

The Necessities of Successful Living

Scripture Reading:

Psalms 90:9-10 "FOR ALL OUR DAYS ARE PASSED AWAY IN THY WRATH: WE SPEND OUR YEARS AS A TALE *that is told*. THE DAYS OF OUR YEARS ARE THREESCORE YEARS AND TEN; AND IF BY REASON OF STRENGTH *they be* FOURSORE YEARS, YET *is* THEIR STRENGTH LABOUR AND SORROW; FOR IT IS SOON CUT OFF, AND WE FLY AWAY."

Yes, we spend our lives as a tale or story that is told; a life story that has a beginning and an end. It is a life story that endures sorrows and troubles, joys and happiness; a life that is limited by the aging and failing of this house of clay within which our spirits live. How we live our life, whom we serve, what kind of person we make ourselves, yes, I said make ourselves, for we have control of much of that; will determine what kind of story can be told about our life. When we have spent all of the years that God will give us; how we used those years will determine the ultimate destination of our souls; whether it be a heaven of joy, or a hell of torment. There are a number of necessities in life that we need in order to reach the goal of heaven. First of all we must have Christ in our lives.

Christ

When Jesus speaks to those listening to him during the sermon on the mount he tells them this:

"NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS: FOR EITHER HE WILL HATE THE ONE, AND LOVE THE OTHER; OR ELSE HE WILL HOLD TO THE ONE, AND DESPISE THE OTHER. YE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MAMMON. THEREFORE I SAY UNTO YOU, TAKE NO THOUGHT FOR YOUR LIFE, WHAT YE SHALL EAT, OR WHAT YE SHALL DRINK; NOR YET FOR YOUR BODY, WHAT YE SHALL PUT ON. IS NOT THE LIFE MORE THAN MEAT, AND THE BODY THAN RAIMENT?" **Matthew 6:24-25**

When we look at the words of the Master, what is the implication behind them? Man will serve some thing or somebody. It is the nature of man that we will serve and/or worship some thing or somebody. It may be material wealth, it may be physical or emotional pleasures, it may be sin brought about by desire, various lusts which can lead to addiction. It may be an idol god as much of the world worships even today or our ancestors as they do in the Shinto religion of Japan. Our choice is to serve these things that our Lord Jesus calls "MAMMON" or to serve God. Jesus didn't leave us or his audience without direction in this matter but said this:

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Matthew 6:31-34 “THEREFORE TAKE NO THOUGHT (be not therefore anxious ASV), SAYING, WHAT SHALL WE EAT? OR, WHAT SHALL WE DRINK? OR, WHEREWITHAL SHALL WE BE CLOTHED? (FOR AFTER ALL THESE THINGS DO THE GENTILES SEEK:) FOR YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER KNOWETH THAT YE HAVE NEED OF ALL THESE THINGS. BUT SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS; AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU. TAKE THEREFORE NO THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW: FOR THE MORROW SHALL TAKE THOUGHT FOR THE THINGS OF ITSELF. SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY **is** THE EVIL THEREOF.”

Do not be anxious about the material things of this world; don't make them your god or your total purpose in life. But, rather seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness; make your focus and your ultimate priority in this life your spiritual wellbeing. For that will yield an eternal reward. Oh, God knows we can't ignore the needs of our physical life but in and among all of the other things that are necessary for successful living, keep God first, live according to His word. Make eternity in heaven your focus, your goal, your purpose in life that is above all others.

Work

The second necessity in successful living is work. The wisdom of God tells us that:

“HE ALSO THAT IS SLOTHFUL IN HIS WORK IS BROTHER TO HIM THAT IS A GREAT WASTER.” **Proverbs 18:9**

So not only is he that is lazy condemned for his slothfulness he is also one that wastes his life, the time that God gives us. There is an old bit of wisdom that Mother taught me many years ago that has been proven true time and time again; idle hands are the devil's workshop.

God created and adapted man to work. He is to work with his hands, work with his mind, work in whatever fashion is available and appropriate for a child of God to do. This was true even when God placed our ancestors in that beautiful garden home called Eden:

Genesis 2:15 “AND THE **LORD** GOD TOOK THE MAN, AND PUT HIM INTO THE GARDEN OF EDEN TO DRESS IT AND TO KEEP IT.”

