

Christ's Success Formula

By

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Mark 11:19-26

In our Scripture today we read of Christ's success formula. Faith may sound easy to some people, but if you are living by faith today you will appreciate this true-life experience of Tom McDowell.

On February 6, 1977 at 6 o'clock in the morning on a slippery road in West Virginia Tom McDowell was driving up a hill with his tractor-trailer truck loaded with meat and produce. His first stop was not far from what happened next.

The truck tires lost their traction and began to slip backwards down the hill. He knew there was a steep drop-off just behind him. There were no guardrails, no trees, just a 75 - 100 foot drop over the roadbed. He opened the door and had an impulse to jump. It was only a few more yards to the drop off. Instead, he prayed and pleaded the blood of Christ. The truck stopped with the rear wheels hanging over the drop off.

He got out of the truck and immediately fell down on the slippery road. The thought came to him that if he had jumped he probably would have fallen under the wheels of the 70 thousand pounds sliding truck. It had slid about 150 feet before it stopped at the edge. He got back into the cab of the truck.

Suddenly, coming down the road was a car. Another car was pulling up the hill going the other way. The car coming down had no place to go -- except to smash into the front of the truck. Wham! The truck was jolted by the impact but it still didn't fall over the drop. The car that rammed the truck was badly damaged, although the truck was not.

A highway patrolman came to the scene; as he got out of his patrol car he too slipped on the icy pavement. As he saw the truck parked in such a precarious place he said, "You were sure lucky there was a tree there to stop the slide of the truck." Tom looked at him and said, "There is no tree behind the truck." The patrolman walked and slid back to take a look, and sure enough, there was nothing behind the truck but empty space and a sheer drop off. He shook his head wonderingly.

I was Tom McDowell's pastor and he told me this story shortly after it happened. He had a little difficulty telling it without getting choked up. He told me he had just listened to a sermon I had preached -- "The Roaring Lion" about temptation and the need to put on the whole armor of God. He said to me, "I just can't tell you how this made me feel. I really saw the power of God. I just praise the Lord for this experience, but I hope I don't have another one like it any time soon.

Tom's experience points up the fact that the Christian life is a life of faith from beginning to end. Living by faith is never dull and it is never easy; exciting, yes; dull, no, challenging, yes, easy, no. Sliding down that mountain road backwards was easy but making a decision to remain in the cab and trust the Lord was crucial, and it required an instantaneous act of faith for the outcome to be successful.

The natural inclination is to act just the opposite of faith. That is because we have all come out of unbelief. We are not born with faith. Faith is a gift from God and it doesn't come full-blown. It begins as small as a mustard seed and then begins to take on size and strength. For this there must be the maturing of faith from God's Word and experiences that cause faith to be strengthened, even as Tom had a sudden, unexpected challenge to his faith. Tom's faith was stronger because of what happened. He is wiser in the Lord because of that experience. He can

share it with others, but it was after all his faith that was tested, not yours or mine.

I'm sure not everyone would have been ready for his test. A lot of people would have jumped out of that truck cab when the impulse came to jump. The natural impulse of man's heart is to walk by sight and not by faith.

The story is told of two young boys playing on a hillside when they noticed that the hour was nearing sunset. One said, "See how the sun has gone down. A little while ago it was right over that tree and now it is low down in the sky." The other boy replied, "Yes, but it wasn't the sun that moved; it was the earth you know, my father told me."

The first boy shook his head and insisted that the sun did move, for he had seen it, and the earth did not move, for he had been standing on it all the time. "I know what I see," he said triumphantly. "And I believe my father," said the other.

So mankind divides still -- some accepting only what their senses reveal to them, the others believing the Word of God.

You've probably heard the expression, I'm from Missouri, show me. A young man of very profound intellect and high culture announced to a group of friends in Missouri one day that he would believe nothing that he could not understand. An old farmer chanced to overhear the remark and turning to the young man said, "As I was riding into town today, I passed a meadow on which some sheep were feeding. Do you believe it?" "Yes," replied the young man.

"Not far from the sheep," said the farmer, "some calves were feeding. Do you believe it?" "Yes"

"Not far from the calves some pigs were feeding. Do you believe it?" "Yes" was the answer.

"Not far from the pigs some geese were feeding. Do you believe it?" "Yes," again.

“Well,” said the farmer, “the grass that the sheep ate will turn into wool; the grass that the calves ate will turn into hair; the grass that the pigs ate will turn into bristles; and the grass that the geese ate will turn into feathers. Do you believe it?” “Yes, certainly,” the young man answered promptly.

“Do you understand it though?” “No,” the young man replied. “Young man,” said the farmer, “If you live long enough you will find that there are a great many things that you will believe without understanding.”

Another thing that makes faith difficult is the uncertainty and unpredictability of life. Did you hear about the weatherman in, Buffalo who quit his job because the weather was so unpredictable?

