

“THE A’s OF (GODLY) SUCCESS”

(1 Samuel 17:1-11,24-27)

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–I–

1. The story is told that one day Moses, Jesus, and someone else were playing golf. Moses tees off, the ball sails down the fairway, and lands 6 ft. away from the hole – that would be a great, successful shot to a lot of people! So Jesus says, “*Way to go, Moses!*” And then it’s Jesus’ turn. He tees off, the ball sails down the fairway, and it lands 6 inches from the hole—that’s successful by any standards! So, Moses says, “*Way to go, Jesus!*”

Then, the third person steps up and tees off. His ball sails down the fairway, but doesn’t come close to the green. Instead, it hits off a tree, onto a squirrel, who grabs the ball and starts to running with it. But just then, an eagle swoops down and picks up the squirrel (ball and all), flies over the green, where the squirrel drops the ball right into the hole for a hole in one – that’s *real* success! So Jesus says, “*Way to go, Dad!*”

2. Well, how DO we measure success? You know, for some people (like me), merely getting the ball off the ground would be considered a “success”!

A–Yet, more important than success in a golf game, the real question most people wrestle with is: what does it take to be “successful” today *in life*? ¹

B–Well, today’s scripture is the famous story of David and Goliath from 1 Samuel 17, and it shares just a few ways to “succeed” against the “Goliaths” of our lives. Listen to what it says in a few verses from 1 Samuel 17:1-11, 24-27...

1 The Philistines assembled their troops for war at Socoh of Judah. They camped between Socoh and Azekah at Ephes-dammim. 2 Saul and the Israelite army assembled and camped in the Elah Valley, where they got organized to fight the Philistines. 3 The Philistines took positions on one hill while Israel took positions on the opposite hill. There was a valley between them. 4 A champion named Goliath from Gath came out from the Philistine camp. He was more than nine feet tall. 5 He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore bronze scale-armor weighing one hundred twenty-five pounds. 6 He had bronze plates on his shins, and a bronze scimitar hung on his back. 7 His spear shaft was as strong as the bar on a weaver’s loom, and its iron head weighed fifteen pounds. His shield-bearer walked in front of him. 8 He stopped and shouted to the Israelite troops, “Why have you come and taken up battle formations? I am the Philistine champion, and you are Saul’s servants. Isn’t that right? Select one of your men, and let him come down against me. 9 If he is able to fight me and kill me, then we will become your slaves, but if I overcome him and kill him, then you will become our slaves and

you will serve us. 10 I insult Israel's troops today!" The Philistine continued, "Give me an opponent, and we'll fight!" 11 When Saul and all Israel heard what the Philistine said, they were distressed and terrified.... 24 When the Israelites saw Goliath, every one of them ran away terrified of him. (25 Now the Israelite soldiers had been saying to each other: "Do you see this man who keeps coming out? How he comes to insult Israel? The king will reward with great riches whoever kills that man. The king will give his own daughter to him and make his household exempt from taxes in Israel.")26 David asked the soldiers standing by him, "What will be done for the person who kills that Philistine over there and removes this insult from Israel? Who is that uncircumcised Philistine, anyway, that he can get away with insulting the army of the living God?" 27 Then the troops repeated to him what they had been saying. "So that's what will be done for the man who kills him," they said. (the Word of God for all people... PRAY)

C—As we learn in this story, the Bible doesn't measure "success" by the standards and criteria of our world, but it *does* speak of it as a way to describe the overcoming of adversity – of having victory over the challenges and difficulties (the "Goliaths") of life. So here in this story, we find what I'm calling "*The A's of (Godly) Success.*"

–II–

3. The first "A" is **ATTITUDE** – if we want to be successful against the "Goliaths" of life, then we've got to start by **having the right attitude** – & in this story, we find at least *TWO*:

A—The first was the attitude of **Saul and the Israelites**.

1—Verse 24: "*When the Israelites saw Goliath, every one of them ran away terrified of him.*"

2—And later, in Verse 33, Saul says to David, "*You can't go out and fight this Philistine,*" Saul answered David. "*You are still a boy. But he's been a warrior since he was a boy!*"

3—You see, Saul and the Israelites had a negative attitude about this giant – they *focused upon the problem*, and so didn't even *want* to face Goliath.

4—How many times do we get caught today doing the same thing... focusing upon our problems and obstacles, and so we don't even *try* to face our "giants."

B—Thank goodness there's a second attitude, however – **that of David**.

1—Listen to how he responds to Saul in Verses 36-37: "*Your servant has fought both lions and bears. This uncircumcised Philistine will be just like one of them because he has insulted the army of the living God.*" *The Lord,*" David added, "*who rescued me from the power of both lions and bears, will rescue me from the power of this Philistine.*"

2–You see, rather than focusing on the *problem*, David focused on the *power and possibilities of God* working through him.

C–While the Israelites were thinking, “*Goliath is so big, we’ll never kill him!*”, David was thinking “*Goliath is so big that I can’t miss him!*”

1–While some people wake up in the morning and say, “*Good morning, God,*” others wake up and say, “*Good God, it’s morning!*”

2–You see, if we want to be successful for God, we've got to start by having a positive, right attitude.

4. The second “A” to success is **ASSESSMENT**– before we just start *doing*, we need first to take time to properly *assess ourselves, our abilities, & our situation*.

