

GIVE IT UP: SUCCESS

MARK 9:33-37 // 1 TIMOTHY 6:11-12,17-19

Today we continue our sermon series on Give It Up. We have been sharing the past few weeks about things that God wants us to give up – Control, Greed, Pride – not just for forty days of Lent, but as a way of living in our day-to-day lives until He calls us home for eternity. This week, I will focus on considering those things that truly get in our way from a deeper walk with God when we let the drive for success take control of our lives.

Most of us journey through a season in life where we focus on the world's definition for success. During this season, many of us may pursue power, position, possessions, and pleasures striving for success and status. As we pursue these, we may begin to realize that focusing on these areas can bring hurt, suffering, disappointment, separation and loss. If we look at success as simply "getting ahead" and seeking our own selfish desires, we may find we bring damage and destruction to our own lives and those around us.

The most important take away I have for you today is – Christ teaches us to shift our focus from success and status to significance and service. Let me say that again... Christ teaches us to shift our focus from success and status to significance and service.

True success comes only through Christ, who taught us to lay down our lives for one another, love those He brings into our lives, and to live out our days aligned to His word. He directs us to be guided by the power of the Holy Spirit so we can realize the fruit of His Spirit, so we can prosper as a reflection of His character, and so we can attain success as difference-makers in the lives of others by making the invisible Christ visible to those around us.

Biblically, our success or significance is not determined by how much stuff we possess, how much income we accumulate, what position we attain. John Maxwell, renowned author, pastor and leadership coach, has said "Success is...knowing your purpose in life, growing to reach your maximum potential, and sowing seeds that benefit others. SUCCESS is when I add value to MYSELF. SIGNIFICANCE is when I add value to OTHERS."

Shifting from Success to Significance / from Status to Service

Whether through entertainment, sports, or the workplace, emphasis is continually placed on how we as individuals have an internal need to go all out for success. Just this past week, many of you may be following the Olympics. Success is defined by reaching the medal stand and the ultimate achievement is to attain the gold medal. We feel bad for those who fall short, and celebrate those who reach their goals. We recently wrapped up the NFL season and the Superbowl focused on winning the Vince Lombardi trophy and leaving the field as Champions. So is all this success wrong in God's eyes? No – when we put the gifts and talents God has given us, we please Him. God wants us to be successful, and God wants us to have lasting success. So what is wrong with striving for success? It all boils down to each person's motive.

What is it in life, that makes us so competitive? What requires us to know, or at least feel like we have to be “better” than others? What causes us to not only desire to win, but to topple others as we do so? Television reality shows have brought this to life in newer and darker ways. We can see more clearly how the world measures success. The shows glorify wealth, power, honor, and winning at all costs. As I shared already, if we look at success as simply “getting ahead” and seeking our own selfish desires, we may find we bring damage and destruction not only to our own lives but also those around us.

We are taught that we are successful when we accumulate wealth, power, prestige, and fame. We consider ourselves successful when our accomplishments and earthly ambitions give us higher standing in the world. We sometimes think that we can measure success the way the world does. However, we must remember God’s faithful servants like those in Hebrews 11, reflecting on their significant faith in action. We must remember that the outcomes from these faithful were far from successful in the eyes of the world. These ordinary people did extraordinary things. And the Lord has shown us through His Word the significance each of these faith-filled people played in His unfolding story.

We may find it difficult to let go of our desire to attain worldly success. Our human nature wants to be in control. We want to be self-sufficient. We want to be in the driver’s seat of our lives. So why do we drive to succeed for its own glory? Why do we have an attitude that leads to envy or provokes others?

We need to let go and let God control our destiny if we want to be seen as significant on His terms and in His eyes. We need to let go of our drive to outshine others and, instead, replace it with a desire to serve others -- especially those less fortunate. Success is accomplishing what the Lord create us to do. When we turn from success to significance we please God and as we do we align to His will.

Finding Our Significance in Christ

As Christians, we need to consider why significance outweighs success in light of God’s word. When looked at through His lens, the Lord no longer has us to focus on our personal gain or achievements. Rather, He asks us to put significance at the forefront of our hearts and minds. He wants our motive laser focused on impacting the lives of others for His glory. In 1 Timothy 6:11–12, Paul reminds us, *“¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”*

We see in His Word; the message of Christ is what God desires be of utmost importance to us. This message of Christ must be the cornerstone that serves as the foundation of our lives. Paul reveals the importance of putting our hope in Him, putting our hope in Christ. In 1 Timothy 6:17, Paul exhorts us to *“¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”*

We can see further into this passage that we are called not to success as defined by this world but to significance that He defines for us as service to others. *"¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."*

Many of us will be challenged in this life with seeking God's truth and then putting His truth into action. This world around us attempts to distract us from having life of significance for God. The world would have us focus on riches and pleasures, or the lack of attaining them.