Then when man sinned as part of his punishment; when God removed him from this beautiful and bountiful garden and He made work more difficult for us. God cursed the ground; that we should eat of it in sorrow:

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Genesis 3:18-19 “THORNS ALSO AND THISTLES SHALL IT BRING FORTH TO THEE; AND THOU SHALT EAT THE HERB OF THE FIELD; IN THE SWEAT OF THY FACE SHALT THOU EAT BREAD, TILL THOU RETURN UNTO THE GROUND; FOR OUT OF IT WAST THOU TAKEN: FOR DUST THOU *art*, AND UNTO DUST SHALT THOU RETURN.”

Further we find in the doctrine of Christ this charge given by the Holy Spirit:

II Thessalonians 3:10 “FOR EVEN WHEN WE WERE WITH YOU, THIS WE COMMANDED YOU, THAT IF ANY WOULD NOT WORK, NEITHER SHOULD HE EAT.”

Oh, that’s terribly plain brother Paul, do you mean if we refuse to work, if we won’t work then we shouldn’t expect to eat? That is exactly what the Holy Spirit directed him to write. That also tells us something about how the church should conduct its benevolence work doesn’t it? But that’s a lesson for another day.

We should also be happy in our work. If we allow our work to become a drudgery, something that we hate to do, it will become a trouble to our souls. The wisdom given Solomon still speaks to us today:

Ecclesiastes 2:24 “*There is* NOTHING BETTER FOR A MAN, *than* THAT HE SHOULD EAT AND DRINK, AND *that* HE SHOULD MAKE HIS SOUL ENJOY GOOD IN HIS LABOUR. THIS ALSO I SAW, THAT IT *was* FROM THE HAND OF GOD.”

In the mind of God there is nothing better for a man than that he should enjoy the “GOOD IN HIS LABOR” whether that labor be for material good or spiritual good. When we set a purpose for ourselves, a goal that we want to reach; we should stick to it with the same attitude that Jesus had for the work He came to this earth to accomplish:

Matthew 20:28 “EVEN AS THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, BUT TO MINISTER, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE A RANSOM FOR MANY.”

Idleness exposes us to all kinds of temptations, imaginations, to things that will bring us woes and fears. It provides the opportunity to get ourselves into activities that could endanger our souls. This is the reason that Paul wrote to Timothy that the churches should take in only widows that were widows indeed. They should be widows no longer able to look after themselves because younger widows would:

“...LEARN *to be* IDLE, WANDERING ABOUT FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE; AND NOT ONLY IDLE, BUT TATTLERS ALSO AND BUSYBODIES, SPEAKING THINGS WHICH THEY OUGHT NOT.” **I Timothy 5:13**

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Work, purpose in our lives, is a necessity for the happiness and well-being of man, physically, emotionally and spiritually. And let's not overlook our good sisters in Christ. Women who are wives and mothers already have one full time job, a work that is God ordained and blessed in heaven. They have their work and the heroine of their lives should be the worthy woman whose example was given by God through the direction of the Holy Spirit in **Proverbs 31**.

Love

The third necessity for the art of living is love. Man has also been created to have a strong need for companionship. God saw that need and gave us the remedy at the beginning:

Genesis 2:18 "AND THE LORD GOD SAID, IT IS NOT GOOD THAT THE MAN SHOULD BE ALONE; I WILL MAKE HIM AN HELP MEET FOR HIM."

We are to find suitable companionship if that can be done. I say if that can be done because good Christian young people, men and women are hard to find these days. Some today are fortunate and are able to find good Christian mates that are willing, even eager to share righteous living and a right relationship with God. Many are not; and as an elder in the Lord's church I am painfully reminded almost daily of the trouble, sorrow and heartache caused by bad marriages. Most often I see young women, mothers, struggling, trying to live a Christian life, raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord married to men who are worthless or worse; husbands who are a hindrance to their spiritual well-being. But our love must be much broader than just our homes, our mates and our families. When asked by the lawyer what was the greatest commandment Jesus answered this way:

"JESUS SAID UNTO HIM, THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND. THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT." **Matthew 22:37-38**

And this was not a new commandment because Jesus was quoting **Deuteronomy 6:5** where the same was commanded of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant. And why is the love of God so necessary to the art of living? Because Jesus tells us in:

John 14:21 "HE THAT HATH MY COMMANDMENTS, AND KEEPETH THEM, HE IT IS THAT LOVETH ME: AND HE THAT LOVETH ME SHALL BE LOVED OF MY FATHER, AND I WILL LOVE HIM, AND WILL MANIFEST MYSELF TO HIM."

