin and destruction” (v. 9).

In verse 11, Paul exhorts us to turn away from pursuing the things of the world and instead to pursue “righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness”. This is part of fighting “the good fight of faith” (v. 12). Some believers may think that fighting the good fight of faith is a reference to spiritual warfare in the spiritual dimension and fail to realise that many “battles” that we need to fight and win also involve the visible, material, worldly attractions of this life. Fighting the good fight of faith involves fleeing from wrongful desires, and pursuing that which really counts. Our chief concern should therefore be with the things of enduring meaning and value in God's eternal kingdom.

Concluding remarks

What is crucial to true success and accomplishment is having the right motivation and being faithful to God. This will result in God's approval of our lives, in His blessings and undertaking, and in spiritual growth and fruitfulness. Then, whatever we do or go through in life, whether in prison or in an exalted earthly position like Joseph, whether as a fleeing fugitive or as king like David, and whether in the lions' den or in a high position in society like Daniel, there will be meaning and quality in our lives, whether or not it is obvious to others or to ourselves.

It is helpful always to remember the poor widow who contributed the two small copper coins. She might not even be conscious of the meaningfulness and significance of her contribution. Yet her contribution was very significant because her heart was right.

The Lord looks at the heart, and the true meaning that flows forth from there. The quality and the reality within is the critical issue. This is the way and perspective of God's kingdom.

Are we committed to this way and perspective? Are we concentrating on the inward qualities of our heart or are we indulging in our fleshly desires? *What we are committed to and what we concentrate on in life will determine whether we will be truly successful!*

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What can we learn from Moses and the apostle Paul about living a life of true success and accomplishment?
2. Share your understanding of the meaning and implications of our abiding in Christ and He in us.
3. How should Christians view doing well in career, achieving status and recognition in society and having material wealth?

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