

THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

Most people want to be successful. Some dream of being great or at least being recognized as the best. You can buy books and attend training seminars on the subject of "How to Be Successful." Most of us know, in general terms, what actions result in success. We could summarize it as "Do the right things in the right ways at the right time and the right place." If we could accomplish what this statement says, then we **would** be successful. The challenge is in knowing *the right thing* to do, *the right way* in which to do it, *when*, and *where*. We characterize those who "get it right" as wise. Then there are those who consistently find either the wrong thing, the wrong way, the wrong time or the wrong place and we characterize them as foolish. There is a third category and I fear that many people are in the group who take little or no action (either wise or foolish) and, consequently, miss opportunities.

You have likely met people who advocate, don't just stand there, DO something. Other will even go so far as to say, "I'd rather do something, even if it is wrong." I would not want to get caught up in that philosophy; however, Christians should be people of action.

Many of us participated in the series *Experiencing God*. One of the teachings of that study was that we should "determine where God is working and then join Him in that work." As with most things, this is easier said than done. How **do** we determine *what, how, when and where* God is working? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us a prescription for such initiative. He said: "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matt 7:7-8)

In life, we will either be inactive, reactive, or proactive. The ultimate in being "inactive" is being dead. Very few (live) people are totally inactive. However, we may see them being inactive in certain areas of life. For example, a person who has not been born of the Spirit will be "dead to things of the Spirit." These same people will be either reactive or proactive in other areas. As Christians we are admonished to be inactive or "dead to the things of the world but alive to things of the Spirit." Being alive implies some sort of activity.

Each of us who can legitimately call ourselves Christian (been born of the Spirit) have work to do. Paul told us about salvation not being "by or through work" but "for work." The well-known passage from his letter to the church at Ephesus describes this.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast. Eph 2:8-9

How many Christian are familiar with the very next verse?

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Eph 2:10

How do we know what these good works are that God wants us to do? ASK, SEEK, KNOCK. This is how we determine where we should invest the talents God has assigned to us.

We can start with **Asking**. What do we ask about? Whom do we ask? Good questions. If we are to find out about the good works God has for us to do, then we need to ask about such works. How do we know what these are? Jesus said in John 14:12

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater [works] than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

(Parenthetical question: Why was His going to the Father going to enable us to do greater works? He knew that when He went back to the Father with His completed work, that the Holy Spirit was

going to be given to be poured out as confirmation of God's acceptance of the finished work that He did.)

The works that God has for us are things such as Jesus did. We could list these. He healed the sick, taught, comforted, fed people, prayed for others, cast out demons, talked about the Kingdom of God.

Now, whom do we ask? Friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, anyone. We could ask, "What is God doing in your life?" "Are you engaged in regular Bible study that is feeding you spiritually?" To the homeless, we could ask, "Are you hungry? Can I help you?" To those who are grieving and hurting, we can ask, "Will you let me pray with you?" We can also ask God to give us the faith and boldness to minister in His power to do these *greater works* as Jesus had promised we would.

What about **Seeking**? What do we look for and where do we look? We can find the word "seek" 284 time in the NIV. We are to seek God's will, the Lord our God, the place of the Lord, the counsel of the Lord, God's face, help from God, dwell with God, peace, favor, God's name, food from God, God's decrees, God's prosperity, knowledge, justice, good, righteousness, humility, instruction from God's messenger, the kingdom of God, God's righteousness, to be justified in Christ, and by persistence in doing good works we seek glory, honor, and immortality.

A place to start seeking many of the things on this list is the **Word of God**. We can find God's will, His counsel, food, His decrees, knowledge, instruction. Another place is in the **prayer closet**. It is there we seek His face, His counsel, and His favor. In **worship** we find his peace, food from God, instruction, and decrees from God. We should also be seeking among the needy and downtrodden of the world to be persistence in doing good works and to be channels of those things we have sought from Him.

Interestingly, we are to NOT seek certain things: Revenge, spiritists, treaty of friendship with the world, false gods, our own honor, great things from ourselves, evil, to please ourselves, self, and our own good.

Knocking implies a level of urgency and a willingness to interact one-on-one with others in carrying out the work of the Kingdom. We normally think of knocking being on a door and that door being closed. Because it is closed, then we do **not** know what is behind the door. Many times that door is nothing more than a facade that people have built around themselves to hide what is going on in their lives. However, we can guess by the physical surrounding outside the door what is behind it. In other words, we need to look for evidence of the need for ministry. There may be some risk in knocking on doors that are unknown. However, we will never know the need and not be able to minister to people outside of our immediate sphere of influence unless we do start knocking to get behind the facade that most people have built around their lives.

How do we get people to open up to us? You would open **your** door to someone you know or to someone who is promising benefit to you. In the same way, the message we take to the world must be such that the world can see from our lives that it works -- that is, there is benefit in knowing God through Jesus Christ. We can and should work on relationships with those we know and cultivate opportunities to let people get to know us. It takes effort, it takes planning, and we have to do it on purpose.

Ask, seek, and knock seems pretty simple, but we have to DO it for the formula to work.