

“SECRETS TO SUCCESS”

(1 Timothy 4:6-12)

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[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 5-21-23]

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1. [11AM ONLY...] Read CEB Text: 1 Timothy 4:6-12 and Pray.
2. Today is graduate recognition Sunday -- a day for us to honor and recognize our high school and college graduates as they celebrate their achievements thus far, and prepare for the next stage of their life.

A--But in a greater sense, today is also a day for us ALL to remember (& be reminded) that we are "perpetual students," of sorts -- that no matter how old we are, there will *always be* new things to learn in life.

B--And this is especially true in terms of our Christian faith, where we seek to follow the teachings & example of Jesus (who was sometimes called "*Rabbi/Teacher*"), & where we as his followers often refer to ourselves as "*disciples*" (which means "*student*").

3. For that reason, the apostle Paul wrote letters to one of his young apprentices named Timothy in which he shared things he felt Timothy needed in order to be successful both in life and in Christian faith.

A--Today these are the biblical books of 1st & 2nd Timothy, but in reality, they're nothing more than Paul's lessons about how to succeed in life -- i.e., his "*Secrets To Success.*"

[9am ONLY...] B--Listen to his words in chapter 4:

6 If you point these things out to the believers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus who has been trained by the words of faith and the good teaching that you've carefully followed. 7 But stay away from the godless myths that are passed down from the older women. Train yourself for a holy life! 8 While physical training has some value, training in holy living is useful for everything. It has promise for this life now and the life to come. 9 This saying is reliable and deserves complete acceptance. 10 We work and struggle for this: "Our hope is set on the living God, who is the savior of all people, especially those who believe." 11 Command these things. Teach them. 12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. Instead, set an example for the believers through your speech, behavior, love, faith, and by being sexually pure.

[11am ONLY...] B--Listen again, for example, to what he says in Verse 6 of today's scripture from 1 Timothy 4 "*If you point these things out to the believers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus who has been trained by the words of faith and the good teaching that you've carefully followed.*"

4. So today, I'd like to use Paul's words here both as words of encouragement and challenge not only for today's *graduates*, but really for *all* of us, as well.

--II--

5. The first thing Paul describes along these lines is found in Verse 7, where he says: "*Stay away from the godless myths that are passed down...*" -- I love how The Message version translates this verse: "*Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion.*"

A--In other words, **DON'T BE GULLIBLE** -- don't believe everything comes along; don't automatically buy into what the crowd is doing or saying.

1--Paul obviously had some experience with this... he'd seen people who would otherwise be reasonable and intelligent get sucked in to what he called "*godless myths*" and "*silly stories that get dressed up as religion.*" --...

2--...His point being that there are many things out in the world that *pretend* to be true, but *aren't* --things (like cults) that masquerade as religious *truth* but are *not*

B--I remember when I graduated from High School and went to college (a supposedly "Christian" college, even!) I was bombarded with social influences that pressured me to think and practice things that may have looked and *felt* right on the surface, but really *weren't* -- to convince me of the "rightness" of *UNtruth*.

1--...UNtruth like: "*Might makes right*"; "*the majority is always right*"; "*If it feels good it must be okay*"; UNtruth like "*the only person that matters is you!*"; and "*If you want to be accepted, you have to think & act like everybody else*"; etc.

2--And today, many grown adults buy into "myths" and UNtruths found on the internet, on social media, or even shared by our gossip networks.

3--Yet to all of these, Paul essentially says to Timothy (and to us today, as well), "*Don't be gullible! Don't be suckered in by things like this! ...because these things are nothing more than 'silly stories dressed up as [a form of] religion.'*"

C--So how, then, do we *know* what these things are so we can avoid them? Well, the only sure way to discern UNtruth is by us knowing and learning what IS true.

6. And we do that by following Paul's second "Secrets to Success," found in Verses 7b-8: "*Train yourself for a holy life! [for] while physical training has some value, training in holy living is useful for everything. It has promise for this life now and the life to come.*"

A--In other words, **PRACTICE YOUR FAITH** -- that is: do intentional things that help you stay connected to God.

