

CLIMBING THE LADDER OF LASTING SUCCESS

RUNGS THAT ARE REACHING TOWARD THE HEART OF SUCCESS--I PETER 5:5-7

Introduction: Our society's quest for success reminds me of a smorgasbord, where the diners are gorging themselves on the sweet taste of success.

- As a society, we've filled our plates from a buffet of books ranging from "dressing for success" to "investing for success."
- And when we've devoured them, we have turned our ravenous appetites toward seminars.
- We've gobbled down whole notebooks and cassette albums in our hunger for success.
- The irony is, our appetite for successful and meaningful lives has no lasting satisfaction: One author says: "There is never enough success in anybody's life to make one feel completely satisfied"--Jean Rosenbaum, quoted in Quote/Unquote, comp. Lloyd Cory (Wheaton, IL.: SP Publications, Victor Books, 1977), p. 315.
- Instead of fulfillment, we experience the bloated sensation of being mostly full of ourselves.
- So the result of that *all-you-can-eat appetite* is not contentment, sometimes it's nausea, especially if certain approaches/attitudes are missing from the menu.

Sadly, many church leaders have the same ravenous appetite for success.

- Their quest for success has taken them to a similar smorgasbord that doesn't seem to satisfy either.
- I don't believe we should throw out the baby with the bath water when it comes to the many wonderful resources and seminars we have for the church today.
- We here at Hillcrest have been very blessed by some wonderful resources, and to God's glory, we have been able to give some assistance to many churches because of the journey and the lessons we have learned along the way.
- I am thankful for the opportunity to influence for good; I love to share what the Lord has made clear to us about church life.

Today, however, I want to change the metaphor from a buffet to a ladder and share with you what might be called, "rungs that are reaching toward the heart of success."

- These are steps we should consider whether we are focused on the church or the marketplace.
- So if you're not climbing at all, or your climb has left you feeling disappointed and unfulfilled;
- If you don't need another seminar on success, but you do need to learn how to be satisfied;
- Then what we want to offer to you today, hopefully, can be just what we all need.

Before we get to those needed and/or welcome rungs to our ladder, let's review some of the "rungs for success" that we find in our society!

BUILDING A HEART

- Think with me...what do the Madison Avenue ad campaigns promise for would-be success, especially in the marketplace?
- These appealing messages fall into four categories. (They are not necessarily sequential, but nonetheless are seen as essential.)

The first appealing message is **fortune**. The subliminal message is that to be successful, we need to make a great deal of money. Although money is not sinful or suspect in itself, it is obvious that money does not bring happiness or fulfillment.

The second appealing message is **fame**. To be successful, the ad campaigns say, we need to become known in the public arena. We need to be a celebrity, a social somebody. In this view, fame and popularity become the twin sisters of significance.

The third appealing message is **power**. To be successful, the success seminars say, we need to wield a lot of authority, carry a lot of weight, flex our muscles, take charge and be in control.

The fourth appealing message is **pleasure**. To be successful, the messages imply, we need to be able to do whatever satisfies our sensual side. This philosophy operates on the pleasure principle, "We deserve every bit of pleasure we can acquire."

In the church world, the corollaries to these four might be:

- **A big budget and building**
- **Attendance records**
- **Name recognition (popularity)**
- **Advancement to greater opportunities**

Summary: In and of themselves there is nothing wrong with these goals, but they are empty and don't satisfy, if other heart matters are lacking.

So let's take a look at Fortune; Fame; Power; Pleasure; or in the church world--big budgets, attendance records, name recognition and advancement to greater opportunities.

- If we look closely at this list, what's missing?
- Simply stated, it's a vertical, horizontal and interior dimension.
- There's no focus on God's will, what pleases Him, or the essential attitudes for success.
- There is also nothing in that list which will guarantee satisfaction deep within the heart.
- In other words, the heart of the matter is literally missing.

So what we need is a means for "**Climbing the Ladder of Lasting Success.**"

- Contrary to the world's formula for success, God's formula includes the attitudes necessary to climb to the heart of success and reflect God's heart in the process.
- Last week we shared with you the foundational attitude necessary to take us to lasting success.
- The statement is one I pray will be central to our understanding of success.
- It is, "Doing all things to win some and leaving a legacy for the next generation."
- Please pick up the cassette from that service or download my notes from our web site.
- This week we want to go from that foundation to the rungs leading us to the heart of success.

