

“The God of love and peace will be with you.” (2 Corinthians 13:11, EHV)

Theme: Power in Weakness

- I. God’s promise
- II. Our failure
- III. God’s power

**Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. <sup>7</sup> “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. <sup>8</sup> Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. <sup>9</sup> Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”**

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Mighty ones in the LORD our strength,

How do you measure success? Is success achieving the American dream: the house with the white picket fence and three-car garage filled with Porsches, the perfect job and the perfect family? Does succeeding mean working less hours for more money with more vacation time? Students, have you “made it” if you are able to get the A using minimal effort studying? Is success making it in to the school of your dreams or pursuing advanced degrees? When do you know you’ve “made it?”

World War II General George Patton proposed a definition of success: “I don’t measure a man’s success by how high he climbs, but how high he bounces when he hits bottom.” So is success measured in sweat instead of achieving aspirations? What does God’s Word have to say about how to achieve success? Today we see God’s POWER IN human WEAKNESS. Could that be the key to success?

God tells Joshua three times in this short section, “Be strong and courageous.” Joshua needed to hear those words. Put yourself in his shoes. Moses, the great prophet and leader of God’s people, has died. You have suddenly become leader, of a large nation, of God’s very own people God. The task ahead of you might as well be “Mission Impossible.” Like the Allies executing their plans for D-day, you’re commanded to clear the countries from Canaan. Add a couple wrinkles: they’ve lived in fortified cities for hundreds of years while your soldiers slaved. And there’s the slaughter. God has ordered you to wipe out the people of the land because they hardened their hearts against him.

That highlights another important part of your job. You are the spiritual leader of the nation that represents God to the world. Joshua wasn’t only army commander—a job he had done before. He led all Israel to inherit the promised land. He led all Israel in “carefully obeying” the law of Moses. His personal resolve reflected in the troops on the battlefield and in the men, women, and children who struggled to obey the LORD. Israel’s success depends on you, Joshua, God’s chosen leader. Prosperity rides on your shoulders.

Could you do it? Could you succeed Moses the man of God as Israel’s leader? Most of us would probably have trouble following our current president, much less George Washington or Moses! Could you bring success to a nation? Would you do what God commanded Joshua: exterminate entire races

because the LORD says so? Or would you, like Joshua and the people, start with the best intentions, only to let the world's wickedness win? Are you strong and courageous enough to read your Bible so much that its words come out of you automatically? Do you meditate on this Word of God, guarding it as your treasure day and night? Can you do it? Can you carefully obey everything Moses commanded? Do you have POWER, even IN moments of WEAKNESS?

If you think God's instructions here to "keep this book of the law always on your lips" and "meditate on it day and night" are good suggestions or a bonus way to spend your extra time in a busy world, you've missed the mark. God commanded it, not when it's convenient. He commands our attention to it at all times. He promises blessings to those who follow. I know our translation promises success; that isn't outside of the idea inherent in the word, but the Hebrew word is related to skill and wisdom. That leads to success. Want to prove to the world you know what you're doing? Follow what God says. All the time. To do that, you need to know everything God says.

What could be more logical? God, who designed us, knows exactly what leads to the best outcome. He knows how the world works. He lays out the map.

Just think of hiking. As long as you stay on the path, you'll have no problems. Follow the signs that indicate where to go. Wander off the path and ignore those signs, and you quickly find yourself lost. Ignoring directions can and does have disastrous consequences.

God lays out the path for us in his Word. He desires us all to stay on the path. He promises success and prosperity and even eternal life for following it. The reward could not be higher! You couldn't make a better deal than to follow God's Word and inherit eternal life, along with "success" in this life. Yet the law is powerless to give us the strength to keep it. The law cannot make us strong enough to do what it says.

Neither could Joshua. As the LORD told him to be strong and courageous, the LORD's own words were able to provide him with strength and courage. But he couldn't get God's people to obey God's commands. He couldn't even do it himself. God gave Joshua all the strength and courage he needed to bring the people into their inheritance, just as the LORD promised. But he didn't keep the law. Neither did the people. Neither can we.

We are too weak. Humans by nature cannot do everything God commands. We have trouble reading the Bible well enough to have an answer for every situation. In our weakness, all we can do is ask for strength. Strength that comes from elsewhere.

God promised that to Joshua. God, who in this section begins with his promises, ends with a promise. "The LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." The LORD was with Joshua and the people as they took the land. He was with them as they settled in it and began to ignore his Word. He was with his people even though all this law would ever amount to is a curse. We cannot keep his law.

But he can. That's where another Joshua, one whose name you know better in Greek, enters the story. Joshua's name means "The LORD saves." It's also the name of the hero of this story, not Joshua, the successor of Moses, but Jesus, the Son of God, our Savior. He was with his people from the beginning, and remained with them. He came to them, not with the divine power that destroys people who disobey. Instead, he came to them in human weakness. But he was anything but weak when it came to God's Word. He relied on it for strength. There he found POWER IN WEAKNESS to stand up to the devil's schemes. He answered with the powerful Word of God. He meditated day and night. God's Word was on his lips, not just when he was teaching, but when he was at his weakest. He didn't deviate to right or left, even when that put him in the path of greatest suffering. He wiped out sin by his death on the cross. He is the Savior, who gives his strength to ours.

Jesus isn't just the success story of Joshua's life, either. The same God who called Joshua to be strong and courageous by faith calls you to trust in Jesus for strength. He gives you Jesus' success. Jesus'

POWER IN WEAKNESS covers your weakness. It gives you eternal life. What could be more of a success than that?

So what does that mean for us now? The same Word of God that gave Jesus power over death is in your hands. The promises he earned have been given to you. You can be strong and courageous as you deal with the armies of sin, death and hell. You are God's people, who represent him in the world.

That drives us back to the Word. If this Word of God hasn't already earned a place in our lives because of the life it gives, we go back to it because there we find success for our failures and strength for our weakness: Jesus. God's Word forgives our sins. We rely on its strength every day. Get to know it—not just when you have free time, but so that your life revolves around it. Find its answers to life's problems. Learn its method for success. Success in the Bible is trust in Jesus, who saves.

That gives you POWER IN WEAKNESS. Shape your success around what God calls success. Success is bouncing from rock bottom—from the rock bottom of sin to the heights of heaven, prepared for you by Jesus. Success is bringing souls the good news about Jesus, who saved you. Success is raising children who know their Savior. Success is meditating on God's Word when you wake up and when you got to sleep, when you eat and drink, as you grow and when you die. Success is living God's Word in whatever job God has given you. Success is living for Jesus, who gave his life to you.

So how do you measure success? The world has its own ideas of success. For us, God's Word has already given us success. It is Jesus' victory over sin, death, and the devil. That's why we read the Bible. Here we find POWER IN WEAKNESS, power that keeps us close to Jesus. That is true success. Amen.

“May the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all.” (2 Thessalonians 3:16, EHV)