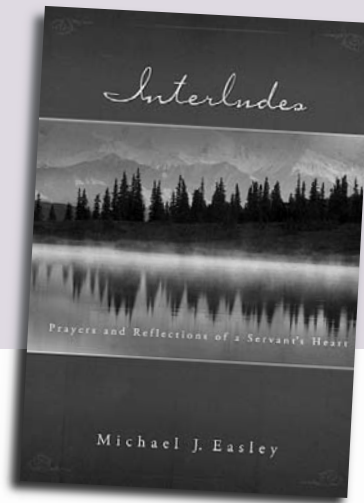


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A Biblical Formula for True Success in Life

by Michael J. Easley

Michael J. Easley



Dr. Michael J. Easley became the eighth president of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago on March 1, 2005. A gifted Bible teacher and church leader, he shares the passion for ministry, heart for people, and love for God that have distinguished previous Moody presidents for the past 119 years.

Dr. Easley came to Moody Bible Institute after serving in the pastorate for more than 20 years, first at Grand Prairie Bible Church in Texas and most recently at Immanuel Bible Church in Springfield, Virginia. Dr. Easley's love for ministry and the teaching of the Word, along with his desire to be part of a team, allowed the churches where he served to grow and prosper.

Dr. Easley's desire to enter full-time ministry began while he was a college student at Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches, Texas. In order to prepare himself and learn more about God's Word, he earned a Master of Theology (Th.M.) degree from Dallas Theological Seminary, returning to the Seminary later to complete a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) degree as well.

As president of Moody, Dr. Easley oversees the entire scope of the Institute's ministries, including education, broadcasting, and publishing. He married his wife, Cindy, in 1980, and together they are raising four children: Hanna, Jessie, Devin, and Sarah.

Some time ago I was privileged to go on a two-day retreat with a friend I highly respect—a retired Air Force officer and former CEO of a very large corporation. I had asked this friend to help me define true success in my life, so for two days we studied God's Word and talked together as we tried to determine what real success would look like in terms of serving Jesus Christ with the gifts and resources He has given us.

Out of that study emerged some principles I want to share with you that I believe will give you a biblical formula for true success. But before we look at these, I want you to think about the issue of success. You'll discover that it is one of those concepts that is hard to define. A lot of people would equate success with the so-called

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American dream of owning a home, having a well-paying, satisfying job, and raising children who turn out to be well-adjusted adults.

There is nothing wrong with those things, but let me ask you a challenging question. If you were to pull the “American dream” threads out of the fabric of what you consider to be success, would that fabric unravel before your eyes? I’m afraid it would for many people, even for many Christians. So we need to consider what success might look like from God’s standpoint—and in turning to His Word, we discover that true success is radically different from the picture we find in the world.

I want to look at four ingredients of success from 1 Timothy 4:6–10, a key passage in which Paul as the elder apostle and statesman writes to Timothy, his son in the faith. These verses help us understand what it means to be successful in God’s eyes.

True Success Demands the Right Directive

If you and I are going to be successful in serving Christ, we need to have the right directive. Paul wrote to Timothy: “If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of

the good teaching that you have followed” (1 Tim. 4:6). The word Paul used for “point out” means to “lay it down” as someone would lay down the directives for a project.

What is the directive we need to follow as Christians?

Clearly, it is “the truths of the faith.” The context of Paul’s statement is the “deceiving spirits” and “hypocritical liars” the apostle warned Timothy about in verses 1–5 of this chapter. The role of students and graduates at Dallas Seminary as preachers and teachers is to lay down the principles of God’s Word in such a way that His people can clearly see the truth over against what is false.

OUR JOB AS CHRISTIANS IS TO MAKE SURE THAT THE DIRECTION OF OUR LIVES IS BASED ON THE DIRECTIVES OF SCRIPTURE.

This means it is also our job as Christians to make sure that the direction of our lives is based on the directives of Scripture. If you want to know what a life anchored in God’s Word looks like, Paul gave us this portrait earlier in 1 Timothy: “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1:5). If these qualities describe you, you are well on your way to being successful in God’s eyes.

True Success Demands the Right Diet

The verb “brought up” in 1 Timothy 4:6 can also be translated “nourished.” The meaning is to provide with food or to feed. It can even refer to a nursing child. The idea is that we are to feed and nourish ourselves on the Word of God so that we may grow strong in faith.

What’s interesting is that the particular form of the verb used here suggests that we are to nourish ourselves, which I think is the idea Paul was after. Timothy was to feed himself

on two things, “the truths of the faith and of the good teaching.” Again, the content of our nourishment is the Word of God.

I don’t know about you, but I nourish myself every day. No one has to remind me to eat every day. Most of us are faithful eaters—but I wonder how we as Christians are doing in the area of our spiritual diet, feeding ourselves daily on God’s Word.

Whenever I speak at a retreat or other location, I get some funny looks when I ask people if they are spending time in their Bibles every day. I encourage you to consider your Bible as important as the food you need to live. It’s not that we *have* to read the Word every day; it’s that we *get* to. It’s our privilege to

have the Word in our hands by which we can read and study and grow.

When we lived in Texas, we used to go to an Asian buffet restaurant where you

can eat yourself into oblivion. I remember eating there one day when the thought suddenly hit me that I had never denied myself a meal. But when I don’t feed on God’s Word, I am denying

IT’S NOT THAT WE HAVE TO READ THE WORD EVERY DAY; IT’S THAT WE GET TO.

myself a feast that will nourish my faith and help me be truly successful in life.

True Success Demands the Right Discipline

Here is the third ingredient in a biblical formula for success. “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Tim. 4:7–8). We are to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.

