

How God Spells Success

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God wants you to succeed. He didn't call you into leadership to fail in what he created you to do. But here's the catch—he doesn't define success like the rest of the world defines it.

The world measures success by how you look, what you have, or who you know. But God says success is measured by who you are—your character.

The apostle Paul is a great example of success in the Bible. He models for us seven attitudes we need to have in our ministries, as shown in the acrostic: **SUCCESS**.

1. **Sense of direction.**

"My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else" (Romans 15:20 NLT).

You can't succeed if you don't know where you are headed. You may have heard the saying, "If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else." That's true in our ministries and in every other area of our lives.

Paul knew where he was going when God had called him to plant churches. He was a pioneer who wanted to start churches where people didn't know Jesus. He never wavered from that sense of direction.

Not only did he know what God called him to do, but he was determined to succeed. Paul wrote, *"I keep trying to reach the goal and get the prize for which God called me through Christ to the life above"* (Philippians 3:14 NCV). Paul wouldn't settle for a subpar performance. God had called him to start churches where Jesus wasn't known, and Paul reached his goal.

2. **Understanding.**

"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation . . . I can do all things through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:12-13 NIV).

Paul had an incredible depth of understanding. For example, he understood there was no conflict between contentment and success. He wasn't born with that contentment. He learned it.

You can't get the understanding Paul brought to his ministry from a self-help book. You get it from the Bible. Joshua 1:8 tells us we'll find success when we study, memorize, and apply the Bible to our lives.

3. Commitment.

"I don't care about my own life. The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me—to tell people the Good News about God's grace" (Acts 20:24 NCV).

Many leaders struggle with making commitments. They look at life like a buffet. They're afraid if they commit too early, they will miss out on something at the end. Paul realized that God's mission had to be his top priority.

During seminary, I did an independent study of the 100 largest churches in the United States. I discovered large churches differed greatly in terms of strategy, structure, and style. My study confirmed that these large churches had one thing in common: They were all led by pastors who stayed at the church for a long time.

That's why I made the commitment at the beginning of Saddleback to be there for 40 years, which I completed. Commitment is crucial to success.

4. Compassion.

"I may have the gift of prophecy. I may understand all the secret things of God and have all knowledge, and I may have faith so great I can move mountains. But even with all these things, if I do not have love, then I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2 NCV).

Your work will struggle to succeed if your plans are accomplished without love. Jesus set our priorities in Matthew 22:37-39 when he gave us The Great Commandment—love God and love others. You can summarize the entire

Bible in those two phrases.

Success is inevitable when leaders genuinely care about the people they lead. People want to follow someone who they know will love them and will be willing to serve them.

5. **Enthusiastic faith.**

"Christ gives me the strength to face anything" (Philippians 4:13 CEV).

Paul was an eternal optimist. In Romans 8:31, he said, *"What can we say about all this? If God is on our side, can anyone be against us?"* (CEV). Paul knew nothing was too difficult. Many centuries later, missionary William Carey said, *"Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."* The apostle Paul made that concept a cornerstone in his ministry.

The word *enthusiasm* originally comes from the Greek phrase "in God." Enthusiasm comes from having God in your life.

You'll face impossible tasks in your ministry, but your ability to accomplish them will grow to the size of your dreams.

6. **Service to others.**

"We are doing this service to bring glory to the Lord and to show that we really want to help" (2 Corinthians 8:19 NCV).

You won't find success without service. Jesus said, *"Whoever wants to become great among you must serve the rest of you like a servant"* (Matthew 20:26 NCV).

The more you give your life away, the more you get back. Paul gave everything to help others (2 Corinthians 12:15).

7. **Staying power.**

"We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NLT).

When I read these verses in 2 Corinthians 4, I always imagine an NFL quarterback evading blitzing linebacker. That's the picture Paul gives us of facing our problems from every direction.

Paul understood that success didn't mean that you would stop facing problems. In fact, success brings on a new round of problems. But Paul had already committed to never giving up. Look at all he faced in his ministry—stoning, imprisonment, being left for dead—yet Paul kept going.

Successful people fail, but they have staying power. They refuse to quit.