

SUCCESS

From success to significance

Session 1

*For I know the plans I have for you,
declares God, plans to prosper you and not
harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*
- Jeremiah 29:11

Issue: How do I define success?

The owner of the 75-employee manufacturing company was ready to turn management of the family business over to his son. Three of us sat at a table in Mark's office, when suddenly, the dad slammed the business plan on the floor and lashed out at his son, Mark. "You're an idiot! I can't believe what a loser of a son I have! I didn't build this business to have you destroy it!" Mark sat quietly in his chair, expressionless. He walked out of the office, disgusted. I was stunned. I searched for something to say that would comfort Mark. After an awkward pause, Mark said, "It's nothing new. He's been like that his whole life."

I followed Mark's dad out of the room. I looked him in the eye and asked, "Do you love your son?" He paused for a moment, then answered, "Of course I love my son. It's just that I spent 35 years busting my butt to give him a better life. I don't want him to throw it all away." Then he added, "I worked hard to be a success, and I don't want to lose that."

Mark's father defined success by working long hours and making a lot of money. While he loved his son, his pursuit of success had cost him dearly. He had become a financial success and a personal failure: a 70-year-old man with plenty of money but nothing to show for it. As a father, he left money, but no legacy. He left only pain and an emotionally abused son.¹

Solution: Expand your definition from making money to making a difference.

When I was working with Mark and his father, I read a wonderful book, *Halftime: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance*, by Bob Buford. The book provides tremendous insight into how we define success. Bob likens a business career to a football game. In the first half of our life, we pursue success. We work hard, sacrifice, and expend energy to become financially successful. In the second half, we focus on significance, giving our experience, time, talent, and energy toward making a difference in people's lives and leaving a legacy. Bob Buford's book crystallizes how important it is for us to take a hard look at how we define success.²

¹ Larry Julian, *God Is My CEO: Following God's Principles in a Bottom-Line World*, 28.

² *Ibid.*, 29.

Conclusion

How we define success is important in shaping our lives. So, how should we define success? Success is generally defined in terms of achievement, fame, recognition, material possessions, and wealth. In a word: *outcome*. Significance, on the other hand, while less tangible, concerns the *process*. Significance is importance, meaning, essence, relevance, and value. Success drives us by a desire for tangible things; significance guides us by a desire for something greater than just what is tangible.

Three characteristics lead successful people on their path to significance.

1. A Sense of Urgency

They have a sense of urgency. Because this life is short, the preciousness of life continually challenges them to prioritize what is most important. They live lives of daily significance, doing what they feel is most important every day. This sense of urgency translates into passion for the moment. You can sense their aliveness.

2. A Sense of the Whole of Life

They have a sense of the whole of life, rather than just the part of life we can see today. When we feel stuck or slowed down by pain, obstacles, or circumstances, we can remember that God has a bigger plan than what we are seeing in front of us. We can take a step back and sense the bigger picture and the whole of life. Then we can see our situation from a different perspective.

3. A Sense of Significance

They have a sense of significance. Rather than being driven by ego, they are driven by a calling. They believe they are here to make a difference in other people's lives. Everything they do is for something that is beyond just a tangible result. They have a passion to unleash the potential energy lying dormant in churches today. Their passion is to help meet needs in all aspects of the community. They have passion to leave a legacy that affects thousands of others.

While we may not all be asked to change the world, we can each affect one person in a meaningful way. Others need us. We can make a big difference in their lives right now. And that alone makes our lives significant.³

Discussion Guide

1. How do you define success?
2. How do you define significance?
3. If you had only one more year to live, what would you do with your year?
4. What are the obstacles that keep you from doing what you are passionate about?
5. If you were to make a shift from success to significance, what would it look like?
6. What legacy do you want to leave others?
7. What small thing can you do today that would make a difference in another's life?

³ Ibid. 45-48.

COURAGE

From choosing the easier wrong decision to making the tougher right decision

Session 2

*Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified;
do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God
will be with you wherever you go.*

- Joshua 1:9

Issue: How do I do the right thing when I'm pressured to do otherwise?

