



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Shattered Directions

The Secret to My Success

When life goes to pieces | Part 5

Tim Badal | October 25, 2015 | 1 Samuel 13–15



We are looking at the book of 1 Samuel in a series entitled “Shattered: When life goes to pieces.” Over these last few weeks we have explored some of the most difficult and heartbreaking stories from this book. We used it as an opportunity to learn lessons for living life and understanding God’s will when life doesn’t go the way we expect it to. Maybe life doesn’t go our way because of issues or struggles we’re having, trials and tribulations, or maybe because of sinful decisions we’ve made, so we find our lives shattered and broken. We’re trying to figure out as Christians how we are to live vibrant and healthy lives in the process. We’ve learned what it means to suffer well. We’ve learned what it means to keep our eyes focused on Jesus Christ and His will even in the most difficult of times when it seems life couldn’t get any worse.

Along the way we have dealt with different aspects of being shattered. We looked at Shattered Expectations, Shattered Parenting and Shattered Religion. Last week we talked about the demise of a Shattered Nation—a nation that chooses to follow its own ways instead of the ways of God and the consequences that come from that.

Now we come to a time in Scripture when Israel was tired of following God as their King. Since the time of Moses leading the people out of Egypt, God had been their leader and they followed Him. He blessed them, ministered to them and led them well in the wilderness, then into the Promised Land. But during the time of the judges when everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6), they grew tired of following God. They wanted to be just like every other pagan nation and have a king. They turned their backs away from God and desired a man to lead and guide them, to be their protector and go before them. Instead of following God and His ways, they saw fit to follow the same ideas and pathways that the pagan nations around them did in having a king. When we go outside the will and plan of God things don’t always go so well. When we put our trust in men instead of God we see the consequences of such folly.

Now we’ll be looking at the life and times of that king. He was given the job of leading the people of Israel. If we were to look more deeply into 1 Samuel we would notice a lot of contrasts. Consider this ironic contrast: At the end of the book of Judges there is a very famous passage that tells us about the life and times of the nation of Israel. Judges 17:6 says, *“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* Today we will learn there is a king in Israel who did what was right in his own eyes. So now Israel has the leader they’re looking for but that leader, who should be leading the people of God into a closer and more vibrant walk with Him, must be humble and obedient to the commands and calling of God as well. But he did what he wanted, on his timetable, following his own plans and vision.

When we pursue our own plans and desires, disobeying God, we shatter the directions God gives us. We render ourselves unsuccessful. I have the unenviable task of working through six chapters of Scripture and we’ll look at them under the heading “Shattered Directions: The secret to my success.” God has a word for us regarding whether or not we will be successful in this life.

I love the sound of the word success. Even as kids, success is something we strive and long for in academics, athletics and the arts. We want it for our sports teams. We want it in the work place. When you are successful at work you’re given promotions and opportunities for new ventures. We want success in our homes. We want our children to grow up and be successful. We want our marriages to be successful. We want our communities to be successful. A successful community is close knit and free

from the encumbrances of crime and other vices. We also want to be successful in our church. I'm pretty positive that no one would say, "I don't want to be successful." I can't imagine talking with any of you and hearing, "I'm really striving to be as unsuccessful as possible. That's my goal. That's my focus. If I can get that then I'll be a happy individual."

Success is part of the human experience. There are hundreds of books about how to become successful. We watch movies about people's lives or sports teams that have all the odds against them, but in the midst of the struggles of life they find a way to be successful in reaching and attaining their goals. We're moved and challenged by stories of success. We see over and over again that we are a people who recognize and affirm success through the giving of awards and recognitions.

While success is a universal experience, over the last generation or so the definition of success has changed. In his book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Leaders*, Stephen Covey says, "There's a shift in how one attains success." He says that for the first 200 years of the United States' existence, success was found in character. He said the forefathers of our nation were really good at instilling this in us as a nation. Our first president, George Washington, would spend hours every day improving areas of his character that had faults. We know the great men and women of our history books were usually men and women of great character. We gave them labels such as "Honest Abe" or "Conscientious Thomas Jefferson."