But our commandment to love doesn't stop there either. The rest of Jesus answer to the lawyer is this:

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Matthew 22:29 “AND THE SECOND IS LIKE UNTO IT, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF.”

So our love is not restricted to our mates and God but we are to love everyone; our near neighbors, fellow-workers, brothers and sisters in Christ, all of those around us. And yes, even our enemies and even those who curse us and spitefully use us (**Luke 6:28**).

An Acceptance of Self

One of the things that we encounter when dealing with people is that some of folks have a rather low opinion of themselves and more have a low opinion of others. We must accept the fact that different people have different talents and capabilities. Jesus recognized that in what we call the parable of the talents (**Matthew 25:14-30**). In using the natural order of things to teach a lesson in stewardship he also helps us to understand that there are one talent people, two talent people and even some five talent people. As we remember the story it doesn't matter in the kingdom of heaven how many talents the Lord has given us but rather how we use that talent or those talents that God has given us. The servant who was given five talents gained five more:

Matthew 25:20 ” AND SO HE THAT HAD RECEIVED FIVE TALENTS CAME AND BROUGHT OTHER FIVE TALENTS, SAYING, LORD, THOU DELIVEREDST UNTO ME FIVE TALENTS: BEHOLD, I HAVE GAINED BESIDE THEM FIVE TALENTS MORE.”

And the two talent man also gained two more. But the one talent man didn't use his talent:

Matthew 25:25 “AND I WAS AFRAID, AND WENT AND HID THY TALENT IN THE EARTH: LO, *there* THOU HAST *that is* THINE.”

This man was afraid, afraid to use that one talent that his master had given him. Are we like the two talent and five talent men or are we like the one talent man. I have no doubt at all that had he used that talent, he would have been approved by this master just like the other two men were. Not everyone has the same talents. Not everyone can be a good cook, even among women; not everyone is cut out to be an accountant, a merchant, a carpenter, painter, and the list could go on and on. It doesn't matter whether we have the talent to proclaim the Word of God and exhort folks to live better Christian lives or if we only have the talent to help keep the meeting house clean and prepared for God's people to use, or prepare the Lord's Supper for Sunday worship. Every person is important to the Lord God of Heaven. The apostle wrote words that help us understand that we all have a place in God's Kingdom.

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Ephesians 4:11-12 “AND HE GAVE SOME, APOSTLES; AND SOME, PROPHETS; AND SOME, EVANGELISTS; AND SOME, PASTORS AND TEACHERS; FOR THE PERFECTING OF THE SAINTS, FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY, FOR THE EDIFYING OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.”

It is an essential part of successful living to accept what we have in terms of abilities, even though we might feel that our talents and capabilities are inferior to others or that we might have severe handicaps. We must spend our time and efforts developing, growing, strengthening and using those talents that we do have rather than complaining and making ourselves miserable over what we do not have or can't get. Or be like the one talent man who buried his talent and didn't use it.

We should accept those things that limit us, those things that are beyond our control; we should accept whatever level of achievement that we are capable of reaching. Paul tells that he learned this vital lesson during his lifetime:

Philippians 4:11 “NOT THAT I SPEAK IN RESPECT OF WANT: FOR I HAVE LEARNED, IN WHATSOEVER STATE I AM, *therewith* TO BE CONTENT.”

And yet; while we should be content with what we have, with our station and situation in this life we should never be content with what we are. We should never become satisfied with our spiritual lives, our relationship with God, our preparation for the judgment, for that would put our eternal destiny in danger. Again a lesson from the Holy Spirit through the pen of Paul:

Philippians 3:13-14 “BRETHREN, I COUNT NOT MYSELF TO HAVE APPREHENDED: BUT *this* ONE THING *I do*, FORGETTING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEHIND, AND REACHING FORTH UNTO THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE BEFORE, I PRESS TOWARD THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE OF THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.”