A–Look at Verses 39-40: “*David strapped his sword on over the armor, but he couldn’t walk around well because he’d never tried it before. “I can’t walk in this,” David told Saul, “because I’ve never tried it before.” So he took them off. He then grabbed his staff and chose five smooth stones from the stream bed. He put them in the pocket of his shepherd’s bag and with sling in hand went out to the Philistine.*”

B–David was able to realistically assess his own abilities and conclude that he was better off fighting Goliath merely with his own sling shot, rather than with what everyone else wanted him to wear.

C–And this points out a fundamental truth of Godly success in any battle: *You can’t fight a giant in somebody else’s armor.*

D–And yet, isn’t that exactly what we often try to do in the church today?

1–I.E., We think that just because something worked well 50 or 100 years ago it will work just as well today (styles of worship, leadership, missions or evangelism).

2–Worse yet, we try something new *just because* the church or ministry down the road is doing it – that’s about the *worst* thing a church or ministry can do!

3–No. First *assess* the needs of *our* situation and context, and then determine how **YOU** can best meet that need.

5. A third “A” is **ACTION** – “*Just Do it!*” as a famous Nike TV commercial used to say.

A–If we look at Verse 48, it says that “*[When Goliath] got up and moved closer to attack David, and David ran quickly to the front line to face him.*”

B–Notice it *doesn’t* say that he went and formed a committee to discuss his predicament!

1–Yet, isn't that what we sometimes do? After we've done the first two steps, we stop to *think about* and *analyze* and *talk about* our situation, but we never get around to *doing* anything about it! We lack what's called "follow-through." ²

2–Noted author and pastor Dr. Zan Holmes says that "*Even if you're on the right track, you'll still get run over if you just sit there!*"

C–I'm *not* advocating bypassing administrative planning processes – No, we do these when we go through step #2 (Assessment).

1–But there comes a time after everything has been properly assessed and analyzed when we need to stop *talking* and *just do it!*

2–And this applies not only to *church* life, but also in our own *personal lives*, too — there comes a time when we have to stop saying to ourselves that "*Some day I'll... lead a Sunday School class, OR go on a mission trip, OR answer a call to full-time Christian service, OR EVEN become a Christian,*" ...and instead *take action* – "*JUST DO IT!*"

6. The fourth "A" in overcoming "Goliaths" in life is **ASSURANCE** – we need to persist in the *Assurance that God has called us, and will eventually give us the victory.* ³

A–In Verses 45-46, David tells Goliath: "*But David told the Philistine, "You are coming against me with sword, spear, and scimitar, but I come against you in the name of the Lord of heavenly forces, the God of Israel's army, the one you've insulted. Today the Lord will hand you over to me. I will strike you down and cut off your head! ... Then the whole world will know that there is a God on Israel's side."*

B–You know, God often calls us today to tasks that we might think are impossible, or at least very difficult to accomplish.

1–Throughout my career, God has sent me to pastor several churches which were in crisis, facing things that seemed overwhelming, and situations that others had given up on.

2–But while these situations were always daunting, I always tried to remember that when God calls us to do something, he doesn't just leave us to do it on our own – he *also* equips us for the task.

3–A poem by an unknown author puts it this way...

*"The will of God will never take you, Where the grace of God cannot keep you.
Where the arms of God cannot support you,
Where the riches of God cannot supply your needs,
Where the power of God cannot endow you."*

4—And when I remembered all this, God did miraculous things in these churches, and turned what others thought were hopeless situations of death into shining testimonies of victory and life.

C—My point, you see, is that if God calls you or I (or our church) to face giants, then can boldly persist in the assurance that He'll *also* give us the ability to have victory.

—III—

7. Today's Bible story reminds us that if we want to be successful in overcoming the "Goliaths" of life, then we need to...

A—Start with the right *Attitude*

B—Take time to *Assess* our Situation

C—Take *Action*

D—And finally... persist in the *Assurance* that God is with us to give ultimate victory ⁴

8. I don't know what "Goliaths" you are facing today.

A—Maybe it's bad health, grief over a lost loved one, loneliness, a job change or decision, a marriage gone bad, an addiction/bad habit that you can't seem to kick, etc.

B—Whatever it is, we can be assured that if we'll invite Jesus to help us put these four "A's" to work in our situation, He'll bring us *His* success over the "Goliaths" we face.

9. [CLOSING PRAYER]

[Suggested closing: UMH#370, *Victory in Jesus*]

ENDNOTES:

¹ The concept of "success" in fact drives much of our Western culture today. We seek "success" in our business, in our home and family, in our relationships, in our school and career, and even in our church.

² What's more is that the longer we wait to act, the harder it is TO act.

³ The key here is that David was *persistent* in assurance of God's eventual victory – he didn't give up too early. Time and time again, he was told that he would never make it, and I'm sure it crossed his mind to give up, especially when he actually *saw* Goliath. But even through these feelings, he didn't give up.

How often today do we fail to accomplish something, *not* because we haven't tried, but because we haven't tried *enough times*? Author Chuck Swindoll writes that "*The person who succeeds is not the one who holds back, fearing failure, nor the one who never fails... but rather the one who moves on in spite of failure*" [Cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992). Entry 3624].

⁴ Actually if we do these first four "A's", my experience is that we will find a fifth occurring, as well..." **Accomplishment**". God through us accomplish victory that would have been impossible by ourselves. "Accomplishment" is summed up in Verses 50-51, which tells us: *"And that's how David triumphed over the Philistine with just a sling and a stone, striking the Philistine down and killing him—and David didn't even have a sword! Then David ran and stood over the Philistine. He grabbed the Philistine's sword, drew it from its sheath, and finished him off. Then David cut off the Philistine's head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they fled."*