Shutting my office door behind him, my boss said, "I think Mike has a nose problem. I heard that he's heavy into cocaine. I want you to get some dirt on the guy and fire him." I was taken aback. Mike had been an excellent employee and one of my best salespeople for years. My first reaction was to do the right thing: I wanted to talk honestly to Mike. If, in fact, he did have a problem, I wanted to help him get his personal and professional life in order. But when I mentioned this approach to my boss, he blew up, saying, "I don't care how you do it, just get rid of him. I want him out of here now!"

I was caught between a rock and a hard place: I could do what was right and risk being fired myself, or I could choose not to make waves and be the team player as my boss would call it, and do the dirty work my boss had demanded I do. Well, I copped out and made the easier decision, the wrong one. I saved my job by unjustly taking the job of another. My boss's ego and my fear of unemployment hurt the entire staff. Not only did we lose a good employee, we also lost the trust of our sales team. The decision may have saved my job, but I lost a little piece of my soul.

Solution: Walk with God in Courage.

A time will come when a person's faith will be tested beyond his or her perceived limit, a time when business pressure, intellectual logic, and fear gang up on them, to the point where an easier wrong decision takes precedence over a tougher right decision. Fear and discouragement keep us from doing the right thing. Conversely, courage enables us to rise above difficulty to reach new heights as a human being. This is the time when people need to be strong and courageous and do what's right.¹

Conclusion

Courage is easily misunderstood. For many, courage is defined by doing bold or brave things. The underlying reason for the action may be ego gratification, power, or recognition. Demonstrating moral courage is very much a private matter between you and God. Sometimes, we come to a point where we know God is calling us to change our life's direction, and we must quiet our ego in order to hear God's whisper. Sometimes, we are confronted with a painful blow that shakes the very foundations of our beliefs and we need the courage to renew and deepen our faith in God.

Whatever your situation, you will probably be brought to a special place of tested faith and courage, a place where you will be challenged to go against the grain of common sense to move

¹ Larry Julian, *God Is My CEO: Following God's Principles in a Bottom-Line World*, 51-53.

into the uncharted waters of illogical faith. Common challenges, rewards and blessings occur for all of us who have the choice to do the right thing.

Most of our lives are shaped by the small decisions we make every day. It doesn't matter whether the decision we're faced with is big or small. What's important is to understand that every decision helps shape our character and destiny. We are either becoming who we want to be or who God wants us to be. Business demands, coupled with personal fears and ego, make choosing the wrong decision tempting. For that reason alone, it is even more important to take time to make sure our decisions align with our faith, values, and principles. It is wise to prayerfully consider God's counsel for all our decisions. Asking ourselves these two questions will help guide us when choices be made:

What is the right thing to do?

Am I willing to trust God's promise that God is with me in this decisions regardless of the consequences?

Deciding what is right and acting on our convictions can be a daunting task. We are all different people with many different situations. We may never understand why God has placed a certain decision before us. Nevertheless, the one thing we have in common is that God has promised that God is with us always.

Discussion Guide

Part 1: Individuals facing a difficult decision

1. What is the most difficult decision you are facing?
2. What are your fears and concerns regarding this dilemma?
3. What do you believe God is saying to you about this decision?
4. In your opinion, what do you think is the easier wrong decision?
5. What are the consequences and implications of making the easier decision?
6. What do you think is the right thing to do?
7. What are the consequences and implications of making the right decision?

Part 2: Individuals facing a difficult situation

1. How do you cope with your present situation?
2. What attitudes do you presently battle with?
3. How can you develop the patience to wait for God's answers?
4. What gives you comfort during this difficult period?
5. What messages of hope can you see?
6. How can you move forward with courage to transcend this difficulty?²

² Ibid. 64-67.

PATIENCE

From sprinting under pressure to running with purpose

Session 3

*Let us run with perseverance
the race marked out for us.
- Hebrews 12:1*

Issue: How do I avoid becoming a slave to urgent, short-term pressure?