But somewhere between the two world wars something began to shift. No longer was success determined by character but by your mindset. You didn't have to change who you were as a person; you just needed to change the outlook you had in life. If you could do that you would be successful. All sorts of posters and maxims came out as a result, such as: "Your attitude determines your altitude." "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." "Turn those scars into stars." "Don't let your problems make you bitter, let them make you better." The shift is subtle. Instead of success being forged in character and integrity that takes a lifetime to build, success is quick and flippant. Success is easy to obtain.

I think our forefathers were closer to the basis of success found in the Scriptures because the Bible says that to be successful is to be men and women of integrity and obedience, recognizing who they are in God's economy. They recognize the hard work it takes to not only acquire good character but to keep it.

Right living in the Bible is the basis of true success. The Old Testament is full of stories that could be split into two columns: those who were successful according to God's mindset and those who were unsuccessful. In 1 Samuel we see a poster-child for one of the most unsuccessful lives in all of Scripture. King Saul was a man who seemingly had everything going for him. He had good qualities that would normally lead to success—he was from a good family, was tall, dark and handsome. He was influential, gifted, victorious in his past—people were initially attracted by such success.

But as time goes on—as it does in our own lives—true character is what becomes important. When people look at our lives they will start to ask the question, "What kind of human being is this?" As we look at this very prominent figure from the Scriptures we see that Saul, being the first king of God's chosen people, was an utter failure when it comes to being successful. It wasn't a failure of intellect, competence or not having enough gifts to be able to accomplish a job, because Saul had everything. But in chapters 13–15 Saul's life unraveled because he was unwilling to wait on God and make Him the Ruler of his life.

Some of us fall prey to this same thing. But in order to understand how to remedy this, we have to ask the question, "What is the secret to our success?" Will it be built on the backs of our lives and accomplishments or will it be found in our position as children of the Great King and God of the universe?

1. The Definition of Success

When we define success, we're quick to look at what we've done, what we have, or who we are in comparison to other people. We'll look at our possessions and accomplishments and try to figure out how to define success according to those things. Listen to how these people define success [from a man-on-the-street video clip]:

- I define success as, oh my gosh. You have challenged me right there.
- I define success, ummm...
- I guess, ah...
- I don't know...
- Success means motivation, passion, determination.
- Going to Disney Land.

- Just taking down fear and doing what I have to do to survive.
- I define success by the amount of likes I receive on Instagram.
- I guess how I would define it would be by the smiles that I see on my wife's and kids' faces each and every day I come home. That lets me know that what I'm doing is worthwhile and to keep going.
- I would describe it in one word: sincerity.
- Achieve the goals that you set for yourself.
- I started my Instagram account back in 2012. At that time, I had just lost my job and it was one of those rare moments when I felt like I had time to really think about what I wanted to do with my life. I fell in love with Instagram. Now I do that as my job.
- I want to go back to law school, to help change laws and also to improve society and the world's understanding of people in general, especially those who are deaf and hard of hearing.
- I've thought about going back to school, even on line, because I don't think I could sit in the classroom with youngsters. They'd probably call me Grandma.
- Actually, I had a child at 22. I never really had time to go back to school, but he turned five and I went back and I got my high school diploma at 27.
- One of the goals I set for myself many years ago was to have a happy family. I think I've been successful in that.
- My first love is, you know besides my wife, is music. I feel like I just have a lot to say to the world.
- I want to be the number one Instagrammer in the world.
- Waking up with a complete, biggest smile on your face, knowing that you're going to make it.
- I would tell people to follow their gut.
- It's never too late to do anything.
- Don't sweat the small stuff.
- To embrace others, who they are.
- I think we all deep down know what we want to do in this world.
- Don't be afraid to be you.

The World's Definition

How do you define success? I don't want to beat up on what was articulated in the video but I want to nuance what you heard a little bit. A lot of what was said we would consider success in some way, shape or form. Some of them were incredibly notable things. When we define success the way they did, we must recognize that their success is bound up in what they're going to be or do. When we define success that way we have no control over it.

One man said, "I want to have a happy family." That sounds like a great and laudable thing. Here's the problem: he cannot make his family happy. He has no control over that. He can do things that can make his family experience have differing levels of joy and happiness, but he has zero control over making someone else happy. If I define my success as a pastor by whether I make you guys happy or not, I'm going to fail a lot more than I will succeed. You're a fickle people and I don't know exactly what will make you happy. I have zero control over the happiness of others.