And so shall we all! On occasion we must also:

Examine Ourselves

Periodically we need to sit down and take inventory of our lives. We need to make sure that in pursuing our daily interests we haven't let ourselves neglect an important part of our lives. We need to make sure that we haven't become so focused on one or two things in our lives while we're neglecting others that are just as important. God again admonishes us through Paul:

II Corinthians 13:5 “EXAMINE YOURSELVES, WHETHER YE BE IN THE FAITH; PROVE YOUR OWN SELVES. KNOW YE NOT YOUR OWN SELVES, HOW THAT JESUS CHRIST IS IN YOU, EXCEPT YE BE REPROBATES?”

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Except we be untrue to our calling. Jesus Christ is in us, dwells in us, for we are the temple of God. If we are untrue to that calling, we are reprobate and subject to the wrath of God.

“LEST WE BE REPROBATES” This kind of self-examination can be done to find the things within our lives that we need change in order to be a better person, a better Christian, a better husband, a better wife, a better man or a better woman. Sometimes this kind of self examination must be done because it is critical to our spiritual well-being. About 50 years ago I went through a self-examination that was totally critical to my spiritual well-being and changed my life completely for the better and sometimes folks need to do that.

Another kind of examination should be done on a regular basis, weekly on the first day of the week. Speaking of the Lord’s Supper; God gives us this admonition:

I Corinthians 11:26-29 “FOR AS OFTEN AS WE EAT THIS BREAD, AND DRINK THIS CUP, WE DO SHEW THE LORD’S DEATH TILL HE COME. WHEREFORE WHOSOEVER SHALL EAT THIS BREAD, AND DRINK *this* CUP OF THE LORD, UNWORTHILY, SHALL BE GUILTY OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF THE LORD. BUT LET A MAN EXAMINE HIMSELF, AND SO LET HIM EAT OF *that* BREAD, AND DRINK OF *that* CUP. FOR HE THAT EATETH AND DRINKETH UNWORTHILY, EATETH AND DRINKETH DAMNATION TO HIMSELF, NOT DISCERNING THE LORD’S BODY.”

Definition: we partake when we are not fit due to sin, or eat and drink without understanding the true sacrifice. We need to be able to see ourselves as God and others see us. As we all know; when we have a weakness or a fault we must first recognize that weakness or fault exists before we will ever be in a position to do anything about it. Probably the most extreme example of right and wrong thinking in scripture is the account of Apostle Paul in Acts 7 and 9.

We should focus any criticism that we find in that self-examination upon ourselves and correct whatever we find to criticize:

Matthew 7:3-5 “AND WHY BEHOLDEST THOU THE MOTE THAT IS IN THEY BROTHER’S EYE, BUT CONSIDEREST NOT THE BEAM THAT IS IN THINE OWN EYE? OR HOW WILT THOU SAY TO THY BROTHER, LET ME PULL OUT THE MOTE OUT OF THINE EYE; AND, BEHOLD, A BEAM *is* IN THINE OWN EYE? THOU HYPOCRITE, FIRST CAST OUT THE BEAM OUT OF THINE OWN EYE; AND THEN SHALT THOU SEE CLEARLY TO CAST OUT THE MOTE OUT OF THY BROTHER’S EYE.”

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Interest in Others

We can never convert others to the cause of Christ unless we are genuinely interested in their welfare and the welfare of their souls. There are four ways that we can work on this essential. First of all by following the teaching of Jesus that the world has paraphrased and calls the Golden Rule:

Matthew 7:12 "THEREFORE ALL THINGS WHATSOEVER YE WOULD THAT MEN SHOULD DO TO YOU, DO YE EVEN TO THEM: FOR THIS IS THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS."

Next we need to learn to show concern and compassion for others. This is the context of Paul's writing to the brethren at Philippi in:

Philippians 2:3-4 "*let* NOTHING *be done* THROUGH STRIFE OR VAINGLORY; BUT IN LOWLINESS OF MIND LET EACH ESTEEM OTHER BETTER THAN THEMSELVES. LOOK NOT EVERY MAN ON HIS OWN THINGS, BUT EVERY MAN ALSO ON THE THINGS OF OTHERS."