- The rungs for reaching the heart of success are found in I Peter 5:5-7:

“Young men (Certainly this verse is focused on young men, but it could also apply to anyone under 40, or maybe under 60.), **in the same way be submissive to those who are older.** (“In the same way” implies as the elders are called to be eager to serve, to be examples to the flock, yet submitted and under the Chief Shepherd), so the young men are to be submissive to those who are older.) **All of you** (So now the instruction is broadened to include everyone. In fact some commentaries believe this paragraph should start another verse and paragraph.), **clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’** (See Proverbs 3:34.) 6] **Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.** 7] **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”** (What a great passage of Scripture!)

A. The world's strategy for climbing the ladder of success is simple:

- Work hard, get ahead, don't let anything get in your way, and promote yourself.
- The goal is to make it to the top; it doesn't matter who you step on along the way.
- And it doesn't matter who you leave behind, even if it's your family or your friends.
- It's a dog-eat-dog world they tell you, and the puppies don't make it.
- To survive, you have to hold on to the ladder for dear life.
- To succeed, you have to claw your way to the top.

B. Peter, however, has a different strategy for success for the church and individuals in the church.

1. In fact, in these three verses there are some major adjustments to a common way of thinking.
2. Peter offers three rungs to counter the world’s quest for success.

a. **The first rung is horizontal humility--toward spiritual authority and each other -- I Peter 5:5.** (It really isn’t a step up the ladder, it really is a step down the ladder.)

- 1) We are to submit ourselves to those who are wise and to "clothe" ourselves with humility. v. 5-- *“Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*
- 2) The metaphor Peter uses, *“clothe yourselves,”* comes from a rare word that gives the picture of a servant putting on an apron before serving those in the house.

Example: Perhaps Peter is recalling that last meal in the Upper Room, where Jesus girded Himself with a towel and washed the disciples' feet--John 13:4-17.

- 3) The imperatives/the commands to *“...be submissive...”* and *“clothe yourselves with humility”* are in the present tense.
 - Think with me: here’s what these verses imply--being submissive and clothing ourselves with humility is the way to success.
 - We are to listen to the counsel of the elders, be open to their reproofs, watch their lives, follow the examples they set, accept their decisions, and respect their years of seasoned wisdom. (How often success is inhibited because we don’t listen to those who have lived before us, who have experienced the climb!)
 - History giving from our models/elders and our own research is crucial to our success.

- Why don't we take advantage of the lessons learned from those who are older?
 - We simply don't put on the clothes of humility in our relationships with each other; we don't humble ourselves; we think we know better!
- 4) Why should we humble ourselves before our spiritual leaders and each other?
- Well, we don't know all the reasons, but in these verses we have powerful motivation.
 - We are to be submissive to designated leaders and to each other so we can learn from the positive lessons of their history and also, to avoid the traps, missteps, and failures they have had as well.
 - Some have fallen off the ladder many times.
 - Many of our peers and elders have learned valuable lessons we can benefit from.
 - We should consider the counsel of others before we make major steps ahead or up!

Why should we humble ourselves before our spiritual leaders and each other?

- Because to do otherwise leads to proud independence--a focus only on ourselves!
 - The results of proud independence is a backlash of consequences.
 - The main ones being:
 - God's opposition,
 - and a shortage of His grace.
 - James 4:6 relates the same message--"But he gives us more grace." That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
- 5) The idea of God opposing the proud and giving grace to the humble was first found in Proverbs 3:31--"*Do not envy a violent man or choose any of his ways, 32] for the LORD detests a perverse man but takes the upright into his confidence. 33] The LORD'S curse is on the house of the wicked, but he blesses the home of the righteous. 34] He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble. 35] The wise inherit honor, but fools he holds up to shame.*"
- So in contrast to the humble are those who are "proud mockers."
 - The term "mockers" is an expression of scorn, derision, or contempt.
 - But this verse promises God, not the proud, will have the last scoff!
 - As Proverbs 3:34 puts it: "He (God) mocks proud mockers."

6) But in contrast and in summary, look back at I Peter 5. For those who are climbing to the heart of lasting success, we are called to climb a different rung: *“be submissive to those who are older....to clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.”*

- It doesn't sound like the ladder to success, does it?
- But if we want to receive God's grace and not be opposed by Him, our first rung is to be submissive to authority and be humble towards each other.

b. The second rung of success that Peter suggests has to do with vertical humility --I Peter 5:6.

1) There is no more important attitude for success than to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. I Peter 5:6--*“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.”*

- Not only are we to humble ourselves before authority and each other,
- We must see ourselves as humbly submissive to God's mighty hand.

What does it mean to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand?