Faith calls on us to believe God for things that seem unlikely to happen. That was the case with the Fig tree that our Lord cursed. God expects every tree to bear fruit and this tree hadn’t done so. The Lord cursed it, no doubt as an object lesson. But there was no earthly reason to suppose that the fig tree would wither. The weather was not likely to cause it. Yet it did wither. And there is no explanation for it other than the faith of the Son of God.

God’s Word tells us that faith is absolutely essential. Hebrews 11:6-12 tells us, **And 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.**

In thinking about that have you ever asked yourself why? Why is it impossible to please God unless you have faith? The answer is obvious: it is because God is invisible. You can’t by using any of your five senses find God. Since you don’t see God and have no way to verify his existence other than by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling the existing world around you with all of its multitudinous forms of life it is only by faith that anyone can know that God must exist, because none of

these existing material things and living creatures could have happened apart from an unseen and superior intelligence and power that we call God.

Fortunately, God has given special revelation. Special revelation comes to us via God's Word. His word has been coming to man since the creation of Adam and Eve. Hebrews 1:1-2 details this special revelation: **God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ²in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.**

All men are guilty for not honoring God as Creator and giving thanks to him for all his goodness even though they know of his invisible attributes, his eternal power and divine nature through the created order. (See Romans 1:18-25)

God reveals himself in his creation but in a more essential and defining way he reveals himself in his Word. We come to true, saving faith in and by the Word of God. The entrance of his Word brings light. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. It is by the Word of God that faith is born and nurtured. How precious is the Word of God!

If men are without excuse for knowing there is a God of infinite wisdom, power and glory simply by apprehending the created order how much more are they excuseless when they are given the word of God, especially when it is attended with the power of the Holy spirit?

On top of the created order and the Word of God there is the argument of history to persuade men to have faith in God. The lives of men and women who have trusted God demonstrates God's love and care.

Think of Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Think of Moses, Caleb, Joshua, the prophets, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and many, many more. Think of

Christ himself and all the apostles except Judas. Think of all the men of faith produced by the Christian church: Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, Whitfield, the list is literally endless. All these found God to be true.

For all these reasons is it not reasonable and right to trust in God and live by faith? But when God himself tells us that without faith it is impossible to please him I would take that to mean that unless I want to be found displeasing to God I would want above all things to have faith in Him and live by that faith every day.

But the clincher for living by faith ought to be the argument from personal experience. Any man who will just do the will of God as revealed in the Word of God will discover that God is true to his word. He does just what he says he will do.

A skeptical physician said to his Christian patient: "I have never been able to understand saving faith. I believe in God, and I suppose I believe in Jesus Christ -- I am not conscious of any doubts. I believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and I believe in the Bible, yet I am not saved. What is the matter with me?"

"Well," said the patient. "A week ago I believed in you as as a very skillful physician. I believed that if I should get sick and put myself in your hands I would be healed. In other words, I trusted you. For two days now I have been taking some mysterious stuff out of a bottle. I don't know what it is, I don't understand it, but I am trusting that you know what you are doing and that you can help my case. Now, whenever you turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and say, "Lord Jesus, Christianity seems to me to be full of mysteries. I do not understand them, but I believe Thou art trustworthy, and I trust Thee; I commit myself to Thee that is saving faith. "

A very simple thing, is it not? The faith of the person did not heal him; it was 'the remedy that healed Him, but faith took the remedy. Every one must come to a personal faith in Jesus Christ as the remedy for sins.

He must trust him as his personal Savior and Lord, and then he is saved.

But saving faith leads to a life of faith Christ gives the formula for success in the Christian life when he told the disciples, **“Have faith in God. ²³“Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him.**

Have faith in God. This is a basic beginning. We must come to God believing that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Secondly, make definite faith decisions. In the explanations of the reason why the fig tree withered, Christ told his disciples to have in mind exactly what it was they wanted to have happen, even if it was to say to a mountain, **‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’** This was something that had been decided. Then believe God for the thing to happen

Thirdly, follow up your faith decisions with prayer, **all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be *granted* you.**

God responds to faith. He healed the palsied man because of his faith and the faith of the four who brought him (Mk. 2:5). He healed the daughter of the Syrophenician woman because of her persistent faith (Matt. 15:21-28), We are told to be importunate, persistent and decisive in our faith.

Christ did add that we must forgive those whom we have something against. ²⁵**“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.**

²⁶“**□ But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.**

Saving faith involves repentance and forgiveness. God forgives us on the basis of Christ's redemptive work on the cross. Faith must extend that same forgiveness to those who have sinned against us. Forgiveness is a condition for successful prayer.

How is it with you today? Do you know you are saved and are going to heaven? Have you personally trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior and made him Lord of your life? And are you living each day by faith. Do you take every problem that comes along to the Lord? Do you make faith decisions and then follow up with believing prayer? I invite you to have faith in God and Christ and to live a life of faith every day of your life.