I recently heard a physician who was talking about aging and medicine, and he said that exercise is the “magic bullet” to most maladies in our older years. We all know the importance of bodily discipline for health in this life. Yet Paul says that spiritual discipline holds value not only for this life, but also for the life to come.

Many successful people would tell you that not very much of lasting value is accomplished without discipline. Good spiritual discipline follows logically

from having a healthy spiritual diet. Paul knew that it wasn’t enough for Timothy just to know the truth. He also needed to practice it, again and again, the way an athlete continues to train and practice the fundamentals of his or her sport. Elsewhere Paul taught that if athletes are willing to discipline their bodies to receive a perishable prize, how much more should we as God’s people be willing to discipline our lives to win the eternal prize from Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 9:24–27)?

True Success Demands the Right Desire

The right desire is also important for true success. Paul continued, “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:9–10).

Here Paul talks about our motivation in life and service. I want to focus on the words “labor” and “strive.” Labor means work that is exhausting and sweaty, which reminds me of growing up in

the hot, humid biosphere of Houston, Texas.

My father was not afraid of hard work. I can remember as a small boy on sweltering Houston nights, holding the light for my father as he worked under his 1966 Plymouth. “Hold the light, boy,” he would say to me. “I can’t see a thing if it is shining in my eyes.” My task was to hold the light, and when we were done, we would both be drenched with sweat and smelling like grease. Dad would smile and say, “We did it.”

In fact, my father would often tell me, “The reward of work is not the end of it, but the work itself.” He taught me never to be afraid of working hard.

I have to be candid with you and say that one of my greatest fears as I watch this culture is that we have adopted an entitlement mind-set. As a pastor for 20 years, I hired a lot of people. It is sad to say that the first thing many of them wanted to know was what they were going to get, what they had coming to them because they had a degree.

My friend, we are serving

the King of kings! Don’t come to Him with your hand held out, but with your sleeves rolled up, ready to work hard. And if you work hard, God will take care of what you need.

“Strive” is the other word I want to emphasize in this area of our desire to serve the Lord and be successful in His eyes. It is the basis of the word “agonize,” and it means to “fight” or “struggle.” I played football

in junior high school. I was no good, so they made me into a lineman. There I found out that I did one thing well: hit people. I loved to play defense because I could use my hands, and once in a while I would break through the line and crush the quarterback—in a Christian sort of way! I would look up and my coach would tell me, “Way to go, Iron Mike.”

I didn’t like the agonizing and the struggle of practice, but I loved flattening the opposing quarterback and hearing my coach say, if you will forgive me, “Well done, well done!”

Are you laboring and striving to serve the King of the universe, or are you

“THE REWARD OF WORK IS NOT THE END OF IT, BUT THE WORK ITSELF.”

looking for what you have coming to you? We can have the right desire to serve the Lord with everything we have because we have a living hope! “We have put our hope in the living God,” Paul reminds us. Because our hope is fixed on God, it is not a temporal but an eternal hope. As the hymn says, we serve a living Savior who is in the world today—not a dead God we read about through dead words on the pages of a dead book.

So let me ask you: What are you doing with what God has given you? Are you laboring hard, agonizing in your work to do and be your best for Jesus Christ? You and I need the right directive, which is the Word of God and the truths it contains. To be truly successful, our direction must come from God through His Word.

Then we need the right diet. We have to feed and nourish ourselves on the Word of faith and of sound doctrine. The right discipline is also required to ensure that we are doing each day the things we need to do. And when these things are in place, having the right desire to work hard and give God our best will be

easier to attain.

All of us want to be successful in life. Having the right formula and pursuing the right kind of success are important all the time, but this really makes the difference in those tough times when you are worn out and find yourself saying, “Why am I doing this?”

I had one of those times in 1987 when I almost walked away from my ministry as a pastor. I told myself I was done with this church stuff. It was too hard, people didn’t care—and besides, sheep are stupid anyway. To be very honest, for two years I hated sheep. But the real problem wasn’t with the sheep—it was with the sheep dog. I had to step back and get things in focus.

So I can tell you that without the right directive, the right diet, the right discipline, and the right desire, you will be confused about what success in life really is. But once you start getting these priorities in line, you will begin to discover the wonderful plan God has for your life.

This message is taken from Dr. Easley’s chapel address to the Dallas Seminary student body.

Preparing leaders with the “right stuff”

As a former pastor and now a school president myself, I deeply appreciate Dr. Michael Easley’s message to the Dallas Seminary family. Like Michael, I am discovering that leading a great school requires all the discipline, hard work, and desire I can muster!

I’m sure you have discovered the same to be true in the calling where God has placed you—whether that is in the office, the shop, or the home. No matter where we serve, it takes the “right stuff” to be truly effective and successful for the Lord. At Dallas Seminary, we are committed to instilling in our students not only the truths of God’s Word, but also a godly determination to roll up their sleeves and work hard in their ministries, to serve with discipline and excellence.

I believe that the people we serve deserve nothing less than our best. As a friend and supporter of this ministry, you need to know that your investment is well placed—that the men and women who leave Dallas Seminary to follow God’s call to the ends of the earth have the “right stuff” to do the job. We will never waver in keeping our standards high.

I trust that Michael Easley’s ringing call to true, God-centered success has stirred within you a renewed desire to make sure your life reflects the right directive, the right diet, the right discipline, and the right desire. There is more than enough in his message for us to meditate on and put into practice with the Holy Spirit’s help. This is the purpose of *Veritas*—to be a tool in your hand to help you put God’s Word to work in your daily life.

Our commitment to help you be the best you can be for the Lord is only right, because it is your prayers and financial support of Dallas Seminary that enable us to prepare godly leaders like Michael Easley who can equip believers like you for true spiritual success in life. Thank you for partnering with us in this work.



DR. MARK L. BAILEY
President

Dallas Theological Seminary