When we define success this way, it almost always comes with a comparison to someone else. When we say, "I want my family to be happy," we usually find an unhappy family and compare our families. "How do I know if my family is happy? How do I know if I have accomplished this success in my life?" The answer is we look for someone whom we think has not accomplished these things and compare ourselves to them.

If we are the ones who define what success is, it would be no different than a student taking a class; when the exam comes, instead of giving an unbiased test, the teacher gives out a blank test and says you can determine what questions you want on the test. Unless you are really dumb, you will always be able to answer the questions that you put on the test. When you say, "This is how I define success," you are defining the terms by which you will be deemed successful or not.

Here's the problem: success must, by nature, be defined by an unbiased arbiter. That's what makes graduation so amazing. When a student graduates, it wasn't that he set the terms, but met the terms set by someone else. Someone else set the level and said, "If you achieve these things you have achieved a level of success because you have accomplished something that was

predetermined to be successful.” So when we meet the standard that is set by someone else we can know we have truly accomplished something great.

The Word's Definition

The Bible speaks over and over again about what success is, where it's found and how it's derailed in people's lives. That's why we need the Word's definition of success instead of the world's. We need the Scriptures to speak into this.

To help us, we as the preaching team spent a lot of time thinking through what would be a good definition of success. We had definitions that were a mile long because we wanted to be sure to hit everything. Then we brought it down to the bare minimum so that we could see at the end of the day how success is defined, regardless of our backgrounds or struggles. Here's the definition we came up with: “Biblical success is the on-going pursuit of all that God wants you to be and do.”

Let's break down a couple parts of this definition:

- It's ongoing. You cannot just live in light of your past successes. When someone asks you, “Why are you a successful person?” you can't answer, “Twenty years ago I did ____.” It's ongoing. And it's a pursuit, meaning it's something that we can attain but we never fully grasp.

You see this in your sanctification. As you pursue becoming more like Christ, straining and stretching for what God wants for you, it's not that He never gives it to you but that once you grab hold of one level of sanctification, God then causes you to stretch for the next level.

- This on-going pursuit is not just to obtain part of what God wants but all of what God wants you to be and do. A successful person is someone who recognizes that he is a child of the one true King and has been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. It's not based on anything you do but the mercy of God that He has lavished upon you. You need to revel and rest in that. That is success.
- But you can't just sit and revel in the idea that you've been saved, because God says that you are His workmanship, created in Christ to do good works that He has prepared in advance for you to do (Ephesians 2:10). So you can't sit back and say, “I'm successful because of all that Christ has done.” Yes, that's a realization, but you must move beyond that realization to action.

Based on this definition, are you successful? Are you engaged in an on-going pursuit of all that God wants you to be and do? Notice what I haven't talked about. I haven't talked about your bank account, the car you drive, how nice your house is in comparison to your neighbor's, what the name plate says on your desk, if your kids made the honor roll this quarter or if they're the starters on the athletic squad, or if your wife thinks you're the greatest thing in the world. I'm asking you the question, “What does God say about your success?”

When we stand on the Day of Judgment, it won't be our neighbor, our banker, our boss, our parents, our kids, or the watching world but God who will define whether you were successful. God is going to say one of two things: “*I never knew you; depart from me*” (Matthew 7:23) or “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (Matthew 25:23). I would hope that you want the latter. If that's the case then you must pursue the things that God defines as successful.

2. The disguises of success

Instead of choosing God's way, many times we disguise success. This is where we bring in King Saul. Instead of pursuing God's way and God's definition of success, he pursued his own. Had he obeyed God he would have ruled over the nation of Israel for a long period of time. He would have had great blessings, but instead he chose his own way. All the while he did something that we often do: he disguised his success to try and make it look better than it really was.

Saul chose the easy way instead of the hard way. He chose the shortcut instead of the long way. He was able to trick others into believing that he was truly successful. Likewise we do the same thing. Instead of pursuing God on His terms, we fake it while going our own way. We're going to look at four of Saul's disguises.

