THEN YOU WILL BE

PROSPEROUS AND SUCCESSFUL

Joshua 1:7-8

Key verses: 7-8 “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. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; 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.”

How many of you would like to be prosperous and successful this year? Then what is your plan or strategy to attain this goal? Of course, we must work hard at school and work. We must exercise and eat healthy food. We must have enough time to relax and rest our weary bodies. All of these are indeed necessary to be prosperous and successful. But there is something else we must do. Something way more important. **We must live a bible centred life!** In today’s passage we will learn how Joshua and the Israelites **studied the bible and practically obeyed God’s word; in every battle and before every obstacle. And when they did so, God Himself made them prosperous and successful. Today, let’s discover the secret to a prosperous and successful life. Amen!**

Today’s passage begins with the Israelites being encamped on the eastern border of Canaan. (Slide 1) Now Canaan was a beautiful land. It had hills, mountains and valleys. It had rivers and streams with vineyards and olive orchards growing abundantly in the fertile soil. It was such a resourceful and beautiful land, that God described it as a land “*flowing with milk and honey*.” (Ex 3:17). And amazingly, for over 500 years God had promised to give this wonderful and good land to His people Israel. This was because, Israel as a nation was formed in Egypt while they were slaves. (Slide 2) It all began 450 years earlier, when Jacob and his sons (totalling about 70 people) settled in Egypt. Then over a period of about 400 years, God increased them into a nation of about a million people. But because they increased so rapidly, the Egyptians enslaved them in fear that one day the Israelites might fight against them with Egypt’s enemies. So the Pharaohs appointed slave masters over the Israelites to oppress and ruthlessly work them. Then, after about 430 years in Egypt, God sent Moses to miraculously bring the Israelites out Egypt with the 10 plagues. God’s initial plan was to bring Israel into Canaan after a few months in the desert. Yet, due to their unbelief the Israelites failed to enter Canaan. Instead, God let them wander around in the desert for about 40 years. During this period the Israelites suffered many pains and hardships. And as they suffered and **struggled in the desert, their hearts’ desire for Canaan – the land flowing with milk and honey - grew stronger and stronger by the day**. **To the Israelites, Canaan was a place that held so much promise. A place where God would bless them with a new life. A place where they could be happy, safe and comfortable. A place where they could eat delicious food, had enough water and even drink some wine. Indeed, in comparison to the desert and their lives as slaves in Egypt, Canaan seemed like paradise to the Israelites**. And now, after centuries of waiting, and years of pain and suffering, the time had finally come for them to enter their Promised Land and take possession of it.

Surely, Joshua and the encamped Israelites were eager to leave their wandering desert lives behind, and cross the Jordan River into Canaan! Surely, they were so excited and simply could not wait. Right? Well, yes and no….. The fact that God promised to give Canaan to Israel, did not mean He would serve it to them on a silver platter. Instead, God wanted them to physically, take possession of the land. This meant that they would have to overcome countless obstacles: like crossing the mighty Jordan River while it was in flood stage (Jos 3:15a), they would have to conquer fortified cities like Jericho and Ai. (Jos 6 and 8) They also would have to wage war against the 31 kings who at that stage occupied Canaan (Jos 12); and fight against 7 nations that were larger and stronger than them (Numbers 7:1, Jos 23:9-10). They would also have to fight soldiers as big as giants (Jos 11:21-22), face armies that had fast horses and strong chariots (Jos 11:4). Moreover, they would have to walk endless days and nights through a land that was still unknown to them (Jos 3:4), all while they struggled against their natural tendencies of sinning against God. (Jos 5:4-8, 7:1-5) Suddenly, when the Israelites came to understand what it meant to take possession of their Promised Land, they were not filled with excitement anymore. Instead, their hearts were filled with great fear and discouragement.

Here we need to ask the question: if God really wanted to give the Israelites this beautiful land and bless them; then why did He not make it much easier for them to obtain? Why could God not just kill the Canaanites with a plague? Then the Israelites did not need to fight them. Why could God not just break down all the fortified cities with an earth quake so that Israel could simply walk in and claim the towns and villages as their own? Why did the Israelites have to overcome so many impossible obstacles and fight so many dangerous battles in order take possession of Canaan?

We can ask ourselves the same question? Today, we stand on the brink of a new academic year. Ahead of us lay so many good things that God wants to give us. As students, I am sure there are many of you who would regard passing all your modules or even graduating this year as your Promise Land. Surely, God wants you to prosperous and succeed! For others finding a job or being promoted at work can be your Promise Land. Also, surely God wants you to be prosperous and succeed in doing so! Yet, when we carefully consider how we are to conquer our Promised Land, we noticed that we too have so many obstacles in the way. We have our own Jordan Rivers to cross, Jericho walls to break down, unfamiliar territory to explore and conquer, and battles to fight.