B--Let me ask: How many of you have some sort of regular exercise routine, either at your house, at a gym, or somewhere else? [WAIT FOR SHOW OF HANDS...] So, what's the purpose of exercise? (...develop our bodies & keep them healthy)

1--Well, Paul is saying that just as surely as we need to regularly exercise our *physical* body to stay healthy, so we need to regularly exercise (or "train") our *spiritual* body to stay spiritually healthy and be able discern & avoid UNtruth.

2--He's saying that not only our life in the present but also our *eternal* life will only be fulfilling when we take time to engage ourselves in intentional, spiritual practices that help us learn about, grow with, and connect to God.

C--Now, he doesn't list what these are here, but the Bible is clear that they at least include spiritual disciplines like: Prayer; Bible study; regular participation in worship & a small group; receiving Holy Communion; fasting; sharing our faith; helping others in need; and even financial giving to God through His church.

D--So to our graduates (really, to ALL of us) I say... if you want to succeed in life, then if you're not already, you need to practice your faith in at least these ways.

1--These are how we'll know truth (and how we'll be better able to avoid UNtruth when we're tempted by it).

2--These are how we'll receive strength and help when we go through tough times

3--Our regular practice of these is how we'll be able grow into healthy, mature men or women of God.

4--And conversely... *without* them (e.g., when we don't practice them), we'll find ourselves getting spiritually flabby, out of shape and overweight, and vulnerable to whatever spiritual disease comes along.

E--So don't let that happen. Practice your faith! Stay connected to God and His church!

7. The final of Paul's "Secrets to Success" that I want to share today is found in Verse 12: *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. Instead, set an example for the believers through your speech, behavior, love, faith, and purity."*

A--My way of saying that is... young people (and *all of us*): **BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE WORLD.**

1--In other words, if you want the world (or your school, or your church, or your community) to be different, then instead of complaining about how it's run, or how others aren't doing what *they* should be, then BE different *yourself*.

2--If you're tired of others selfishly looking after what *they* want and not really considering others, then first check to make sure that you are not coming across as selfish or self-centered yourself, and then determine to continue to be self-LESS in *your actions*.

3--If you want your neighborhood, or your community, or your church, or your world to be a kinder, gentler, and more patient neighborhood, community, church, or world, then BE kinder, gentler & more patient yourself in your treatment of others.

4--Or as Paul puts all of this... "*set an example for the believers through YOUR speech, behavior, love, faith, and purity.*"

B--The lyrics to a song by Christian artist "Caedmon's Call" put it this way:

*"Don't blame the bullet for the wars you have sown
Don't blame the winter when you've forgotten your coat
When you make the same deals for a hundred years & you wanna make a change
You gotta hold up the mirror and share in the blame*

*Don't blame your brother for the color of his skin
Don't blame your neighbor for the house he lives in
From the same cloth, we are all made of, we are just the same
You gotta hold up the mirror and share in the blame*

*Don't blame the president, don't blame the king
Don't blame your history for what might have been
We will all be free where the grass is green and the lion is tame
If we just hold up the mirror now and share in the blame." ¹*

C--You see, if we want things to be different, then none of us should sit around blaming *others* for what they're *not* doing. Instead, WE need to BE the difference that we want so desperately to see -- to do *our part* to make the world a better place.

--III--

8. How do we succeed in life? Well, according to Paul's advice to Timothy, we succeed: (1) by *Not Being Gullible*; (2) by regularly *Practicing Our Faith*; and (3) by us *Being the Change We Want to See in Our World*.
9. And my prayer is that, whether or not we are graduating from something this year, each of us would learn to apply these "**Secrets to Success**" in all that we do as we try to make God's world a better place for all people.
10. [PRAYER for all, but especially for graduates as they move to new stages of their lives].

ENDNOTES:

¹ Caedmon's Call's song "*Share in the Blame*," from their album *Overdressed*. Words and Music by Sandra McCracken (2007 Same Old Dress Music), cited from <https://www.lyrics.com/lyric/12197404/Share+in+the+Blame>