Turn in your Bible to 1 Samuel 9 where we are introduced to the first king of Israel who has been anointed by Samuel. Remember that this was not Samuel's choice but the people's choice. God said that their choice of Saul was a rejection of God Himself. In 1 Samuel 9:1 we learn that he was a Benjaminite, the son of a man from the family of Kish, a wealthy family.

When we try to look successful, we will disguise it in a number of ways. We're coming to the week of Halloween when children will dress up and disguise themselves as something else. Many of us wear disguises every day of the week. We do so because we don't want people to see the real us but the person we want them to see. Saul did this in many ways and the people of Israel were ripe for it.

The possession test

In 1 Samuel 9 we learn that Saul came from a family of great wealth. Some believe that Saul's family was one of the richest families in the entire nation of Israel. With those riches came the finest of fare. It's no wonder he was the people's choice for their king because he was already living the high life of luxury.

It's amazing how the things you have can tell people whether or not you're successful. We do this all the time. Sometimes we don't even recognize it. We see someone driving a nice car and we assume they're a successful businessperson, good with money, and rich. We do it when we look at people's homes and the possessions they have. They are all disguises of success. Nowhere in all of Scripture do possessions or money ever equal success in God's eyes, yet it does here in America.

The problem is that we can disguise it more now than ever before because of the use of available credit. We can tell the world that we have more riches and are more successful than we really are by lying and using other people's money. This was the great demise that took place some seven or eight years ago during the housing crisis. We bought homes we could not afford long term because we had this idea that if we had a home people might think that we were doing better than we really were. So people leveraged all that they had on their house and little did they know that the bank would come and ask for the money in return. We bought into the idea that a bigger house gives a greater picture of success. The devil tells us that people will look at us differently when we have these things. It changes how we look.

To illustrate this disguise, some years ago I was catering in a very fancy, upscale neighborhood for a first birthday party. As I was setting up I noticed that in this beautiful, pristine, massive home there was very little furniture, basically just folding chairs and tables. It just didn't seem right. I assumed that maybe they had just moved in so I asked, "How long have you been in the neighborhood?" They said, "Three and a half years." I was kind of surprised by that. Then a moving truck came. I thought, "Maybe they've been getting new furniture and it just arrived." The movers brought in everything from sofas and couches, to dining room tables and all of the usual decorations. Every room now had beautiful, pristine furniture in it.

As I was grilling out in driveway I said to one of the movers, "You guys delivered just in time! They must have been getting really nervous." He said, "No, that's how we operate." I said, "You wait till the last second to deliver?" He said, "No, we're a rental company. We rent furniture by the hour. We usually do it for model homes when they're going to have an open house. They'll fill the house with paintings and all sorts of things." I said, "But this isn't a model home open house." He said, "This is our new market. All of these people are buying houses they can't fill and when they have a party they know that no one wants to see an empty house because that would mean they are unsuccessful. They'll have the furniture for five hours. We'll be back at 9:00 and take it out."

That couple was living a lie. They wanted to prove their success to their family and friends and little did they know it was just a mirage. There was no financial success there. I've got to imagine that they weren't there very long. We disguise success.

The portrait test

Saul was a man of great wealth, but the first thing that is mentioned about Saul in this text is that he was a handsome man. Verse two says, "*There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he.*" What we see in Saul is that God had graced this man with absolutely beautiful looks. He was something to behold. Isn't it odd that this would be one of the things the people used to determine their king? "Look at him! He's so good looking."

Our media is driven by the portrait test. They put before you beautiful people and you'll listen a lot more closely, as if they've achieved something. We want to get our news from good looking people; we want all of our entertainers to be good looking.

The only thing they've achieved is being born.

I get these good looks from God's grace and Bill and Michelle Badal. I couldn't do anything and be this good looking. It's not because of me but the great genes I have. Seriously, I've got a face for radio. Have you ever noticed the ugliest people in media are the radio personalities? Yet I might add some of the most interesting people I know are the ones on radio because they're not driven by that portrait test.

Jesus failed the portrait test. Isaiah 53:2 says this of the King of kings and Lord of lords: *"He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him."* Jesus could have put Himself in the most beautiful of human flesh but He said, "The portrait test isn't important."

