

Succeeding in Life Without Losing Your Soul

Lesson 8

GROW DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM

Engaging the Learner

Our society teaches us to drop individuals, both others and ourselves, into two categories-- success and failure. Our language, our pastimes, and our credos form us from childhood to label ourselves as winners or losers. "There's no prize for second place." "Runner-up is just another name for number one loser." These sayings determine our understanding of sports, jobs, and even romance. When we play a game, the first question we're asked is not, "Did you have a good time?" or even, "How did you play?" No, they want to know, "Did you win?" Were you successful? TV and movies often tell us success is the house we move into, the attractiveness of our mate, the car we drive, and the vacation we take. Never mind that being successful by this definition means other people must lose. The message is clear. We must win.

But God says, "Be in the world, but not of it." He turns the idea of "winners" on its head. "The first will be last and the last will be first," He says. "Blessed are the poor for theirs is the Kingdom of God," He says. God tosses out our definition of success and says, "You have heard you've got to win, but I tell you, there is another way." But if we discard the world's version of success, with what is it replaced? How do we become successful Christians? How do we hear the words God longs to speak, "Well done, my good and faithful servant"?

Exploring the Lesson

This lesson will explore two questions: What counts as success for a Christian and how do we achieve this level of living? While many scriptural passages deal with this issue, 2 Peter 1:1-11 is particularly helpful and will serve as our guide as we seek to answer these questions. Take a moment to read over this passage before continuing.

What Counts as Success for a Christian?

Another way of asking this question might be, "What does a successful Christian look like?" Verses 1-11 begin like most letters, acknowledging the intended audience. Verse 2 tells us that these words are addressed to people of faith—Christians. In verse 4 we first glimpse the goal of a successful believer— "So that... you may participate in the divine nature (of God)." Wow! Unlike the world, which defines success as who we are, God defines success in relationship to who He is. The pressure to be successful is taken off us and placed on God! The passage continues to describe successful Christians as those who "escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." What do successful Christians look like? Using God's power, they participate in God's nature and escape the corruption of this world.

Verse 8 continues the description, telling us we should be effective and productive in our knowledge of Jesus Christ. We are also to have a clear understanding of God's work in us (1:9). In addition, a successful Christian makes certain that they are right before God (1:10). Verses 10b-11 finish the description of success in Christ with this beautiful picture: "For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!" How do Christians judge success? By participating in God's nature, escaping the corruption of the world, being

effective and productive in our knowledge of Christ, maintaining a clear perspective of God's work in us, making sure we are right with God, refusing to fall, and receiving a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom!

How Do We Achieve This Level of Living

So, we know what God counts as success, but how can we be successful? Through 2 Peter, God also reveals how to achieve these expectations. Verse 3 begins, "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness." First, we are successful through God's power. The passage tells us His power supplies everything we need to be successful. We are empowered through our relationship with Christ.

Second, through God's glory and goodness, He has prepared us for success through His great promises (1:4). These promises allow us to participate in His divine nature—to enjoy the same character as God, honorable and good. Further, they illuminate a better existence and future and show us an alternative to earthly values, allowing us to resist the corruption of the world.

Finally, God gives us the grace to add spiritual qualities to our faith. When God saves us by grace, all we have is faith. However, we learn from verses 5-8 that our ability to live the Christian life relies on our building upon this initial faith. So what must we construct on our faith foundation? First goodness, then knowledge, then self-control, then perseverance, then godliness, then brotherly kindness, then love. Each of these qualities is directly related to our spiritual success. For example, developing goodness and love and living in these qualities permits us to participate in God's divine nature. God's nature is goodness and love. As with any renovation or construction project, these spiritual additions are hard work. We must be diligent and sincere. Verse 5 reminds us to "Make every effort to add to your faith . . ."

Enhancing Our Lives

We've examined God's understanding of success and how He has empowered Christians to be successful in this life and for eternity. The following exercises are designed to help you receive God's power and realize His promises.

1. Receiving God's Power:

- a. In an attitude of prayer, make sure there is no disobedience blocking God from working in you. God will never force you to follow Him. Before He will empower you for success, you must decide you want to be a disciple.
- b. Desire Christ's will for every area of your life. Express this desire to God.
- c. Prayerfully take on a responsibility or calling you cannot accomplish on your own.
- d. Use up all your abilities and power.
- e. Realize you need God's power to accomplish this task.
- f. Pray to God about your need.
- g. Make yourself available to His power supply through attending worship services, personal prayer, and Bible reading.
- h. When God's power comes, use it to accomplish your task.

