

How Do You Handle Success?

⁸ Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboyim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim ⁹ against Kedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goyim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar—four kings against five. ¹⁰ Now the Valley of Siddim was full of tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some of the men fell into them and the rest fled to the hills. ¹¹ The four kings seized all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away. ¹² They also carried off Abram’s nephew Lot and his possessions, since he was living in Sodom.

¹³ A man who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew. Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a brother of Eshkol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. ¹⁴ When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. ¹⁵ During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. ¹⁶ He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

¹⁷ After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).

¹⁸ Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Creator of heaven and earth.

²⁰ And praise be to God Most High,
who delivered your enemies into your hand.”

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

²¹ The king of Sodom said to Abram, “Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself.”

²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, ²³ that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich.’ ²⁴ I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share.”

I’ve noticed something the past couple years in football. The defense makes a big play. It could be an interception. It could be a stop on a fourth down play. They all run down to their endzone and stick their faces in the camera celebrating. I get it. Football is emotional. You will get excited when you are part of a big play. But would they do it if there were no cameras or even crowds cheering?

Christians like to celebrate success, too. But we celebrate in a different way. Instead of sticking our faces in the camera, we direct folks to our Lord in heaven. Today we will go to our Old Testament reading and see how Abraham handled success. We will see that it wasn’t about himself. It was all to the glory of God.

I. It isn’t about ourselves.

Abram goes to war. This war may not be the first recorded war in history, but it is close. Four kings from the east attacked the five kings in Canaan, including the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. The reason for the war was rebellion. These five kings refused to pay their tribute or taxes and declared their independence. So the eastern kings invaded and defeated them. They sacked their cities, loaded up all the gold and money and food they could find, and grabbed as many citizens they could to be used as slaves.

The Bible is clear. We believers are no longer of this world. We belong to the kingdom of God. And yet we still live in this world. Sometimes we can ignore world events, and sometimes we can’t. At first Abram avoided the war. But a time came when he fought. Why? We know it wasn’t for power or money. We know it wasn’t for glory. Why? You heard it in our text. ¹⁴ **When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan.** It wasn’t about Abram. It was about his nephew, Lot.

There is a lot we can learn from this small piece of the Bible. I know that war is hell. It is destructive and takes so many lives. But there is such a thing as a just war. Abram did try to stay out of it. He didn’t join in the rebellion and he did not join in the war that defeated them. But a time came for the Father of Faith to arm and fight for a just cause.

And it wasn’t about Abram. It was about Lot. Think about all those who benefit from your labor. Your family benefits. Think of the company that relies on you. Think of the customers. You want to give them the best product you can. So, it isn’t just about a paycheck. You are serving other people. It is about them. Maybe your job is tough. Maybe the boss or company are not the easiest to work for. But you can still find great satisfaction when you know you are benefitting others.

Abram had every reason not to go to war. He would have to risk everything. Besides Lot made his choice. He wanted to live by Sodom. He must live with his choices. You can say that it was his calling. God has called each believer to love him with all our heart. He has also called us to love our neighbors as ourselves. It is our calling to love and serve our neighbors. That may mean serving in the armed forces. Those who serve do so for others, willing to lay down their lives for us. I can think of people who serve in other forms of public service like in government. Look at Daniel in Babylon who served a heathen government with distinction and honor. Who better to serve as a police officer than Christians? Or a jailer who not only sees criminals, but souls needing Christ? Who better to serve as a first responder or fireman or doctor than those who view all life as precious? Who better to volunteer to raise money for the cancer society or give to Red Cross?

You don't have to be a Christian to answer the call to public service or to help out a neighbor. What makes your contribution to society unique is your motivation. Jesus said it best. **A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.** We know, God wants us to love our neighbor as ourselves. What makes this command new is we now love our neighbor AS HE FIRST LOVED US. What kind of love is that? Jesus didn't look at you to figure out if you were worth redeeming or not. If he had done that, he would have skipped over you and over me because we are not worth saving. He would have to skip over the whole world for there is no one who is righteous, not a single one. Rather, while we were his enemies, while we were rebelling against God, Jesus died for us and redeemed us from the guilt of our sin, from the devil, and from hell. That is the love that saves us, and that is the love we bring to our husbands and wives, to our kids and church, to our neighbor.

We see Jesus in the face of every neighbor. You don't ask if that neighbor is related to you. You don't ask if that neighbor belongs to your church. You don't care if that neighbor is an unbeliever or living a life of sin. You love them as Christ loves you. And the hope is they will see you as a disciple of Christ while you love them.

So, we do things for others. And we do things for the Lord.

II. It is for God's glory.

Abram won a stunning victory. He was able to muster 318 to arm. But he wasn't alone. He had some allies, neighbors who knew Abram and respected him and went to war with him. How many men they provided we do not know. I find this interesting. These were Canaanites who worshipped other gods. Yet, Abraham enjoyed a friendship with them and could work alongside of them. Christians can work alongside non-Christians. And if we live out our calling and love our neighbors as Christ loved us, we may enjoy a good reputation among them even if they do not agree with our theology.

Why did Abram win? Well, he did employ a brilliant battle plan. He was outnumbered. He was up against battle hardened veterans and his men were weekend warriors. So Abram attacked at night, and he split his force into several groups who attacked from different directions. It worked. They routed the army and captured everything from them.

Is that why he won? No. He won because the Lord granted him success. ¹⁸ **Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, ¹⁹ and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. ²⁰ And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."** Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything. We do not know much about this Melchizedek. He is the king of Salem which will eventually become Jerusalem. He is both a king and a priest. For that reason, the New Testament uses him as a type or example of Jesus who also is a priest and king. But he was a believe and knew exactly what to say. He reminded Abram that it was the Lord who won the battle for him.

That is how the Christian handles success. Yeah, in football they celebrate their success by running into the endzone and dancing in front of the cameras. Christians celebrate their success, too, only we direct the glory to God in heaven. ²¹ **The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."** ²² **But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, ²³ that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.'** ²⁴ **I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me—to Aner, Eshkol and Mamre. Let them have their share."** Is it wrong to profit from your work? Certainly not. When I bought the engagement ring for my wife, I went to a jeweler who was a member of our church. I told him I was not looking for a discount because I was his pastor. I came to him because I trusted him and wanted to give him my business. Abram could have kept everything. That sounds brutal by today's standards, but that is how they did things then. But he did not care about the spoils. He did not want people to think that he did it for the money. Yes, he used some of it, but not for himself. He gave 10% to the Lord as an offering. He let his men eat food. They needed it. He couldn't speak for his allies who fought with him; so he said they should get a share. That's it. He wasn't in it for the money. He didn't want anyone to say he did it for power or prestige or money. He did this because he was the Lord's servant.

This is how we praise and glorify God, when we make it plain that we have no other motivation than Jesus Christ. We can never pay God back for all he does, especially forgiveness in Jesus. So, we don't. Instead, when we do anything for God, it is because we are happy to. Let's say a gentleman came to your house and returned the wallet you lost the other day. You open the wallet and everything is there, so you pull a twenty dollar bill and gave it to him. Did you just pay him to return your wallet? No. You gave him a gift out of thanks. That is what we do. We give back to God, and we give to our neighbor. We let people know that it was one of

God's redeemed children that has helped them. And we are willing to tell them why Jesus means so much to us. That is all the reward we could ever want.

So, do Christians celebrate success? You bet, but in a different way. We celebrate success when we remember that it is not about us; it is about all those around us. We celebrate success when we acknowledge that it was the Lord giving us the success. When you do, you are a blessing wherever you serve and you are blessed in that service. Amen.