

SUNDAY
SCHOOL *Superintendent*



Fall Quarter
September | October
November 2023

Sunday School Superintendent

FALL QUARTER

September, October, November 2023

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Edited and published quarterly by
**THE INCORPORATED TRUSTEES OF THE
 GOSPEL WORKER SOCIETY
 UNION GOSPEL PRESS DIVISION**

Rev. W. B. Musselman, Founder

Price: \$3.29 per quarter*

**shipping and handling extra*

ISBN 978-1-64495-447-8

Editorials

BY KENNETH SPONSLEER

Formula for Success?

Success has always been a popular topic. The secular book world is awash in titles that promote success in everything from business to diet and health to raising well-adjusted children. Surefire formulas are offered, often bolstered by compelling statistics and inspiring testimonials. Much of what is out there does offer valuable insights on various topics, and many people benefit in specific ways.

Sometimes the Bible is cited in the prescriptions for successful living. Often this is done without much understanding of what Scripture actually teaches, but occasionally, valid biblical insights undergird the presentations. Still, the vast majority of books and articles focus on success as the world defines it, meaning the pursuit of happiness or improvement in this life here and now. Spiritual realities are rarely even a concern, much less the aim.

The Bible, by contrast, cannot be reduced to a mere success manual, although it does contain principles that, if followed, promote successful living. Unlike the vast array of secular literature, Scripture is concerned primarily with living successfully before God, with pleasing Him and growing in His favor and love. In other words,

spiritual success is the aim, not the ability to amass material wealth or achieve social status.

Moreover, the scriptural prescriptions for success in spiritual matters are far different from, even contrary to, the typical outlook that pervades most secular literature. What the Bible has to say about living successfully in God's sight is rejected as foolish and unworkable by most people today (or in any era). Considering man's sinfulness, that is to be expected. Yet God's Word gives the only sure and reliable principles that apply to any and all situations.

What we can glean about success in God's sight from our present quarter of studies comes mainly from the first unit of lessons. (For a survey of the remaining lessons, please see page 32.) We begin with God's exhortation to Joshua to be strong and courageous in carrying out his commission to lead Israel in conquering and possessing the Promised Land (Josh. 1:1-6). The second portion of the lesson (11:16-19, 21-23) reports the astonishingly successful result of that endeavor.

From the first portion, 1:1-6, we learn that strength and courage are certainly key to success in carrying out God's mission. We are, of course,

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talking about spiritual strength and courage that rests on God's promises (vss. 3-4). And going further in the passage (beyond the lesson text itself), we find that God explicitly links this courage to obeying His Word (vs. 7), in Joshua's case the law given through Moses. Joshua is told to meditate on that law daily in order to do everything in it (vs. 8). Success, or prospering, is directly tied to faithfulness in that spiritual discipline.

A bit farther on in Joshua, we see an example of an amazing success and the equally amazing steps that led up to it. Circling the city of Jericho once each day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day might have had a deep psychological effect on the enemy, but there was no actual military reason for it. Yet it was the battle plan given by God, and the Israelites followed it rigorously. The result was a miraculous collapse of the imposing city wall and complete victory for God's people. The lesson: success comes from obeying God's commands, even when we cannot see the sense in them.

That lesson is greatly intensified in the study on Gideon that closes the first unit. While the instructions to Joshua had no humanly discernible military impact, God's directive to Gideon ran directly contrary to universal military practice. Already vastly

outnumbered by the swarming Midianite enemy, he was instructed to cut his own forces down to almost nothing. Most commanders would have rejected such an order as preposterous and suicidal, but Gideon obeyed without protest. The result was an astounding victory over an overwhelmingly superior force.

What is common to these episodes is simple obedience to God's direction—an obedience that flows out of and expresses faith in Him. It is not always a great, heroic faith either. Gideon was still at the beginning of his faith journey and needed much bolstering and reinforcement along the way (Judg. 6:36-40; 7:9-15). He illustrates Jesus' teaching on what God can accomplish with faith as small as a mustard seed (Matt. 17:20).

Rahab also demonstrated that kind of faith—small, germinal, but authentic—when she hid the two Israelite spies and helped them escape (lesson 2). That action put her at odds with her own people and potentially in great danger, but she did it because she recognized the great power and purpose of God in what was happening. She saw that her only hope was His mercy and favor (Josh. 2:9-13). Rahab would not be touted as a shining example of success in the world's literature, but her faith is celebrated forever in God's book (cf. Heb. 11:31).

Faith in God and obedience to Him will never make it into the world's recipe for success, but a look at the state of the world today is enough to show just how inadequate that recipe is. Believers who pursue faith and obedience may not achieve the wealth and status the world prizes (in fact, they are more likely to invite trouble and hardship), but they will find true success in what really counts, and it will be a success that never wears out or spoils.

LESSON 1—September 3, 2023

Be Strong and Courageous

Lesson Text: Joshua 1:1-6; 11:16-19, 21-23

GOLDEN TEXT—“Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses” (Joshua 11:23).

OPENING MOMENTS

Suggested Song (Adults)

“Higher Ground” (Oatman)

Suggested Song (Children)

“Victory in Jesus” (Bartlett)

Icebreaker

How do you start a new challenge without getting cold feet?

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The call (Josh. 1:1-6)
2. The conquest (Josh. 11:16-19)
3. The culmination (Josh. 11:21-23)

KEY ISSUES

No one likes to be fooled or deceived. How many of us have seen an ad on television (or read one in the paper) and after making the effort to go to the store to make a purchase, found that the item was either sold out or had never come to the store in the first place? Sometimes a person goes through much trouble fighting weather or traffic, or locating a parking space, or all three and then experiences great disappointment. Even the apologetic words of the store owner or clerk are not enough to soothe the feelings one has.

As many have experienced the above scenario, hopefully many will also testify

that they have never found God’s promises to fail them. He cannot and does not lie. He never uses bait-and-switch tactics, as some unscrupulous merchants have been known to do. Of course, if the particular promise is conditional, we must do our part if we expect to reap the reward.

In this week’s lesson, God has brought His people to the very edge of the Promised Land and is about to take them in. But first there needs to be a new leader to replace Moses.

The choice of a leader was God’s, and He chose the one who had been the trusted right-hand man of Moses—namely, Joshua, the son of Nun. Joshua had been tested and found faithful, a principle that is biblical and makes sense. Leadership is not for a novice; it is for a person who not only has certain characteristics but also has learned from experience.

The call Joshua received must have been wonderfully reassuring to him, for in it the Lord reiterated His plan to give a choice piece of real estate to His chosen people. Joshua knew that the plan of God had not changed, just the person leading God’s people.

The Lord encouraged Joshua in the task He had given him—just as He is ready to help and stand with all whom He calls to serve Him.