If you're a beautiful person be thankful to God for it. That's a wonderful thing. If you believe God is your Creator and does all things well, then what do you designate as beautiful? All things He has created. But you need to be careful that you don't determine someone's success by their beauty.

Several years ago a pastor had just received the call to be the new pastor of a very large church of about 10,000 people. His first Sunday there everyone wanted to meet the new pastor but they couldn't find him. That Sunday a homeless man walked into the church. He didn't look very good and was told to sit in the back. He wasn't talked to and no one interacted with him. They left him alone. That's what we do. When someone doesn't look put together we push them out to the fringes. That all changed when the chairman of the elder team got up and said, "We'd like to introduce our new pastor." When he said the name, the only person who stood up and walked toward the pulpit was the homeless man. He was the new pastor. The church learned that they needed not to determine someone's success by their appearance.

The personality test

Turn in your Bible to 1 Samuel 10:24. The personality test is looking for hidden charisma. "Whatever it is, he's got it!" And Saul had it. King Saul was anointed and presented before the people. Notice even Samuel was in on this. First Samuel 10:24 says, *"Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? There is none like him among all the people."* This guy was a cut above everyone else. It wasn't just his looks. It was his charisma. It was his personality. He exuded success. He was the kind of man a woman wanted and men wanted to be like.

The best way to define it would be the Dos Equis commercials. He's the most interesting man in the world. He has experience. He is far superior in every way—from romance, to strength, to his vast intellect. I studied the Dos Equis commercial and the marketing behind it and this is what they said about that man: "We wanted to present to our customers a man who is so rich in story and experience that it would only lead them to dream and hope for what may be in their future." "Drink the beer and you'll become interesting."

We desire and long to be the hit at the party and be the most interesting person so that when we talk people hush in silent expectation for what we're going to say. What we are told is that Saul had that charisma, that "thing" that so many of us desire to prove that we've made it and we're something special.

The position test

In 1 Samuel 10:24 we are told that not only did Saul have the personality, but *"'There is none like him among all the people.' And all the people shouted, 'Long live the king!'"* He was good looking, he came from a wealthy family, he had possessions, he had a personality and then he held the position. He had the corner office. His nameplate said CEO. He's the guy. He was at the top of the food chain. He was the king.

Never think that your nameplate on your desk defines your success. David was a lowly shepherd boy, yet he was a man after God's own heart. The disciples were unlearned fishermen, yet they changed the world because of Christ. We love titles. There are people here who are striving and longing for a promotion. You don't want it because you'll get more money, or because it will bring new opportunities, or because of new challenges. You long for it because you think that new title will give you recognition you don't have today. Saul had position. He was the king.

The prize test

First Samuel 11 says that the first thing Saul did as king was destroy the neighboring nation of the Ammonites who were enemies of God. He defeated them. There were victories in his past and Saul continually went back to what he had done as king. He went back to his victories. Some of you would say, "I'm successful." You would even say, "According to the biblical definition I am successful," but what you are using as evidence of your success is stuff that happened twenty years ago. "I'm a successful Christian because of what I did twenty years ago in the small group ministry." "What have you been doing since then?" "Not very much but I still rely on the past." That is idiotic thinking.

We see this line of thinking in the Chicago area with our sports teams. We don't talk about the present; we're always talking about the past. Do you recognize this? I can't tell you how weary I am as a Bears fan. We keep going back to 1985 as if we're successful as an organization. We're losing games left and right, so what do we do? We go back to the glory days. As Christians we go back to how we used to be instead of where we should be. That's why we called it an "on-going pursuit" in our definition of biblical success.

I can only define success as a father based on what I've done today. I can't tell my kids, "I was successful when you were infants." "Honey, I'm a great husband because of what I did in our first couple of years of marriage." No, I'm successful, not only based on what has been done in the past, but what is an on-going practice in the present. Some of us are holding this idea that we're successful because of what we did yesterday. It's an on-going pursuit. Every time Saul had someone confront him he would go back to something he did in the past. It doesn't matter what you did in the past unless it has been followed up with faithfulness since then.

