



The Success Mess: Spiritual Success

OPENING PRAYER

Invite a member of the group to lead prayer.

Read 1 Timothy 6:11-19.

“But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.”

WEEK FOUR: SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

We have ways to measure almost everything. Thanks to the internet, computers, and our mobile devices, information is at our fingertips or even available through voice commands. The opening of the football season is quickly approaching and many of us will be participating in fantasy football drafts. We make draft players based on the player's production from the previous year. For those of us who make purchases online, we often look at the product's reviews. Before purchasing a home in a new community, we often look at the ratings of the schools and the crime statistics. We can even search Facebook or Google to find reviews about churches. We use this information to determine the success of the player, the product, or the place. How do we measure the success of our lives? By the world's definition of success, success is measured in Benjamins, dough, greenbacks, or cash. The more money you have, the more things you can buy.

1 Timothy 6:3-10 deals with the love of money. The issue is that there are people in the early Christian community who are preaching and teaching false doctrines. These people are willing to twist the Gospel in order to achieve financial benefit. They love creating controversy and winning debates. It is unclear if these people are teaching and preaching a form of, "name it and claim it" prosperity gospel, or if they are preaching and teaching false doctrine because it plays well to their audience or congregation. The gospel of prosperity summarized is $\text{tithe} + \text{faith} = \text{more money and better health}$. According to this gospel, your spiritual success can be measured by how much money you have and how healthy you are. If you are broke and unhealthy, either you don't have enough faith (not positive enough), or you didn't give enough money to the offering. Additionally, pastors or other ministers of the Gospel should not judge the success of their ministries by the size of their budgets.

In 1 Timothy 6:11-19, Paul cautioned against determining success by how much money one acquires. If we are not careful, in our pursuit of the almighty dollar, we may forget that we are servants of the almighty God who pursued us, saved us, and empowers us. Making our primary goal to chase paper leads to evil. Love of God, followed by the love of neighbor and self, should be our primary goals. So, we should flee from the unhealthy pursuit of money that leads us away from God. Does that mean that we should not work hard or make wise investments? No, it simply means don't become a servant of money, nor measure success by how much money you acquire.

Instead, the measure of spiritual success is righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. Instead of taking hold of the worldly definition of success and all that comes with that, we should take hold of the gift of eternal life. Righteousness has to do with being in right relationship with God and humanity. So, we must seek to live out the Greatest Com-

mandment - to love God with all our being, and the second, to love our neighbor as ourselves. One of the ways that we can do that is through our financial giving to the ministries of the church and to people in need. Our faith is demonstrated when we choose to place our hope and trust in the God that we cannot see, instead of the dollar that we can see. We demonstrate endurance when we choose to hold on to the hand of God, even when things may not look good for us financially or physically. We demonstrate gentleness when we choose to help rather than harm, speak love rather than hate, give rather than hoard, heal rather than injure, and pick up rather than knock down.

GROUP REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Share where you've seen God at work in your life this week. What are your highs/lows?

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What is the nature of "eternal" success? What really matters?

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How do we live with an eternal perspective?

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What does spiritual success really look like? Winning debates? Having all the answers? Information... or transformation?

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What was the most impactful thing you learned from this curriculum, sermon series, or the podcast?

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PRAISE AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Please go around the group and have each person share a praise for this week and a prayer request/concern.

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CLOSING PRAYER

Have a volunteer lead closing prayer: asking for prayer concerns and lifting up the needs of the group.

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WC ENCOUNTER GROUPS CURRICULUM

WEEK FOUR: SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

FAMILY ENCOUNTER

WEEK FOUR

Supplies:

- Bible
- Sacred Candle & Matches/Lighter
- Markers, pens, pencils
- Paper

WELCOMING GOD:

Gather together, and welcome God into this time and space through the lighting of a candle. Take this moment to pause briefly and sit quietly in this light for a few moments, allowing time for everyone to relax their body, mind, and spirit for this time. In these moments, the invitation is to become aware of God's presence with and amongst you as a family.

