

STARTING HOT AND BRIGHT ... THEN FIZZLE!

[OVERCOMING THE NEGATIVES]

As I light the sparkler, watch what happens (FIZZLES OUTS). How does that sparkler represent how some people pursue their goals? Just like the title on the board, they start out hot and bright but eventually fizzle out. Why? How many of you put your specific goals on the chart we handed out in Week One? How are you doing with your goals? This morning, as we continue with Week Eight of our Bible study by Dr. Stanley from *Success God's Way*, we're looking at how to prevent commitment and enthusiasm for our goals from fizzling out!

You will recall several weeks ago we looked at our attitudes and thinking and the effect it has on success. We looked at a great memory verse from **Proverbs 23:7 (NKJV)**, *For as he thinks in his heart, so is he...* Today, though, we turn from thoughts to **BELIEFS**. Is there a difference between beliefs and thoughts? Next weekend is the big in-state rivalry between Carolina and Clemson, with Carolina seeking its first win after four losses. Who do you **THINK** will win? OK, with Thanksgiving coming up this Thursday, do you **THINK** a turkey is better deep-fried, roasted or smoked? So, is there a difference between what you **BELIEVE** and what you **THINK**? Yes, beliefs, according to our Bible study this week, lie deeper in the soul, while what you think is rooted in your mind. Thoughts are rational which can be directed and focused and altered through new information. Beliefs, on the other hand are related to emotions and general attitude toward life. They are the source of your spontaneous responses to life.

Let me ask you, as we start, a few basic questions. What do you believe about your success? Do you believe success is possible? Do you believe you are a success? Do you believe that even greater success is possible for you tomorrow? Beliefs are directly linked to motivation, the foundation for the way you view yourself, the world around you, and God.

After doing your Bible study this week, which of the following beliefs do you believe is necessary for success: ⁽¹⁾ *"I can do anything."* ⁽²⁾ *"I can't do anything."* Neither will bring success. Why? Each week we use a verse as our foundation and so again this week let's start with what Paul said about a successful belief system. **Philippians 4:13** says, *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* What do you believe are the key words in that verse? (THROUGH CHRIST) Does this verse mean I can become a world-class singer even if I can't carry a tune? Why not? If we ask to do all things through Christ, then I believe that we'll set God's goals that can be accomplished with His power.

Sometimes we are devoted to many things to the point where we can't do one thing very well. We have too many "irons in the fire" to be devoted to the ONE thing of living for the Lord. *It was this decision that was the turning point in preacher Dwight L. Moody's life. Before the great Chicago fire in 1871, Moody was involved in Sunday School promotion, YMCA work, evangelistic meetings, and many other activities. But after the Chicago fire, for some reason, he decided to devote himself exclusively to evangelism. The words "This one thing I do" became very real to him. And as a result, millions of people heard the message of Christ through his preaching.*

So, how important is what you believe? If you don't believe in something, typically it won't happen. Consider these individuals and what they must have believed:

- After Fred Astaire's first screen test, the memo from the testing director of MGM said, *"Can't act! Slightly bald! Can dance a little!"* Astaire kept that memo over his fireplace in his home.
- An expert said of Vince Lombardi: *"He possesses minimal football knowledge. Lacks motivation."*

- Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper editor for lack of ideas. Walt Disney also went bankrupt several times before he built Disneyland.
- Thomas Edison's teachers said he was too stupid to learn anything.
- Albert Einstein did not speak until he was four years old and didn't read until he was seven. His teacher described him as *"mentally slow, unsociable and adrift forever in his foolish dreams."* He was expelled from school and refused admittance to the Zurich Polytechnic School.
- Basketball superstar Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team.
- Dr. Seuss' first children's book, *"And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street,"* was rejected by 27 publishers. The 28th publisher, Vanguard Press, sold 6 million copies of the book.

Dr. Stanley says that to be successful, you must believe three things that are directly related to success: ⁽¹⁾ *"I can be a success."* ⁽²⁾ *"I am making progress toward success."* ⁽³⁾ *"God desires for me to be a success.* That last one is the one we sometimes can't get through our thick skin. For some reason we sometimes forget that God is on our side and that He is going to equip you, provide for you, empower you, and be present with you to do what He calls you to do. Turn to **Hebrews 11:6 (NASB)** and listen to these words: ***6And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.***

What does this mean to you on a daily basis? It means that God is with you, and that He is working on your behalf to bring rewards to you as you seek and pursue His plan for you. Now, turn to **Romans 8:31-32 (NLT)** and follow along: ***31What shall we say***

about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³²Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?