3. The Derailing of Success

We cannot define success on our own terms. If we do it isn't success at all. Saul missed opportunities and instead of pursuing God he allowed these terrible disguises of what seemingly looked like success but which really weren't. Instead of pursuing obedience he pursued things that derailed his success. On four separate occasions Saul chose to disobey. Instead of obeying God's pathways to success he followed his own ways.

Impatience with God

In 1 Samuel 13:1-14 we see that the Philistines were causing trouble. They amassed 30,000 troops along the border and were ready to destroy the nation of Israel. Saul didn't have a lot of troops on his side but he knew that Israel never determined its strength based on the amount of men or chariots they had but on the faithfulness of God to rescue His people. Samuel said, "I don't want you going to battle until we get God's blessing. Let's wait on the Lord. I want you to wait in your city for seven days, then I'll come and we'll sacrifice to the Lord. We're going to get His blessing so that we will be ready to take on the enemy with God's blessing and not just our own."

We learn that for some reason Samuel was delayed. We don't know why he showed up a little late. We're not told how late he was. It seems to point to the idea that he showed up on day seven but just a little later in the day. Saul does the unthinkable. Instead of waiting on Samuel and obeying the command of the Lord, he played the part of the priest. The king's job was never to lead the people in the spiritual act of worship. He wasn't the priest, therefore he wasn't ordained to do sacrifices. He was called to wait. God had said, "King, you don't have to listen to anybody else but Me. Here's your command: wait seven days. Wait for My servant Samuel and then you will get My blessing." Instead of waiting and listening to the clear command of God, for whatever reason, he chose to go without God and made a sacrifice himself. He said, "I can't wait. I see things more clearly than God. God obviously doesn't understand my circumstances."

The most difficult and worst decisions of my life have always been ones that have been made hastily. Isn't that true for you? The decisions that we make hastily are usually the ones that come back to bite us. We think we know better than God. We think we can't live without something and that we have to have it right now. So we go and take it and do what we will with it instead of waiting on the Lord and His time frame. Let us remember the words of Isaiah 40:31:

*But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.*

Just like Saul, we are called to wait on the Lord. Maybe you need something right now and God isn't coming through. Well, maybe there is a reason why God isn't coming through on your timetable. Maybe God has a plan that's bigger than your plan. You say, "But I hate being in the waiting room." I'm with you. I don't like it either. There's nothing fun about it, but God has told you to wait for a reason. Saul didn't get it and he lost his kingship as a result. What consequence are you willing to endure because you're unwilling to wait?

Partial obedience

In 1 Samuel 15 Saul was once again given a command from the Lord. This command was to go against the Amalekites because of their harsh treatment of the Israelites in the past. They had dealt treacherously with the Israelites and God said, "I'm done with these Amalekites and I'm going to destroy them." He gave Saul and the people of Israel a brutal assignment: go to Amalek and destroy everything and everyone there. I don't have time to address the theological implications here, but what may seem harsh to us was reasonable and right before a righteous God. I don't know why He would allow the death of women and children and all the livestock, but here's what I know: God does all things well and that's good enough for me.

In verses 8–10 Saul entered the city and was given the task of leaving nothing there. He was to destroy it all. What did he do? He went in and destroyed the Amalekites, but only partially. He kept King Agag for himself. Of all the people to keep alive, he kept the king alive and brought him back to his base. Verse nine says, "*But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them.*" So Saul was given the right command but he said, "Instead of doing what I'm supposed to, I'll obey it partially." So that's what he did. He obeyed the partial command.

We live in a culture that tells us as Christians that we can choose which commands of God to follow. We take part of Jesus' words but not all of them. That doesn't jive with Jesus. He wants full obedience. Something that I have continually taught my boys is that partial obedience is full disobedience. You may say, "I'm doing a really good job over here, so let me have this pet sin over here." "I'm doing what God wants on this edge of the ledger but I can't say no to these things. They're too important to me." That's what Saul was doing. Saul said, "I'll do the easy stuff, Lord, but when it comes to the things I may want and desire, I'm going to keep them for myself." God was greatly grieved by Saul's disobedience and He's greatly grieved by our partial obedience, which is full disobedience before Him.

Pride

As if that wasn't enough, Saul did something even worse. This guy was a piece of work. First Samuel 15:12 says, "*And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, 'Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.'*" That's weird. He built a monument for himself. What in the world was he thinking? That just seems odd. How full of himself could he have been? He wanted to let everybody recognize his accomplishments. If you're the one who is recognizing your own accomplishments you haven't accomplished much.