The corporate office was breathing down our necks. We had only 45 days to achieve our fourth-quarter goal, or else. Our sales team had spent months developing a meaningful strategic plan. In that plan, our long-term goal was to build a base of loyal, long-term customers. We thought we were in the clear to work our plan, but that went out the window with a business shortfall in the third quarter. This downturn created the same old battle cry: Stop what you are doing! We need to create a short-term plan for business now!

We paid less attention to our existing customers so we could focus on getting immediate new business. The good news is we won the short-term battle. We achieved our fourth-quarter goal. The bad news is we lost the war. In the process of “doing whatever it takes” to achieve our short-term objective, we completely lost focus of our long-term goal.

We were so focused on the short-term bottom line that we lost focus on the overall plan. We asked our customers to accommodate our needs, and in the process lost focus of their needs. We were so busy getting new customers that we left our existing customers feeling unwanted, unappreciated, and used. While we fervently sought new business in the short term, two of our biggest and most loyal customers quietly let their contracts expire and went to a competitor.

Solution: Develop patience to run a long-distance race in a 100-yard dash world.

Patience and bottom-line pressure are like oil and water. They don't mix. Having the patience to work a long-term plan sounds great in theory, but, in reality, short-term pressure often forces us to play another game. Pressure comes from both external and internal forces. The bottom line expectation to produce, coupled with our internal pressure to succeed, takes us out of our game plan. We exhaust our energies sprinting from quarter to quarter, running a race dictated by pressure. With patience, we learn to run the race we have been called to run, in spite of the pressure that surrounds us.¹

Conclusion

People who demonstrate patience run a different type of race, one in which they allow God's timing to set the pace. They demonstrate their ability to persevere in running the race God has marked out for them. They are steadfast and consistent in working with a purpose in spite of difficulties and pressure. They rely on three traits that help them succeed through patience and perseverance.

¹ Larry Julian, *God Is My CEO: Following God's Principles in a Bottom-Line World*, 69-71.

Prayer. They use prayer as a means to overcome impatience. Prayer may give the strength to hold onto a plan in spite of outside pressure. It is a practical tool to be used for making tough decisions. Consistent communication with God keeps them focused on their main purpose, rather than distracted by the immediate obstacles in their path.

Perspective. I'll always remember the insightful words of my friend Andy Anderson. He said, "Larry, your problem is that you have blinders on. You are so focused on the bottom line, you can't see the world around you." He was absolutely right. I associated our sales team with a greyhound dog race. We all ran as fast as we could to catch the rabbit. Nothing else came into our sights except our goal. We sprinted from goal to goal but had no sense of purpose. In reality, we were just running in circles.

Goal achievement is extremely important, but it's easy to lose perspective. Our sales team expended all its energy trying to feed the insatiable quarterly revenue god, promotion god, and personal security god, and it was never enough. Over time, we eventually became slaves to short-term goals, living our lives from quarter to quarter.

Preparation. In essence, patience prepares us for greater service to God. The long distance runner gains success by gaining endurance. Endurance helps the long distance runner grow stronger by increasing his or her capacity to run, often by weathering pain. In the same way, the more we practice running with perseverance instead of caving under pressure, the better prepared we become for the next circumstance, the next challenge, and the next opportunity.

We live in an impatient world. The world has trained us to run the 100-yard dash, where success is measured in terms of tangible results. While goals are necessary and important, the challenge in following God's plan when the world demands we react quickly to another plan. Often, God's plan seems to make no sense in our environment because we try to measure God's plan using tangible measurements we use to determine our success. Ultimately, winning the marathon instead of the 100-yard dash comes down to two questions: What kind of race do we want to run? Who is setting the pace?

