



Daily Devotional

THE MEASURE OF TRUE SUCCESS

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1).

God is more interested in your faithfulness than he is in your accomplishments.

Our society is success-oriented. We love success stories. We even have television programs that exalt the lifestyles of the rich and famous. But God’s standard for success is quite different. Unimpressed by our status or wealth, he looks instead for faithfulness to his will.

Paul understood that principle and diligently pursued his calling as an apostle—one of those unique men who were foundational to the church and who were recipients, teachers, and writers of the New Testament.

That was a high calling, and yet, judging from Paul’s lifestyle, most people would hardly call him successful—having suffered imprisonments, beatings, death threats, shipwrecks, robberies, hatred from his theological enemies, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, and exposure to the elements (2 Cor. 11:23–27). But none of those things deterred him from obeying God’s will. His final testimony was, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). That’s true success!

Although we’re not apostles, we’re to follow Paul’s example of faithfulness (1 Cor. 11:1). That’s possible because, like the Ephesian believers, we are “saints [holy ones] . . . and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1). By God’s grace we’ve trusted in Christ as our Lord and Savior (Eph. 2:8–9) and have received his righteousness (Phil. 3:9) and his Spirit (Eph. 3:16) and every spiritual resource necessary for faithful, victorious Christian living (Eph. 1:3).

What remains is to cultivate greater love for Christ and more consistent obedience to his Word. Those are the hallmarks of a true disciple and God’s measure of success. Make it your goal that your life today warrants the Lord’s commendation: “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. 25:21).

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER: Praise God for his wonderful grace, by which he granted you salvation and all the spiritual resources you need. — Thank him for his Word, through which you learn the principles of godly living. — Ask him for opportunities today to encourage the faithfulness of others.

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Read Ephesians 1:3–4; 2:10; Titus 2:11–12. — What is the goal of your salvation? — Are you living each day in light of that goal?

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR JANUARY 1

Genesis 1–2

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, “Let there be an expanse¹ in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.”⁷ And God made² the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so.⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven.³ And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so.¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth,⁴ and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants⁵ yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so.¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons,⁶ and for days and years,¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so.¹⁶ And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars.¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth,¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, “Let the waters swarm with

swarms of living creatures, and let birds⁷ fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.”²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.²² And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so.²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make man⁸ in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

²⁹And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it

¹Or a canopy; also verses 7, 8, 14, 15, 17, 20 ²Or fashioned; also verse 16 ³Or Sky; also verses 9, 14, 15, 17, 20, 26, 28, 30; 2:1 ⁴Or Land; also verses 11, 12, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30; 2:1 ⁵Or small plants; also verses 12, 29 ⁶Or appointed times ⁷Or flying things; see Leviticus 11:19–20 ⁸The Hebrew word for man (adam) is the generic term for mankind and becomes the proper name Adam

God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

- 4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

⁵When no bush of the field¹ was yet in the land² and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground,⁶ and a mist³ was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—⁷then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.¹² And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush.¹⁴ And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat⁴ of it you shall surely die.”

¹⁸Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for⁵ him.”¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed⁶ every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam⁷ there was not found a helper fit for him.²¹ So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs

and closed up its place with flesh.²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made⁸ into a woman and brought her to the man.²³ Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”⁹

²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Psalms 1

- 1 Blessed is the man¹⁰ who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
- 2 but his delight is in the law¹¹ of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.
- 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.
- 4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
- 6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Matthew 1–2

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,³ and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram,¹² ⁴and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon,⁵ and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse,⁶ and Jesse the father of David the king.

And David was the father of Solomon by

¹ Or open country ² Or earth; also verse 6 ³ Or spring ⁴ Or when you eat ⁵ Or corresponding to; also verse 20 ⁶ Or And out of the ground the Lord God formed ⁷ Or the man ⁸ Hebrew built ⁹ The Hebrew words for woman (ishshah) and man (ish) sound alike ¹⁰ The singular Hebrew word for man (ish) is used here to portray a representative example of a godly person; see Preface ¹¹ Or instruction ¹² Greek Aram; also verse 4

the wife of Uriah,⁷ and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,⁸ and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah,⁹ and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,¹⁰ and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos,² and Amos the father of Josiah,¹¹ and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel,³ and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,¹³ and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor,¹⁴ and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud,¹⁵ and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob,¹⁶ and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ⁴ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed⁵ to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel"

(which means, God with us). ²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

2 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men⁶ from the east came to Jerusalem,² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose⁷ and have come to worship him." ³When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

⁶ "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers
of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."

⁷Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." ⁹After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

¹³Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." ¹⁴And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

¹⁶Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ "A voice was heard in Ramah,
weeping and loud lamentation,

¹ *Asaph* is probably an alternate spelling of *Asa*; some manuscripts *Asa*; also verse 8 ² *Amos* is probably an alternate spelling of *Amon*; some manuscripts *Amon*; twice in this verse ³ *Greek Salathiel*; twice in this verse ⁴ Some manuscripts of the *Christ* ⁵ That is, legally pledged to be married ⁶ *Greek magi*; also verses 7, 16 ⁷ *Or in the east*; also verse 9