What about our ministry? We want to have a graceful conference in March, and invite many students to our ministry for bible study. We want to establish at least one house church this year, have an active and vibrant SRC committee on campus and raise native shepherds and shepherdess to take care of university students. When I think about this, my heart is filled with excitement. And I am sure, God is very eager to give all of these to us as a ministry. Just like He wanted to give the beautiful Canaan to the Israelites. But at the same time, I am also a bit fearful and discouraged. Because, I know that, just like the Israelites, God will not give all of this to us on a silver platter. Instead, He wants us to fight for it, just like the Israelites. He wants us to overcome many obstacles. He wants us to come up against impossible situations, and then with His help, be victorious.

But why does God work in this way? I want to share with you a story to answer this question. *A man was walking through a forest when he came upon a butterfly freeing itself from its cocoon. (Slide 3) The man watched the butterfly struggle and fight to get its entire body through a small hole in the cocoon. (Slide 4)The butterfly struggled and struggled, while the man watched in fascination. Then, suddenly, the butterfly stopped struggling. The man grew concerned. After a while with no movement from the butterfly, the man got out his pocket knife and cut the hole in the cocoon to make it bigger. The butterfly slid out of the cocoon onto the ground.* ***What the man didn’t know is….In order for a butterfly to have strong wings and a solid body it needs to struggle and fight its way out of the cocoon. It needs to slowly and gradually squeeze through the small hole in the cocoon******because that process TRANSFORMS its body****. (Slide 5) When a butterfly* ***squeezes through the hole in the cocoon, all the fluids from the body moves into the wings making them solid and strong and creates a strong body. But because the man slid open the butterfly’s cocoon, this did not happen and something wasn’t right with the butterfly. (Slide 6) Its wings were limp and its body was mushy and weak. In the end, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling. It never was able to fly.*[[1]](#footnote-1)** Spiritually, it is necessary for us to struggle like this butterfly. It is in our struggle with God, with life and ourselves that we are transformed from **helpless people** into men and women with **strong and beautiful faith**. (Just like the butterfly) So that we can overcome any obstacle with God and so **be truly successful and prosperous in life**. Amen

Can we please read verse 7 and 8 again. “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. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; 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.” God really wanted Joshua and the Israelites to **be successful and prosperous** in their quest to conquer Canaan. We know this, because God repeats Himself in these verse. In verse 7b God said: that you may be successful wherever you go. And again in verse 8b, saying: Then you will be prosperous and successful.” So many times, we think that God simply does not want us to succeed. I know I did.

*In 2008, and at the age of 25, I enrolled as a Law student at the University of Pretoria. At that time, I really believed that God would finally make me dream come true; to obtain a university degree. Especially after 7 difficult years since high school, during which I wondered around in fatalism and without any sense of purpose or direction. So I studied really heart. And by God’s grace at the end of my first year I was top of my class. My second year was no different. I studied like a machine, and at the end of the year I was second in my class. My third year also, I studied so hard and finished third in my class. But in my fourth year, I completely failed. Because by this time, I was physically and emotionally completely drained. So much so, that I literally could not get out of bed in the mornings to attend my lectures. During three years, I gave it my all to the point that my body collapsed. Needless to say, at the time I was extremely disappointed. I really wanted to finish my law degree and move on with my life. Yet, it truly felt to me that at the age of 29 – God did not want me to be successful and prosper. But this was not true! God always wants His children to be successful and prosper.* ***But on His terms and according to His sovereign will****. The year I dropped out of varsity, turned out to be one of the most important years of my life. I ended up attending UBF’s 50th Anniversary in Korea where I personally received God’s call to remain in the UBF ministry. I also ended up establishing a house church with shepherdess Sarah. Then 5 years later, God allowed me to return to University. Only this time, I did not rely so much on my own strength but depended more on God to complete my law degree. And I could graduate with distinction. My journey to attaining a university degree was filled with many obstacles and battles. But in the end, God Himself helped me to graduate. This realisation means now more to me than the actual degree. Because, I personally learned the meaning of being prosperous and successful –* ***on God’s terms and according to His will***. **The point is: God really wants you and me, and our ministry – to be prosperous and successful.** **Then practically, what does God want us to do?**

Let us look at verse 8 again. God told Joshua: Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth, meditate on it day and night. *The New Living Translation* states it more clearly. It reads: Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night.

