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Join the Family

The first secret of success I have chosen to share with you from the Bible is simply this: God says to you, “Join the Family”. You might wonder why I start there, but really it is quite simple. God’s promises of success are made only to those people who belong to His family. To those outside of His family He has only one thing to say, “Join the Family!”.

There are many advantages in belonging to a family. So often our young people leave home to experience the freedom of living on their own. Yet before too long many want to come home and live with the family once again. They must feel there are advantages in doing this. There is probably a financial advantage to start with, because the parents seem to be the ones who pay the bills. Then there is the advantage of a feeling of real companionship, plus food and clothing and shelter. There is advice to be given, even though it is often rejected or ignored. There is also the feeling that there is a place where you belong; we call it “home” in the English language. It is a great concept, even though we may not fully comprehend it.

There is also something great about the concept that when I decided to become a Christian, I became part of God’s family and I feel at home with God. In the Bible there are many references to God’s children, to God as a Father, and to the family of God. In the Gospel of John, the Bible says, *“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12). When Jesus Christ was on earth, His task was to encourage people to become children of God, to join the family of God. He taught that it

was possible to do this by simply believing in His name. He wanted all people to enjoy all of God's blessings, and to do this they had to be in the family.

Now I know when I introduce this subject some will say, "But there are a lot of successful people who do not belong to God's family, what about them?" Well, let's take a Bible example, because there is always someone in the Bible just like you, and you can learn from their failures and you can learn from their successes. The example I want to look at is of a man who became the greatest salesman in the world, Paul. In many respects you could well say that the apostle Paul had it made, that he was a success. We could say today that Paul had everything going for him—he was on top of the heap, he had the background necessary to be a success in life.

The example of Paul

In Acts 21:39 Paul describes his background, *"I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city."* He was proud of his home town. He did not have to be embarrassed when he said, "I come from Tarsus." I never look embarrassed when I am overseas, and I am asked, "Where are you from?" I reply, "I'm from Adelaide, on top of the world." I'm proud of Adelaide; I believe it is a beautiful city. Tarsus was "no obscure city", which is a way of saying it was a prosperous city, an important city, a place where people enjoyed living, where people enjoyed working, where you could have a good lifestyle.

Paul also said, *"I am a Jew."* He was not ashamed of his nationality. He was a Jew, but he was born in the city of Tarsus. Now this is important, because it made him a Roman citizen. He had his citizenship papers; he came from the right side of the tracks. His family were Jewish and he was proud of it, and said so many times. You would think that with that kind of background he would have really enjoyed life and would have remained proud of who he was.

In Acts 22:3 he tells how he had the right education, *"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem], educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day."* He had the right education. Gamaliel was the president of the Sanhedrin, a group of seventy statesmen who governed

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I Am Not A Victim

“I am not a victim of the world I see.” Of course there are events that happen over which we have no control, like earthquakes and plane crashes, but in the main we are today the result of choices that we have made. If you find that hard to understand, then read on to discover that you have some responsibility for what happens to you, and are fully responsible for how you react to life’s events.

I believe the Bible teaches that we are responsible for what happens to us. On recognizing that responsibility, we can then change the situation for the better. If we think that change will only occur if we go to church regularly or if we read our Bibles often or if we give certain amounts, then we are bound in a works-based consciousness and are living in Old Testament times. However, if we have grasped the position, power and potential of the New Creation, then we can change our world and can maintain that change regardless of our outer circumstances.

Let me first share with you a Bible example. In Acts 21:14 it says, “*So when he [Paul] would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done*” (NKJV); “*And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, ‘Let the will of the Lord be done.’*” (ESV). Most Christians look at Paul as a tremendous example of the Christian faith. This man was converted as an adult after excelling in a university education of the day. He was recognized as a scholar and a leader, and then he became a Christian and eventually wrote three-quarters of the New Testament.

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See That You Excel

Required reading for businessmen since the 1980s has been a book called *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies* by Thomas Peters and Roger Waterman (Harper & Row, 1982). And business writers tell us that if a business is going to survive these difficult times, it had better make excellence its number one goal.

I believe that God's church is just the same. There is no shortage of churches, but there is a shortage of people willing to make the commitment and effort to excel in their Christian faith.

In I Corinthians 14:12 we read, "*So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.*" Then in II Corinthians 8:7, "*But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace [giving] also.*" Those are powerful verses! And both use the key word "excel".

These verses were written to a charismatic church. Look at I Corinthians chapters 8-14 where the charismatic experience is mentioned constantly. Yet just over one year later, when II Corinthians was written, there is no mention of the manifestations of speaking in tongues, interpretation, prophecy, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, discerning of spirits, faith, gifts of healing and working of miracles. The emphasis in II Corinthians, just one year later, was on excellence "*in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness... in our love for you... in this act of grace also*".

What is excellence?

The word “excel” is translated as “abound” or even “super-abundance” in some translations. It is from the same root word used for having life abundantly in John 10:10, *“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”* It is also used in the story of the prodigal son, *“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!’”* (Luke 15:17). “More than enough” is the translation of this same Greek word, meaning to excel, to abound, to go above and beyond.

I was watching men’s gymnastics on television and particularly the vault exercise. There is a long runway, and at the other end is a large wooden horse with padding on the top. I watched a gymnast charge up the runway, do a somersault, hit the high part of the take-off board perfectly, go up in the air, stand on his hands on the horse, then do a double somersault and twist, and come down to a perfect landing, with no step, no movement at all, facing in the direction from which he came. The judges gave him 10 marks out of 10, and he deserved it. That was excellence! Just think about what that gymnast did to achieve excellence. In a similar way, hand a trumpet to James Morrison or Phil Driscoll, and you will hear excellence. Excellence is available to everyone who will supply the commitment and effort.

I do not want to spend time on excellence in spiritual things, which in the context of I Corinthians 14:12 refers to the charismatic manifestations, because since the first major expression in modern times at Azusa Street, Los Angeles in 1906, we have had over 100 years of excellence in the operation of these spiritual manifestations. I believe in them, and they should be in use within the church. But it seems to me that since they do not receive a mention in II Corinthians 8:7, it is obvious that such manifestations are not the be-all and end-all of the Christian faith. The omission of these manifestations is saying to us that while this special equipment is given to the church that it might grow and develop, there are other parts of the Christian life that must be addressed.

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