My encouragement to you is to seek God's truth each day. His truth makes all the difference. His simple truth has not changed. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He shows us the value of humility. In contrast, the world around us says to look out only for #1, consider yourself first. As followers of Christ, we are at odds with those who are caught up in this world and the world's vision of success.

God's Word tells us that we are "in this world but not of this world." *¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.* (1 John 2:15-17)

As Christians, we have the perfect example that always serves as our motivation to do what God wants and not what the world wants. *"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."* (Mark 9:35b)

To be significant in God's kingdom is to understand what He sees as significant in His Kingdom. What is significant is the simple meaning of the cross and the message of the good news of Christ. When His story is central to our lives we discover the significance He desires of us in His kingdom.

From the Old Testament to the present day, *"He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God"* (Micah 6:8).

When we hear God's word and when we study it more closely, we clearly realize His truth has been and will always be the same. *"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...."* (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).

When living in Florida, I remember news coverage following the widespread damage after one of the hurricanes many experienced. Amid the devastation and destruction, the coverage showed one house standing on its foundation. The owner was asked, "why is your house the only one still standing?"

He replied "I built this house myself. I also built it according to the building code. When the code called for 2x6 roof trusses, I used 2x6 roof trusses. I was told that a house built according to code could withstand a hurricane." Adhering to the building code yielded the best outcome for this man. When we adhere to God's code for our lives, we stand on the firm foundation of His truth.

Are you following God's code for your life? Are you seeking significance? Or are you following the world's instruction manual? Do you look out only for yourself? Have you walked over people as you climb to the mountain top in the world's eyes?

We cannot let our sinful nature gain a stronghold over us. We must seek the truth and then eagerly serve others in light of His truth.

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

In Mark 9:33–37, Jesus reminds His disciples, *"If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."* (Mark 9.33-35, NIV).

Jesus provides His students with much needed direction. Jesus shows us they lack of understanding of what it takes to have a life of significance.

Over and over, the disciples would seek personal achievement and wanted Jesus to see them as the leader of the pack, as the teacher's best student. We many times are challenged in the same way. We aspire to be seen as more successful than the person next to us. Instead, we should recognize how much Christ suffered, how much He humbled Himself – we must gain perspective on how God defines biblical success.

Without Christ's humility, we are filled with pride and ego! We seek status in our job titles, positions in life, the corner office, or the coveted assignment? Without a serious heart check, our ambitions can become compulsive, obsessive, covetous, and ruthless.

God exalts us when we find a true servant's heart. He shows us this by taking in his arms a little child and sharing this child as an example of the humble spirit His disciples needed to show. Jesus said to them, "whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." (Mark 9.36-37, NIV) Jesus shows them that significance comes from humbly serving and caring for the most in insignificant among us.

In Aramaic, the word for child and servant is the same... Children were the least "significant" people in their world. If you want to be great, seek to be like a child – one without rank, position, privilege, but one who desires to learn and grow. The only ambition that truly gives life is the ambition to serve those seeking to grow.

Our attitude should be the same as Christ: *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father...*" (Philippians 2.5-11, NIV)

Dr. Viktor Frankl was an Austrian physician who was imprisoned in one of Hitler's death camps. He and his fellow Jewish people suffered unbelievable atrocities. Everything about their living and working conditions were deplorable, including their medical care. Dr. Frankl offered what little medical help he could to the sick and dying.

Over time, he discovered a unique phenomenon he recorded in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. He said those people who kept their strength and sanity the longest were those who tried to help other prisoners and share what little they had. Their physical and mental condition seemed strengthened by their friendliness, compassion, and focus on something other than themselves. Ministering to others breathes life into us, fills us with energy. This is contrary to our great fear that our resources will be depleted if we expend all our energy helping others.

In God's eyes what is important is not what we have to offer, or what we do not have to offer, but who we are, how we put our gifts to use. It means relying on God's strength instead of our own. As Paul reflects on a Christ-centered life in 2 Corinthians 12, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness".

We are called to a life of significance. One where we are servants to others, and a servant of God. We are called to sacrifice our wants, our desires, our position in order to serve God and our neighbor. God is calling us to serve him with our entire lives, to be Christ in this world to be the light of hope, to be the instruments of justice, love and mercy in this world. God is calling us to servant hood, to give of our selves.

When we "commit" our ways into the Lord, we are completely submitting our plans and desires into God's hands, trusting that He knows what's best for us. When we commit our ways to the Lord, we will no longer strive for success and status, we give it up! Instead, we will thrive on significance and service. Or as Dwight Moody once said, "The measure of a man is not how many servants he has, but how many men he serves."

Let us pray...

Worship song...

First Service: Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us (LBW #481)

Second Service (during our offering): I Surrender All

GOSPEL PASSAGE:

Mark 9:33–37 (NIV84)

³³ They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" ³⁴ But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. ³⁵ Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." ³⁶ He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

1 Timothy 6:11–12, 17-19 (NIV84)

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.