2) In the Old Testament, God's hand symbolizes two things:

- **The first** is discipline (see Exod. 3:20; Job 30:21; Ps. 32:4).
- **The second** is deliverance (Deut. 9:26; Ezek. 20:34).

3) In summary: When we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, we willingly accept.

- His discipline as being for our good and His glory.
 - That has massive in application.
 - We recognize we are God's children and He can and should discipline us when it is appropriate.
 - In other words, we submit to his correction and acknowledge His help as we climb the ladder of success.
- So we gratefully acknowledge that God's deliverance is always in His time and in His way. (In other words, we believe under God's hand we are assured of deliverance/relief/help in God's time and way, and we submit to His mighty hand.)
- By submitting to God's mighty hand, we also agree
 - not to manipulate people or events for our selfish advantage,
 - and we agree we will not take actions until we have the grace and deliverance to do it!!
 - We will not hurry His timing--we will let God set the pace.

4) The result of this attitude will be that *God will lift us up in due time*--1 Pet. 5:7

- This is the success we are waiting for.
 - It may mean we live on a lower rung of the ladder until God lifts us up.
 - This will be true success; a lifting up by God. Imagine that!

The same thought is seen in many passages of Scripture:

- Phil. 2:5-9--*“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7] but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8] And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross! 9] Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name...”*
- James 4:10--*“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”*

Example: David serves as a good illustration of this attitude.

- As a young musician, he didn't go on tour trying to make a name for himself: he sang to his sheep.
- He continued to write his lyrics without thought of being published. He eventually became known as a skillful musician whom the Lord was with --I Sam. 16:18.
- As a result of David's staying close to God and submitting to Him, God exalted the lowly shepherd to the highest position in the land— as shepherd of the entire nation. Ps. 78:70-72-- *“He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; 71] from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. 72] And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.”*

Application: I know many people here who need to hear this.

- You feel like you have been forgotten, so you might be tempted to despise, or at a minimum, be discouraged by where you are in your life.
- You feel you have more potential than you are exercising.
- You feel you have a call to do even more.

What should your attitude be?

- Here it is: Humble yourself under God's mighty hand.
 - There is discipline and deliverance only in that place.
 - That's where the grace of God is found.
 - It is only from this place that we will be lifted up.
- Musicians, would-be pastors, Christian workers, businessmen, housewives, minimum wage workers, those who have subsistence employment, the unfulfilled, the discouraged worker, etc., please hear these words from I Peter 5.

Application: As a church, we are in the same place.

- We have been stretched beyond our abilities in our 10 year program to expand our facilities.
- What has come out of this journey? (Discipline and deliverance.)
- After all of this, I want to be nowhere else but under God's mighty hand.
- I never want us to be in a place where we are opposed by God.
- Oh yes, we sometimes receive a raw deal when doing God's will - even persecution from others, but I'll take that any day if I'm lifted up by God & receive His grace.
- I have had great satisfaction, fulfillment and surprises of grace under His hand.
- I have also felt His opposition, His discipline, when I have taken myself from that place.
- As we move forward in the next few years, we can only guess what God has in mind for us, but I can tell you, it will be a lift up!

Looking back at I Peter, there is one more run to observe:

- c. **Peter's third rung in our climb to the heart of success has to do with interior serenity. I Peter 5:7--"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."**
- 1) In our quest for God's will to be done in our lives, we are to cast all our anxiety upon Him.
 - The original meaning of the term "cast," is literally translated, "to throw upon."
 - It represents a decisive action on our part that is neither passive nor partial.
 - We might translate the term to read, "Heave it over."
 - When those anxieties that accompany growth and true success begins to weigh us down, we are to heave our anxieties upon the Lord.
 - Even in the will of God, there will be seasons when we feel anxious.
 - Study the life of the apostle Paul to see evidence of anxiety in a godly person's life.
 - But I Peter 5:7 say, "*Cast all your anxiety on him...*"
 - Psalm 55:22 essentially says the same thing: "*Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.*"
 - 2) Why should we do this? Where does our confidence come from that this casting will work? **I Peter 5:7--"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."**
 - **This is one of the most encouraging Scriptures in the Bible.**
 - **What does it mean to us that God cares for us?**

In Conclusion: Do you want a simple formula that will enable us to not only handle whatever stress, anxiety and disappointment we might have, but provide us true, lasting success? Here it is:

- **horizontal humility + vertical humility + interior serenity = success**
- In other words, humility towards others, plus humility before God, plus **interior serenity** (because we cast our anxieties upon God), equals lasting success--no matter what we achieve.

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