

Wise Up – Successful Wisdom  
1 Corinthians 4:8-13  
April 9, 2017

*Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings – and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.*

Our sinful human nature defines success in human terms. We are drawn to power, position, and achievement. But when the cross becomes the measure of wisdom and the way we “keep score,” it changes how we view success. In today’s text, Paul tells us that we, who are followers of Jesus, measure success in a different way. Actually, we don’t even think of success. We think in terms of service.

Paul tells us that, in human terms, Christians are a spectacle, fools, weak, dishonored, and the “scum of the earth.” Why does the world see us that way? Because we didn’t sign up for success – we signed up to follow Christ.

Jesus defined success as following and fulfilling the will of our heavenly Father. If Jesus had been thinking in worldly terms, he would have entered Jerusalem on a white stallion not a donkey. If Jesus had been thinking of worldly success, he wouldn’t have considered his death on the cross as the successful completion of his mission on earth.

When we signed up to follow Jesus, we signed up for a lifestyle that flies in the face of the world’s definition of success. Jesus said of himself: “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve*” (Mk 10:45 NIV). The successful Christian life is a life of service to our neighbor.

However, our basic, sinful nature rebels against service to others. Our sinful nature wants others to serve us. Therein lies the problem. We are caught in the middle of the battle between our old self and our new self.

Therefore, today we are going to look at some words of wisdom to help us live a successful Christian life. Of course, to find true, reliable wisdom, we turn to God’s Word.

**Matthew 6:33** *Seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness.*

It is impossible to live a life of God-pleasing service without putting God ahead of everything else in life. Putting God first requires faith. The author of Hebrews writes: *Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that*

*he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him* (Heb 11:6 NIV).

The things of this world are always fighting to have first place in our lives. It can be very easy to make God take a backseat in your life. You skip church for more pressing matters, such as a round of golf, a chance to sleep in, or your child's athletic event. You neglect Bible study because you just can't "fit" it into your schedule. You support God's work with what you have left over after you attend to your earthly financial needs.

To live a successful Christian life, you cannot assign God to the back seat. The key word in Matthew 6:33 is "first." Jesus didn't leave room for any other position. Putting God first will allow you to serve your neighbor with a joy that will surprise you.

**Joshua 1:7-9** *"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it."*

The second word of wisdom for a successful Christian life is to follow the Book. Just like you can't put God in the back seat, you can't let him ride shotgun either. If you try to make God your "co-pilot," you're going to crash.

God is not interested in helping you be all you want to be. God is very interested in helping you be all he wants you to be. God doesn't want to be your royal advisor. God wants to be your king.

In Scripture, God has given you everything you need to lead the life he wants for you. Whatever wisdom you might be able to glean from your brain, your heart, or this world will let you down. The only wisdom that never fails comes from God's Word. Is it always what you want to hear and do – no. Can you always trust it – yes. To date, how many people has God's Word led astray – none.

**Philippians 3:13-14** *Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

To be successful as a Christian, you must keep your eyes on the goal. You have two goals in this life. First, you are here to experience God's love for you and to love him in return. Second, you are here to carry out God's will – It is God's will that his church grow and his lost children be found.

Jesus once told a would-be follower: *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."* (Lk 9:62 NIV). In other words, if you take your eyes off the goal you will miss the goal. Following the example Jesus set is to be the goal of your life. If you let the world distract you, you will not find the Christian success God wants for you.

**Galatians 6:9** *Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

Giving up is the easiest thing in the world. It takes no will power to quit trying. It takes no great amount of thought or effort to become discouraged and leave your Christian life of service.

Having said that, can the successful Christian life be so difficult that you feel like giving up? Absolutely! The hardest lifestyle in the world is the Christian lifestyle. It is counter-cultural. It's what makes you a spectacle to the unbelieving world. It's what makes the world see you as foolish, weak, dishonored, and the "scum of the earth."

Don't listen to those TV preachers that promise you health, worldly happiness, and wealth if you just send them \$100. There is no connection between the success of your Christian life and the success the world offers. God is not a vending machine. You can't get everything you want just by giving enough money or saying enough prayers or going to church every Sunday.

If being good brought earthy success, Jesus would have been rich. Everyone would have loved Jesus. No one would even have thought about crucifying him. But that's not what happened, is it? The Christian life is not a guarantee of smooth sailing. Jesus even told his disciples: *"In this world you will have trouble"* (Jn 16:33 NIV).

Jesus didn't say you might have trouble, he said you will have trouble. You have trouble because you are going against the grain. You have trouble because your successful Christian lifestyle highlights the sin of the world, and sin prefers darkness to light.

So what keeps you from giving up when the going gets to be more than just rough? If you finish the verse from John 16, you find what inspires your ability to hang on: *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (Jn 16:33 NIV).

**Philippians 1:20-21** *I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

The last piece of wisdom for being a successful Christian is to do it all for Christ. We are often victims of the deceit of the human heart. We don't always have the ability to see if someone's motives and their actions line up. But God does: *[God] will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts* (1 Co 4:5 NIV).

Jesus warned the people: *"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"* (Mt 7:22-23 NIV). There is no success in the Christian life unless your deeds of service are done only for the glory of the Lord. When you seek the praise of the world, you are not putting God first, you are not following the Book, you have lost sight of your true goal, and you have given up on

Christian success.

Success in God's economy isn't what you have here, but what is waiting for you beyond this life. Do you want riches? You are an heir to the King of the universe. Do you want power? The Bible tells you that you will rule over the angels of God. Do you want to be special? God calls you the "apple of his eye" (Zech 2:8).

Being a successful Christian isn't easy, but it is guaranteed. All you must do is put God first, follow the Book, keep your eyes on the goal, never give up, and do it all for Jesus.