One would expect God to tell Joshua and the Israelites to go sharpen their swords, build siege ramps and work out battle strategies. It only makes sense, right! Yet, God said nothing of the kind. Instead, **the first thing** God wanted Joshua to focus on, was to study His word continually and meditate on it day and night. This is revolutionary! We tend to think that success and prosperity depends on how smart we are, or how hard we work, or how much money we have, or how strong our human network is. So we spend a lot of time pursuing these very things. Yet in the process, we neglect the most essential thing for success and prosperity. **GOD’S WORD! A**ccording to God, the first step in being a prosperous and successful person is to **study His word and meditate on it**. Why is that? It is because, through the studying and meditating of God’s word we can **come to understand the will and the heart of God**. And when we know His will and feel His heart within us: we think differently, we behave differently, we look at life differently. We no longer look at these things from **a sinful man’s point** of view but **from God’s point of view**. In other words: through studying the bible, God transforms the way we look at our lives on earth; even the way we look at Him. So it only make sense, that for us to be prosperous and successful people, we make it our goal to first and foremost study the bible. …….Sadly, however, studying the bible is not something that ranks at the top of our priority list. We have so many other things we think we must do and enjoy doing, than spending time studying the bible. However, from today’s passage we have learned that if we truly want to be a prosperous and successful person, then we simply have to make more time for bible study.

Then how can we study the bible and mediate on God’s word? There are many ways. But our UBF ministry encourages 4 ways. **Firstly,** we start our day with morning devotion, by reading a passage from the bible according to our Daily Bread Booklet. **Secondly,** we attend weekly bible studies; either one to one or in groups. The bible study is led by a bible teacher who are more mature in God’s word and can explain a bit more about the text, than if we have to study it on our own. **Thirdly**, we encourage students to write bible testimonies. A bible testimony is a personal reflection on God’s word, whereby we first observe the text carefully and then apply it practically to our lives. **Fourthly,** we all gather on Sundays to listen to the Sunday message. Then after the service we discuss the passage and share what we have learned in our fellowships. These are four practical ways by which each one of us can study and meditate on God’s word in 2019.

But it doesn’t stop there. God has a second requirement. Look at verse 7b again. God told Joshua: Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left. God wants us to practically obey everything that we learn from the bible. God feels so strongly about it, that He tells Joshua loudly and clearly: do not turn from it to the right or to the left. But obey it exactly as it says, without any compromise. This was really not easy for the Israelites! Especially, when they had to circumcise themselves just after entering Canaan. Or had to march around Jericho for 7 days without shooting a single arrow. Or go and fight against enemy soldiers who were as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Yet amazingly, when the Israelites obeyed everything God commanded them in His word – the Jordan River dried up right in front of them, the walls of Jericho collapse, God threw their enemies into confusion, God stopped the sun and the moon and hurled hailstones from heaven on Israel’s enemies. In other words, when Israel obeyed God’s word absolutely, God fought for them and gave them one victory…. after victory…… after victory. Until they conquered the whole land. **And so become a prosperous and successful nation.**

These days it is really hard, if not impossible, for us to practically obey God’s word in our lives. We live in a broken world filled with so much violence, sexual immorality, poverty and other pains of suffering. Sometimes things get so bad that we are easily overwhelmed with our day to day struggles. To the extent that we simply do not want to even study the bible, let alone struggle to obey it. **But it is exactly at this point, where we……. fail or succeed in life….. Where we are victors or losers….. Joshua and the Israelites faced the same dilemma as us when they had to conquer Canaan. Yet, in the midst of their hardships. In the face of real life problems and threats from their enemies, they not only studied God’s word but also obeyed it. Then God fought for them and made them prosperous and successful…….We can ask ourselves: What would have happened if the Israelites did not obey God’s word? From the account of Achan and the battle against Ai in chapter 7, we see that they would have been defeated and suffered tremendous failure. We must learn from the Israelites. To never compromise God’s word, no matter what the situation. To achieve this, our hearts must be strong and VERY courageous. (Not just courageous. But Very Courageous) (7a). So that we are not intimidated by the situation. Or intimidated by people, to deviate from God’s word. But rather courageously fight back by obeying God’s word by faith; believing that God Himself will fight for us and give us the victory! Amen.**

**In conclusion:** God really wants us to be prosperous and successful people. He also wants us to be a prosperous and successful ministry here on WITS campus. This, however, does not mean that He will make things just easy for us. Instead, God wants us to fight for it so that we can grow into men and women with strong and beautiful faith. And the way we must fight for it, **is by living a bible centred life**. The first and foremost thing we must all do in 2019 – is make time to study God’s word. Then, once we have studied God’s word and learned God’s will and His ways – we must practically obey it in our lives. This **bible centred way of life** is the key to practically experience God’s wonderful work in our lives. And to be a truly prosperous and successful person and ministry. The year lays ahead of us with endless opportunities and possibilities. And there are so many things we have to do and overcome. Yet from today’s passage, we have learned that if we study the bible continually and obey it practically in our lives – then God will give us victory…after victory…after victory. And make us truly prosperous and successful. This then is the direction for our ministry in 2019. To study the bible continually. And obey it practically. Then we will be prosperous and successful. Amen!

1. Purpose in Struggle: The story of the helpful man and a butterfly (An educational story to help people thrive with bipolar disorder) in children's stories / ideas: ways to thrive by robin mohilner october 7, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)