

**“SECRETS TO SUCCESS”**  
(1 Timothy 4:6-12)  
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[East Cobb U.M.C.; 5-16-10]

-I-

1. [Traditional Service ONLY:] Read 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 to remember (and be reminded) that we *all* 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 and example of Jesus (who was sometimes called “*Rabbi/Teacher*”), and where we as his followers often refer to ourselves as “*disciples*” (which means “*student*”).

3. So, in that spirit of continual learning, the apostle Paul wrote letters to one of his young apprentices named Timothy

A–And in these, he shared things that he felt Timothy needed in order to be successful in both life and in Christian faith.

B–Today we call these the biblical books of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, but they are, in reality nothing more than Paul’s lessons about how to succeed in life – his “*Secrets To Success*,” if you will.

C–Listen, for example, to what he says in Verse 6 of today’s scripture from 1 Timothy 4:  
(MSG) “*You’ve been raised on the Message of the faith and have followed sound teaching. Now pass on this counsel to the Christians there, and you’ll be a good servant of Jesus.*”

(NRSV) “*If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed.*”

4. So, in this same spirit, what I’d like to do today is remind us of some of what Paul wrote as words of encouragement and challenge not only for today’s *graduates*, but really for *all* of us, as well. (*Refer to bulletin Sermon Notes*)

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5. Now, the first thing Paul says to Timothy about how to succeed in life is found in Verse 7, where he says: (MSG) “*Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion.*” (NRSV) “*Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives’ tales.*”

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; don't believe the world's lies!

1–Now, Paul obviously had some experience with this... he'd seen people who would otherwise be reasonable and intelligent get suckered in to what he calls "*profane myths,*" "*old wives' tales,*" and "*silly stories that get dressed up as religion.*"

2–...His point being that there are a lot of things out in the world that *pretend* to be true, but *aren't* – things (like some cults) that even masquerade as religious TRUTH itself, but they are *not*.

B–You see, if our young people and graduates (or really *any* of us) need anything today, it's a need to guard against getting suckered in by ideas, beliefs, behaviors and feelings that may look and feel right on the surface, but really aren't right at all.

1–When our high schoolers get to college, and when our college students enter the work world, and when the rest of us leave this building today, we're going to be bombarded with influences and societal pressures that try to convince us of the "rightness" of *UNtruth*.

2–...UNtruth like: "*Might makes right*"; like "the majority is always right"; like "*If it feels good it must be okay*"; like "*If it offends someone, then we shouldn't do it, because 'political correctness' is more important than truth*"; UNtruth like "*If you want to be accepted, you have to look and think and act like everybody else*"; and you can think of more.

C–But to all of these, Paul essentially says to Timothy (and I say to us today), "*Don't be gullible! Don't be suckered in by this kind of nonsense! ...because these things are nothing more than 'profane myths' and 'silly stories dressed up as [a form of] religion.'*"

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

6. And we learn truth by following the second of Paul's "Secrets to Success," found in Vss. 7b-8: (MSG) "*Exercise daily in God – no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever.*" (NRSV) "*Train yourself in godliness, for while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life 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 regularly workout at a gym, or have some sort of regular exercise routine? **[WAIT FOR HANDS...]**

1–So, what’s the purpose of exercise? (to develop our bodies & keep them healthy)

2–Well, Paul is saying that just as surely as we need to regularly exercise our *physical* body to stay healthy and ward off disease, so we need to regularly exercise (or “train”) our *spiritual* body to stay spiritually healthy and be able to discern and avoid UNtruth when we encounter it.

3–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, but the Bible is clear that they include spiritual disciplines like: Prayer; Bible study; regular attendance in worship and a small group; receiving Holy Communion; fasting; sharing our faith; helping others in need; and yes, even financial giving to God through His church.

D–Those of you that are graduating (and really, all of us)... if you want to succeed in life, then if you haven’t already, you need to learn to continually practice your faith in these ways.

1–These are how you’ll know truth (and how you’ll be better able to avoid UNtruth when you’re tempted by it).

2–These are how you’ll receive strength and help and hope when you go through tough times.

3–Your regular practice of these is how you’ll be able grow into a healthy, mature man or woman of God.

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

E–So don’t let that happen. Practice your faith! Stay connected to God through His church!

7. The final of Paul’s “Secrets to Success” that I want to share today is found in Verse 12:  
 (MSG) “*Don’t let anyone put you down because you’re young. Teach believers with your life: by word, by demeanor, by love, by faith, and by integrity.*”  
 (NRSV) “*Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in 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 check first to make sure that you yourself are not coming across as selfish or self-centered, and then learn 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 it...(MSG) “*Teach believers with YOUR life: by word, by demeanor, by love, by faith, and by integrity.*” (NRSV) “*Set the believers an example [by YOUR] speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in 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 and 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.”*

[–Caedmon’s Call song “*Share in the Blame,*” from their album Overdressed. Words and Music by Sandra McCracken (2007 Same Old Dress Music), cited from their website [www.caedmonscall.com/discography.aspx](http://www.caedmonscall.com/discography.aspx)]

C–You see, if you want things to be different in your world, then don’t sit around blaming *others* for what they’re *not* doing. Instead, you yourself BE the difference that you want so desperately to see – do *your part* to make the world a better place to live in.

–III–

8. How do we succeed in life? Well, according to Paul’s advice to Timothy, we succeed by: *Not Being Gullible*; by regularly *Practicing Our Faith*; and by us *Being the Change We Want to See in Our World*.
9. And my prayer is that, whether or not you are graduating this year, that 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].