Look back at **Romans 8:31**: *"If God is for us, who can ever be against us."*? The question is not simply, "Who can be against us?" You could answer that one. Who is against you? Disease, inflation, corruption, exhaustion. Calamities confront, and fears imprison. But that is not the question. The question is, IF GOD IS FOR US, who can be against us?

Indulge me for a minute. Four words in this scripture deserve your attention. Read slowly the phrase, "GOD IS FOR US." Pause for a moment before you continue. Read it again. GOD IS FOR US. God is for **YOU!** Not "may be", not "has been," not "was," not "would be," but "God **IS!**" He is for you. Today. At this hour. At this minute, As listen to me. No need to wait in line or come back tomorrow. He is with you. He could not be closer than he is at this second. His loyalty won't increase if you are better nor lessen if you are worse. He is for you.

God is with you. Knowing that, who is against you? Can death harm you now? Can disease rob your life? Can your purpose be taken or your value diminished? No. Though hell itself may set itself against you, no one can defeat you. You are protected. God is with you. He sacrificed his only son for our salvation. Do you think God would have gone to such extremes, if he wanted us to fret and worry? NO

You know, many people who accept that God *is for them* fail to recognize that God is also within them to ensure them that they succeed. Look over at **1 Thessalonians 5:24 (NIV)**: ²⁴*The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.* The Lord who calls you to undertake a task also provides the power, wisdom, courage, and ability within you to see that task to full completion. God-given goals are just that: God-given goals!

What does **Philippians 4:13** say again: *"I can do ALL THINGS through CHRIST who strengthens me."* You can overcome the negatives and the obstacles in your life WITH CHRIST and CHRIST alone. He believes in you, much like the teacher I heard about several years ago named Miss Thompson, who loved even the least of these as she was supposed to do. Ever heard or read her story about Teddy Stallard? Listen then...

Teddy Stallard was certainly qualified as "one of the least:" Disinterested in school, musty, wrinkled clothes, hair never combed. A glassy, unfocused stare. When Miss Thompson spoke to Teddy he always answered in monosyllables. Unattractive, unmotivated, and distant, he was just plain hard to like. Even though his teacher said she loved all in her class the same, down inside she wasn't being completely truthful. Whenever she marked Teddy's papers, she got a certain perverse pleasure out of putting X's next to the wrong answers and when she put the F's at the top of the papers, she always did it with a flair. She should have known better, she had Teddy's records and she knew more about him than she wanted to admit. The records read:

1st Grade: Teddy shows promise with his work and attitude, but poor home situation.

2nd Grade: Teddy could do better. Mother is seriously ill. He receives little help at home.

3rd Grade: Teddy is a good boy but too serious. He is a slow learner. His mother died this year.

4th Grade: Teddy is very slow. but well-behaved. His father shows no interest.

Christmas came and the boys and girls in Miss Thompson's class brought her Christmas presents. They piled their presents on her desk and crowded around to watch her open them. Among the

presents there was one from Teddy Stallard. She was surprised that he had brought her a gift. But he had. Teddy's gift was wrapped in brown paper and was held together with scotch tape. On the paper were written the simple words, "For Miss Thompson From Teddy." When she opened Teddy's present, out fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half the stones missing, and a bottle of used cheap perfume. The other boys and girls began to giggle and smirk over Teddy's gifts, but Miss Thompson at least had enough sense to silence them by immediately putting on the bracelet and putting some of the perfume on her wrist. Holding her wrist up for the other children to smell, she said. "Doesn't it smell lovely?" And the children, taking their cue from the teacher, readily agreed with "oohs" and "aahs."

At the end of the day, when school was over and the other children had left. Teddy lingered behind. He slowly came over to her desk and said softly, "Miss Thompson...Miss Thompson, you smell just like my Mother...her bracelet looks real pretty on you, too. I'm glad you liked my presents." When Teddy left, Miss. Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her.

The next day when the children came to school, they were welcomed by a new teacher. Miss Thompson had become a different person. She was no longer just a teacher, she had become an agent of God. She was now a person committed to loving her children and doing things for them that would live on after her. She helped all the children, but especially the slow ones, and especially Teddy Stallard. By the end of that school year. Teddy showed dramatic improvement, he had caught up with most of the students and was even ahead of some.

She didn't hear from Teddy for a long time (seven years). Then one day. she received a note that read: Dear Miss Thompson, I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class. Love, Teddy Stallard

Four years later, another note came: Dear Miss Thompson, They just told me I will be graduating first In my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it. Love, Teddy Stallard

And four years later: Dear Miss Thompson, As of today. I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now. Dad died last year. Love, Teddy Stallard

Miss Thompson went to that wedding and sat where Teddy's mother would have sat. She deserved to sit there: she had done something for Teddy he could never forget.