As Rousseau stated, "Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet." Many of us struggle with patience because it's so hard to see any immediate benefit. God's perfect plan for our life may not involve tangible evidence today. Often, it's the things we can't see in the present that prepare us for a significant future. But we can run boldly and with perseverance the race that God has specially marked out for each of us.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the greatest external pressure you have faced?
2. What is the greatest internal pressure you have felt?
3. Describe the ideal pace of your professional or personal life.
4. What prevents you from working or living at the pace you desire?
5. What can you do to run the race God has marked out for you?²

² Ibid., 86-89.

YIELDING CONTROL

From “surrender means defeat” to “surrender means victory”

Session 4

*For whosoever want to save their life will lose it,
but whosoever loses their life for me will find it.
What good will it be for a person if he or she gains the
whole world, yet forfeits their soul?*

- Matthew 16:23

Issue: How do I deal with circumstances that are beyond my control?

I facilitated a strategic planning session for a small, rapidly growing health care organization. They were experiencing significant change in their marketplace. The changes were fast and powerful, and they had to be dealt with swiftly or the company would go under. In a meeting, we identified all the changes and came up with good strategies to address them. The executive team was apprehensive, but overall they were unified about the changes the organization had to make.

But not Jan, the Vice President of Operations. She resisted every single new strategy and had an argument for every change that needed to take place. In essence, she was the biggest control freak on the team. The greater the uncertainty, the greater her resistance. Unfortunately, Jan became a major stumbling block in the strategic planning process. The true tragedy was that Jan was extremely talented and capable, yet she was quickly becoming a liability to the organization. She desperately tried to control the circumstances surrounding her as the riptide of change swept her away. The executive team had to respond quickly to the changes that were occurring, and cooperation from Jan’s position was critical to their success. As a result, they had to replace Jan.

Jan’s situation brings up a challenging question. When is it time to take charge and when is it time to relinquish control?

Solution: Do my part, and let God do God’s part.

Every day, many people try to control situations that they have no control over. The harder they flex their muscles, the more they lose control. Generally, the greater a person’s power, the harder it is for him or her to relinquish control to a higher authority. Many people call on God like they call on a consultant, to help them with their problems. They may go as far as delegating some control, but in no way will they relinquish total control. But ultimately, we learn that surrendering control to God is a better plan than trying to take charge of things beyond our control.¹

¹ Larry Julian, *God Is My CEO: Following God’s Principles in a Bottom-Line World*, 117-119.

Conclusion

Each person reaches a point in his or her life when he or she has to ask, “Who’s in charge here?” Harry Truman coined the phrase, “The buck stops here,” implying that the leader is the one in control, the one with final responsibility. However, though leaders are responsible for and accountable to do the things in their power, they are not responsible for, nor can they control certain outcomes. No matter how powerful a leader is, there are some things a person has absolutely no control over. This is a very difficult message for most leaders to grasp, as the corporate world supports a leader who is in control and in charge. In the business world, surrender is associated with defeat. In the spiritual realm, however, relinquishing control to God’s plan is victory.

To understand why surrender means victory, we need to define surrender. The dictionary gives two distinct definitions. One definition is to give up or to quit; the other is to yield to another’s power. The kind of surrender we are speaking of doesn’t mean quitting or giving up. It does mean yielding our need to be in control to a much higher authority. Surrender provides us with victory because we are free from the anguish, fear, and guilt that is associated with trying to hold on to something we have no control over. It means we will be at peace, knowing that God is ultimately in charge.

When we are challenged by a need for control, we can choose to view our relationship with God as a partnership rather than as one of a boss and subordinate. Our goal is to walk with God one moment, one day, at a time. Dale Carnegie gave a great suggestion to live in “day-tight compartments.” Quite simply, we have no control over yesterday and no control of tomorrow. We can only do those things that are within our control today. When we wake up in the morning, we can review the most important issues we have pressing for that day. Then we prioritize and divide these responsibilities into two categories: things within my control that I will do today, and things outside my control that I will give to God today. Finally, we just work all the things that are within our authority to do.

If we live the day knowing God has a plan for our lives and is in control of all our circumstances, we can learn to cooperate with the uncertainty of a sale, job promotion, or other change by performing the tasks we have in front of us. The uncertainty cannot rob us of the importance of the moment.