And in his writing to the church at Galatia:

Galatians 6:2 "BEAR YE ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS, AND SO FUFILL THE LAW OF CHRIST."

When we genuinely feel love, compassion and caring for our fellow man and particularly our brothers and sisters in Christ then we will be ready to follow Paul's instructions to the Roman brethren:

Romans 12:15-16 "REJOICE WITH THEM THAT DO REJOICE, AND WEEP WITH THEM THAT WEEP. BE OF THE SAME MIND ONE TOWARD ANOTHER. MIND NOT HIGH THINGS, BUT CONDESCEND TO MEN OF LOW ESTATE. BE NOT WISE IN YOUR OWN CONCEITS."

Those that are self-centered and wise in their own conceits many times are void of any real happiness.

Live Life One Day at a Time

After telling us to seek first the kingdom of God, Jesus follows with this thought:

Matthew 6:34 "TAKE THEREFORE NO THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW: FOR THE MORROW SHALL TAKE THOUGHT FOR THE THINGS OF ITSELF. SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY *is* THE EVIL THEREOF."

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Tomorrow will take care of itself. And really this is only way that life can be lived. Yesterday is gone, we can't change it. We can learn from its lessons. Perhaps we can even correct its mistakes. We can make sure that we don't repeat those mistakes and use that knowledge and experience to govern our lives today. We can perhaps even savor its accomplishments; enjoy the fruit of its plans and preparations that provided for our means for today.

What about tomorrow? Tomorrow hasn't come yet and may never come. Oh, yes; we must prepare so that if tomorrow does come we can sustain ourselves and others for whom we are responsible. We must always work today to prepare for that great tomorrow that is inevitable; that tomorrow that will come for all men when they face God in judgment. The writer of James records the following lesson for us:

James 4:13-15 "GO TO NOW, YE THAT SAY, TO DAY OR TO MORROW WE WILL GO INTO SUCH A CITY, AND CONTINUE THERE A YEAR, AND BUY AND SELL, AND GET GAIN: WHEREAS YE KNOW NOT WHAT *shall be* ON THE MORROW. FOR WHAT IS YOUR LIFE? IT IS EVEN A VAPOUR THAT APPEARETH FOR A LITTLE TIME, AND THEN VANISHETH AWAY. FOR WHAT YE *ought* TO SAY *is that* IF THE LORD WILL, WE SHALL LIVE, AND DO THIS, OR THAT."

Proverbs 27:1 "BOAST NOT THYSELF OF TOMORROW; FOR THOU KNOWEST NOT WHAT A DAY MAY BRING FORTH."

Peter also reminds us of the shortness of our stay here on this earth:

I Peter 1:24 "FOR ALL FLESH *is* AS GRASS, AND ALL THE GLORY OF MAN AS THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERETH, AND THE FLOWER THEREOF FALLETH AWAY:"

Many try to carry the weight of the future and all the burdens of the past at the same time. Consequently they are so loaded down with all of these things they can't function properly. We cannot change the history of yesterday, it's gone; it's spent and not recoverable. Oh, we can remove the effects of those things done yesterday from our souls. If we are not a child of God by virtue of having been added to the church that Christ promised to build in **Matthew 16:18** we need only follow the pattern that Jesus and His apostles prescribed:

Hear that word of God that we might have faith: **Romans 10:17**

Nurture that faith that it may become strong enough to lead us to determine to seek admittance into His kingdom through Jesus Christ as we're told we must do in **John 10:7ff**

Repent of those past sins in our lives, wipe the slate clean, have God give us a new start as Jesus says we must in **Luke 13:3**

Confess that you do indeed believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God the Saviour of the world before men as require in **Matthew 10:32**
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Be baptized to be added to His church, His family, His kingdom, as those were on Pentecost **Acts 2:38, 47**

If we are already children of God but have fallen away, denied Christ by your life or need to come to God in repentance for any reason we should do as the Apostle Peter instructed Simon in Acts 8:22 and repent and pray God for forgiveness. Or we must do as we're instructed in **James 5:16** to pray with you and for you. If you have need to respond to the invitation of God; won't you come as we stand and sing.