God certainly instrumented Teddy Stallard's success through the faithfulness and love of his teacher, Miss Thompson. We have to BELIEVE that God's principals work. Where do we find God's principals? Yes, in the Bible. If you don't know them, read your Bible and memorize them. If you don't know them and believe in them, you won't act on them and apply them to your life. If you don't apply them, they won't work.

The opposite is equally true. If you believe in the principles of the Bible regarding a successful life, you will act on them and apply them. You will read God's Word and you will do what it tells you to do. As you apply God's principles, you will discover that the truth of the Bible works in your life.

Let's look at several examples as we near the end of this study. The conventional world wisdom is that a store must be open seven days a week. Listen to God's words from **Exodus 20:9-10** (NLT):
⁹You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This

includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. Are you willing to obey what *God* says over what the world says? Do you truly *believe* this commandment of God?

Ever heard of Truett Cathy? The founder of the now-famous *Chick-fil-A* restaurant chain. But Truett Cathy, for all of his culinary and marketing genius, did have a bit of a quirk. As a devout Christian, Cathy had refused to operate on Sundays ever since he opened his first little restaurant called the Dwarf Grill. At first, this posed little problem for his new firm. Although the policy occasionally created difficulty securing mall contracts, his recipe was in such demand that the malls simply could not say no. Fifteen years later, Chick-fil-A annual sales would top \$100 million.

And then came the economic threat that would audit Cathy's faith. During the deep recession of 1982, sharply lower demand for dining out caused Chick-fil-A sales to decline for the first time ever. To make matters worse, it was around this time that national burger chains suddenly became direct competitors with Cathy by offering chicken sandwiches as menu mainstays. If this were not enough, chicken prices were soaring and the company was beset with heavy debt (with interest rates hovering around 21 percent) for building a five-story office complex. Financial crisis, it seemed, was imminent. Here at the crossroads lay the specter of what had been non-negotiable for decades: opening on the Sabbath. Another day of operation – especially a day where mall traffic was so high—would add at least 16 percent to current revenues. A policy change might therefore mean the difference between the mall's center court and the government's bankruptcy court.

Profitable solutions...God's will. Often they intersect, sometimes they do not. And it is in this later tension that the Christian manager's faith is ultimately tested in the divine crucible. It is here that one must choose whether what he or she learned in business school comes first or second. It is here that top

management must decide whether the organization's direction will be charted using God's compass or a gauge of their own creation. Truett Cathy was committed to doing things God's way independent of the cost.

In one respect, this commitment undergirded much of his financial success. He saw first-hand the overlap between profitable solutions and God's will. There is a common ground, an intersection of the two realms. Operating in that intersection, Cathy was industrious and his work ethic shaped the corporation culture. In that intersection, Cathy cut no more corners to serve the highest quality food he could produce. As he likes to say, "There's always a market for the best." He cared for his employees, sought to meet their many needs, and reaped the lowest turnover in the industry. All of these actions he saw as honoring God by honoring his employees and customers. Cathy had, in fact, discovered another winning recipe for building repeat business, high-Market share and employee commitment.

However, as a man of principle, Cathy knew that his no-compromise approach to honoring God must also apply to those times when profitability and God's will seemed mutually exclusive. So in the midst of Chick-fil-A's 1982 crisis, he went on retreat to strategize with his top managers. It was on this retreat that Truett Cathy rededicated his business to God and, in conjunction with his management team, crafted a new corporate mission statement: "To glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us and to have positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A." Consistent with this vision, Cathy remained resolute in proscribing Sunday work. **Regardless of how much revenue could be generated or what capital was required, Cathy's restaurants would remain closed on the Sabbath. Period.** God's will was paramount. Cathy determined that one day of rest to obey the Fourth Commandment) see Ex. 20:8-11) and let his employees attend worship if they desired would honor God.

If God wanted this six-day-a-week operation to shut down, then that's what could and should happen, Cathy concluded.

Significantly, this story has a happy ending. So stable is his market position that Cathy cheerfully claims to even be helping the competitions, noting that "some of our competitors in the malls tell me that they wouldn't have made it if we didn't close on Sundays!" Saying yes to God on the job does not always precipitate financial or career success.

Applying our faith invites both triumph and trial. For those who genuinely devote their work to God, though, the challenge is to recognize that God is at work regardless the outcome. Our God is the real Boss, the inerrant consultant for every decision, and the immovable anchorman in this daily tug-of-war. And he promises us success (in His eyes) when we unalterably stand by our commitment to Him.

Let's Pray.

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