Discussion Guide

1. What specifically is out of your control, yet causes you worry?
2. What are the things within your control that you can do today?
3. What things can you relinquish and put in God’s hands?
4. What things can you do to cooperate with uncertainty?²

² Ibid., 132-135.

TOUGH DECISIONS

From giving into discouragement to living with hope

Session 5

Blessed is the person who finds wisdom, the one who gains understanding, for wisdom is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.

- Proverbs 3:13-14

Issue: What do I do when faced with choosing between a bad solution and a worse solution?

I remember having breakfast with a good friend, John who was in the midst of a lose-lose dilemma. Faced with one of the biggest decisions of his life, he was mentally exhausted and discouraged. As he described his dilemma to me, John sketched the pros and cons of each decision on his paper napkin. He and his family would experience significant pain regardless of his decision. After 45 minutes, he realized he was talking in circles and finding no solution. Silently, he stared at the notes he had scribbled and mindlessly began doodling on the napkin. John then drew a big horseshoe around the notes and moaned, "If I could just go around this issue."

Have you been in a situation that appeared hopeless? Or have you been in a lose-lose dilemma where a positive resolution seemed impossible? There are times when there is no way around our dilemmas; we can only go through them. We have to go through our issue in order to make the best decision.

Solution: Seek God's wisdom to turn a bad problem into a good solution.

One of the greatest flaws of many of today's people is their avoidance of making tough decisions. While courage is doing the right thing, wisdom is knowing the right thing to do. Hope is the confident expectation of god's solution, even though you can't see the answer in front of you. Effective people seek God's wisdom in their present circumstances and live with hope that god will reveal the right, and best, solution.¹

¹ Larry Julian, *God Is My CEO: Following God's Principles in a Bottom-Line World*, 135-137.

Conclusion

At some point in our lives, we are faced with a very difficult decision in the midst of a complicated situation. While we seek a black-and-white, ethical solution so we can do the right thing, we are forced to struggle to find a clear direction in very foggy conditions. When faced with these conditions, we may choose from one of three paths: fight, flight, or fright. We may try to solve the problem for God, run away from the problem altogether, or, like a deer frozen in headlights, do nothing, out of fear. Each of these paths is limited in scope, because the reality of our circumstances is allowed to dominate the landscape of our mind. In essence, we allow our own fears, ego, and power to cloud the potential of God's power to work through us. We feel limited by the impossible appearance of a dilemma rather than open to the new options it provides.

Successful people who make tough decisions may find themselves confronted with what appears to be hopeless lose-lose situations. But they meet their challenges with courage and determination. Three characteristics help them transform a bad situation into a good solution.

1. **They seek God's wisdom first.** They never try to solve their problems alone. They seek God's wisdom before they take action and then have the personal accountability to follow through on the decisions before them.
2. **They understand their roles, particularly their roles and responsibilities as leaders.** While knowing they are being led by a higher authority, they refuse to just step back and allow fate to take over. They understand they are part of a bigger plan and that they play a role in God's important plan.
3. **They never give up hope.** They have hope for a better future in spite of a present situation that appears hopeless. Their personal hope creates hope in others.

No matter how difficult, there are times when there is no way around most of our dilemmas; we can only go through them to make the best decision. People who effectively face tough decisions find that it is only in the process of boldly walking through their dilemmas that solutions are found.

The process of walking through our dilemmas not only provides an eventual solution, it also defines our character. When we continue to seek God's wisdom, every step we take grows our character and brings us closer to the positive solution God has created.

Discussion Guide

1. What is the most difficult situation or dilemmas that you have faced?
2. Did you pray for wisdom regarding the situation? If so, what did your heart tell you?
3. Describe the underlying concerns of your dilemma.
4. Describe the ideal solution to your solution.
5. Do your thoughts, decisions, and actions align with God's principles?
6. Are you comfortable living with the consequences of your decisions?
7. Describe the direction you feel is right.²

² Ibid., 150-152.