SHARING WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER:

Say: "If anything is on our minds that makes it difficult for us to focus, let's share it now and then let it go."

- Whoever leads this portion might share what is on his or her mind to model this. Give time for each person to respond. When everyone has responded that would like to, invite everyone to place their hands out and lift them up as we give these distractions to God.

OR you can invite the family to pray together as one person leads, saying the following:

"Dear Loving God, The One who knows our hearts, celebrates our victories, grieves with us during our losses, and gives us the strength to overcome our challenges. Please help us to let go of the distractions we name now, so that we can openly share with our family and may encounter you in a special way today. Our distractions are... (let there be silence here, so everyone has an opportunity to name aloud what is distracting them).

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen."

ENCOUNTERING GOD:

Read aloud: 1 Timothy 6:11-19.

- Take turns reading the Scripture or have a different family member read the Scripture each week.

"But as for you, man of God, run away from all these things. Instead, pursue righteousness, holy living, faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness. Compete in the good fight of faith. Grab hold of eternal life—you were called to it, and you made a good confession of it in the presence of many witnesses. I command you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and Christ Jesus, who made the good confession when testifying before Pontius Pilate. Obey this order without fault or failure until the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. The timing of this appearance is revealed by God alone, who is the blessed and only master, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He alone has immortality and lives in light that no one can come near. No human being has ever seen or is able to see him. Honor and eternal power belong to him. Amen. Tell people who are rich at this time not to become egotistical and not to place their hope on their finances, which are uncertain. Instead, they need to hope in God, who richly provides everything for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in the good things they do, to be generous, and to share with others. When they do these things, they will save a treasure for themselves that is a good foundation for the future. That way they can take hold of what is truly life."

ENCOUNTERING EACH OTHER:

Say: “Paul tells Timothy to tell others to do good, be generous, and share with others. He says this is how we save a treasure for our future and that this is how we take hold of what is truly life. Living well then is caught up in how we love God and others. And this means sharing our time and gifts. Today, let’s think about making time for God, and for each other, as a part of sharing.”

Activity: Have everyone in the family write or draw what a typical week might look like for them - draw or write your schedule. See if you can find 20 minutes in the week. Choose 10 of them to spend time with God - maybe pray or read your Bible. Then, mark the other 10 for sharing time with someone else you care about. Ask them what their favorite story or movie is, and what makes it their favorite.

Discussion Questions

- What might make the activity above an adventure in sharing?
- Why do you think talking with each other and with God is important?
- What else - other than your time - can you share with people to help them know and feel God’s love?

*For an alternative, or additional, activity this week, download the #WCBackto-School Prayer & Planning Guide to complete as a family!

ENCOUNTERING GOD TOGETHER:

Say: “May we pray together as a family...”

Let us share our prayers for the world: for our country and leaders, for other countries and their leaders...

Let us share our prayers for the church, ministers, and spiritual leaders...

Let us share our prayers for our teachers, first responders, friends, and others in the community...

Let us share our prayers for our family and our own specific needs...”

If you would like to record the people for whom you pray, use the next few lines to do so:

*You can also record these requests in a family prayer journal if you are using one.

ENCOUNTERING TRANSFORMATION TOGETHER:

Pray aloud together:

God, we welcomed you here and read Your Word,
we prayed and we spent time with you,
we rested in your love for us,
and we did this all together.

Now, we promise to love one another and others as you love us.
In the name of Christ. Amen.

BLESSING ONE ANOTHER FOR OUR ENCOUNTERS WITH THE WORLD:

Invite family members to bless one another using any of the examples below or their own blessings.

Examples:

- "I love you. God loves you. I pray God blesses you."
- "God loves you exactly like you are—and so do I."
- "I love the gifts God has given you and how you bless the world with them."

DAILY REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Please answer these during your personal devotional time at the end of the day or do it as a couple or family.

Where have you seen God today? For the children, we say, "what made you happy today?"

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What broke your heart or made you sad today?

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What good thing did you do for someone else today?

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What are you thankful for today?

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