Review your life. When have you experienced God's power? What were you able to accomplish? What did success teach you?

2. Living in God's promises:

List some of God's promises:

How does your knowledge of these promises affect you daily? Take one or two of these promises and pray them regularly until they become a part of your life. You may want to begin with Psalm 23, which contains a number of promises.

3. Adding spiritual qualities to your faith

2 Peter 1:5 tells you to make every effort to add a number of spiritual qualities to your life. The following exercises are designed to help you do this.

a. Goodness (virtue or morality)

List the things you do or do not do because there is an ethical issue involved.

Do	Don't

b. Knowledge

Your moral standards are based on someone's teaching or personal experience. God wants us to increase our knowledge of ethics or morals in order to make us good. Where can you find more information that leads to good living? Determine to be aware of ethical preaching in your pastor's sermons, and ethical issues in your daily Bible reading. Incorporate these teachings into your life.

c. Self-control

Search for an undisciplined area in your life. This might be negative thoughts or attitudes, impatience, temper, lust, suggestive conversations, gossip, excessive eating, compulsive buying, or some other issue.

Once you have determined an area, choose to be an "overcomer." Overcoming will mean changing your attitude regarding the issue. To help you do this, tell a close friend you have determined to change this area in your life and ask for his or her prayers in that area. While you are overcoming, get plenty of sleep and beware of the temptation to surrender. Strengthen your resolve by staying away from circumstances and influences that might prove seductive. Finally, if you fail, don't give up. Analyze what steps brought you to temptation and adjust your plan to account for this weakness.

d. Perseverance

1. Complete a task you've left unfinished.
2. Make a contract to pray for a reasonable number of minutes per day for two weeks. Stick to it.

e. Godliness

So far, every trait can be acquirable by a disciplined person. However, the trait of godliness can only be fully given to us by God.

List the characteristics of a godly person:

Pray that God would transform you into this type of person.

f. Brotherly kindness

1. Think of a person at your church who means a great deal to you. In the space below, write down that person's name. Now, plan to do something nice for that person in the next few weeks. Write it on your calendar and stick with it.

2. Do something nice for a child.

g. Love

Like godliness, love is something only God can fully give you. Exercise the love you already have. "Brag" on God sometime this week. Perform an act of kindness for a person you know needs God.

Outline for Small Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

All questions and exercises are useful for either personal or small group reflection. While exercises marked with an asterisk (*) are written specifically for a small group leader, individual learners can easily modify the exercise for their personal study.

Engaging the Learner

*As a class, determine someone you consider successful. Write words or phrases that describe that person on a dry erase or chalk board. Ask, "Why do we consider this person successful?"

Do you consider yourself a success? Why or why not?

Exploring the Lesson/Enhancing Your Life

*Ask someone to read 2 Peter 1-10 to the class.

Who defines success for a Christian? What do you think it means to participate in the divine nature of God?

What must we do to keep from falling?

*Ask the class to list how the Christian is to judge success according to 2 Peter 1-10.

How Do We Achieve this Level of Living?

*Ask your class members to name times when they have felt God's power. How did they know God was helping them? Are they using God's power now?

How do God's promises allow us to be successful?

*Dry a line down the middle of your dry erase board, forming two sides. On the left side, list between five and ten characteristics of success to the world. These might be power, attractiveness, etc. On the right side, list God's promises that give us an option to becoming corrupted by the world in this area. For example, for "Attractive" you might say, "You want to be attractive so that you will never be alone. God promises He will never leave us nor forsake us."

What things must we add to our faith? Which of these is easiest for you? Hardest?

*Say, "Describe a person or group that practices God's love. What do they do?" After the class has a good list, challenge the class to adopt one or two of the actions to perform as a class. Set a date and divide up responsibilities.

*End the class time by reading 2 Peter 1:11 again. Have your class close their eyes and imagine what it will be like to have a rich welcome into the kingdom of God. Give them several minutes. After they have finished, you may want to ask them to describe how they imagined that moment.

Close in prayer.