

TOUGH ASSIGNMENTS FROM GOD

Presented by

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If I asked each of you the following question, how would you answer it? Which would you rather do—**succeed** or **fail**? That is not a very difficult question for any of us, is it? **Everyone** wants to succeed—and **no one** wants to fail. It's as simple as that.

Yet **saying** that we want to succeed is the only thing about success that **is** simple! Truth be told, success is rarely easy to achieve. Sure, we often hear catchy sayings about how to be successful—sayings like, “If you can **dream** it, you can **do** it.” But catchy sayings are not necessarily true, are they? For example, a young boy who is born with a crippling muscle disease might dream of climbing Mount Everest. But the fact of the matter is that because his disease robs him of control over the muscles in his body, his dream will never come true.

Nor do catchy sayings guarantee success. For instance, it has been said that “those who **win** are those who **think they can**,” and “when the going gets tough, the tough get going.” But how many “tough” athletes have participated in the Olympic games in the past, “thinking” all the while that they “could” win—yet still ended up losing? While there may be a grain of truth to mottos such as “no pain, no gain” or “tough times never last, but tough people do,” it takes more than mere words to succeed. It takes **action!**

That is true in our **physical** lives, and it also is true in our **spiritual** lives. In fact, in the Bible we find numerous accounts of people to whom God gave various assignments in which He expected them to succeed by taking specific actions that He had commanded them to take. For example:

- God told Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac (Genesis 22:2).
- God told Noah to build a giant ark by which he, his extended family, and Earth's animals could be saved from a coming global flood (Genesis 6:14).
- God told Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10).
- God told Joshua to lead the Israelites to battle their enemies as they occupied the Promised Land of Canaan (Joshua 1:1-9).
- God told Jonah to preach to the huge city of Nineveh in order to convince its inhabitants to repent of their sins (Jonah 1:2).
- God told Nehemiah to rebuild the walls and city of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:12).
- God told Hosea to marry a harlot in order to show the Israelites that they had polluted their service to God (Hosea 1:2).
- Christ told His disciples to take the Gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28:19-20).
- Christ told Christians to be faithful even unto death (Revelation 2:10).

Do you think it was easy for Abraham to lay Isaac on that altar and raise his knife to kill him? Do you think it was easy for Noah to spend almost one-hundred years building an ark—and preaching all the while to the people of his generation to try to convince them to repent of their sins? Do you think it was

easy for Moses to lead an estimated 2.5 million Israelites out of Egypt and through a wilderness for forty years? Do you think it was easy for Joshua and the people of Israel to fight battle after battle in order to take possession of the Promised Land? Do you think it was easy for Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem—while his enemies did everything they could to stop him? Do you think it was easy for Hosea to marry Gomer the harlot, and then watch her abandon him after they were married in order to return to her sinful life? Do you think it was easy for Christ’s disciples in the first century to take the Gospel to people around them—traveling by donkeys, camels, and ships as they tried to do what God had told them to do? Do you think it was easy for Christians in the first century to ask God to save them from death at the hands of their Roman persecutors, only to have God tell them instead, “Wait a little while longer—until the number of your fellow brethren who also will be killed is complete” (Revelation 6:11)?

NO! It was **not** easy for those people to carry out such tasks or to endure such suffering. And no catchy sayings or cute mottos could make their lives any easier. So what was it, then, that helped such individuals succeed in carrying out the tough assignments that God had given them? Actually, there were several factors involved.

First, those people understood the importance of obeying God. It is no accident that we find in the Scriptures statements such as, “By faith Abraham obeyed...” (Hebrews 11:8), or “Thus Noah did, according to all that God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22). **To disobey was to fail.** And each of these individuals understood that.

Second, those people trusted God completely. They “judged Him faithful who had promised” (Hebrews 11:11). Abraham was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice because he knew “that God was able to raise him from the dead” (Hebrews 11:19). First-century Christians were willing to suffer and die as a result of their faith because they, like the apostle Paul, were able to say with supreme confidence, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day” (2 Timothy 1:12). All of these individuals **knew** that God would **never** let them down!

Third, those people understood what it meant to “run with endurance the race that was set before them” (Hebrews 12:1). They knew that the prize would not be given to the swift or the strong, but instead to those whose faith caused them to endure to the very end. This is what allowed each of them to say, as the first Christian martyr Stephen did, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). They knew that the Lord would do exactly that!

Fourth, those people knew that they were running the race “not with uncertainty, but for an imperishable crown” (1 Corinthians 9:25-26). There was no doubt in their minds as to where their faithfulness would one day lead them. As the apostle Paul wrote, “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8).

Today, God may not command us to slay our son on an altar, build a giant ark, or lead 2.5 million people through a wilderness. But He **does** still expect us to carry out certain tough assignments—like taking the Gospel to the entire world, and remaining faithful unto death. How can we accomplish those things? We will not succeed through catching sayings or cute mottos. Rather, we will succeed—just as the people I have discussed in this sermon succeeded—**by our faith and by our actions**. God has given us the commands we are to carry out. And the “great cloud of witnesses” mentioned in Hebrews 12:1 has given us a good example to follow. Now, it is up to **us** to determine whether we fail or succeed. Considering the two alternatives—hell for failure, and heaven for success—we better work hard at making the right choice, don’t you think?