I once catered an event for a man throwing a party in honor of himself. It was very odd. He introduced himself in the third person and then got up and announced the award he had won at work. You say, "That just seems weird." It was odd when I saw it during that catering job, but it isn't odd when I do it—when I allow my ego to edge out God. It isn't odd when I read my own press clippings. It isn't odd when I tell people ad nauseam, "Look at all the great things I've done. Have you noticed them? I know you've been busy so I'm just going to catch you up on all the great things I've done."

Saul was building monuments for himself and, in the same way, it is unbecoming for us as Christians to build monuments for anyone but God Himself. He's everything we have. He's our reason for any success we have. Whatever success or wealth we have been given is not ours but God's. God, by His grace, love and His mercy, has showered it upon us. To think that we could make any claims that we've done anything is missing the mark.

Phony repentance

So like a good prophet would, Samuel confronted Saul about his evil deeds and disobedience. First Samuel 15:10–11 says, "*The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 'I regret that I have made Saul king.'*" The last thing you want to hear as a Christian is God's regret over your life. That should sober you up. You say, "God would never say that of me." He said it of Saul; what indicates He won't say it of you?

So Samuel went to Saul and shared the Lord's message verbatim. "God has rejected you as King, Saul. You have gone too far. Not one, not two, not three, but four times you have seemingly gone your own way in disobedience." What did Saul do? He did what we all do: he repented. But it's phony repentance. Saul did a song and dance. Samuel asked, "Why did the people bring stuff back from the Amalekites?" King Saul said, "I didn't do it. The people did it!" What kind of king are you, Saul, that the people do whatever they want against your own wishes? It's a lie! Saul was trying to blame the very people he led. He was trying to pass the buck. With all that God had commanded, Samuel brought down the hammer and said, "Enough is enough! Your kingdom is over. God has chosen another to take your place." And what did Saul do? At that moment he confessed.

I don't know if this is true in your home, but in the Badal home repentance always comes after the consequences have been laid out. I'll say, "You've done wrong. You need to repent of it." "Uh huh." "And you're going to lose your tablet for a week." "Dad, I'm sorry! I'll go and say sorry to mom. I'll do whatever you want!" That's phony repentance. When you repent only after the consequence comes that's a problem.

Phony repentance is only concerned about the consequences of being caught. There's a lot of phony repenting going on. "I got caught, but now you're saying that something is going to happen?" The only reason Saul repented was because his kingdom was taken away from him. Like a little kid, he started crying before the prophet Samuel and said, "No! Wait! Give me another chance. I promise I'll do better." The chances had come and gone.

There were four areas that derailed Saul's success, and the question is, are they derailing yours? Are you impatient with God? Are you obeying Him partially? Is your life filled with pride? Is your repentance phony? God wants you to be successful. God wants you to pursue Him. But how do we do it?

4. The Development of Successful Living

How do we become successful? The book of Proverbs tells us. By the way, another King lights the way for us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 3:4 says, "*So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.*" Notice that it says you'll find success in heaven with God and on earth with man. That's the kind of success you want. We have to develop good success. How do you get there?

Clinging to His commands

Verses one through four tell us we must cling to the commands of God:

My son, do not forget my teaching,
but let your heart keep my commandments,
for length of days and years of life
and peace they will add to you.

Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you;
bind them around your neck;
write them on the tablet of your heart.

So you will find favor and good success

Are you clinging to the Word of God? Saul wasn't and it led to his demise.

Putting your Savior before self

On the flipside, in verses five and six, we see that it's not only about clinging to His commands but putting your Savior before yourself.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.

When we put Jesus Christ before ourselves, when His will and plan comes before our own, when we can echo the words of Jesus Who said, "*Not my will, but yours, be done*" (Luke 22:42), we will find success in the eyes of God and in the eyes of men. Are you clinging to His commands? Are you putting your Savior before yourself? If you are you'll find success.

Are you successful? Have you taken stock of your life and asked yourself the question, "Am I truly successful?" Remember, it's God Who will determine it in the end, so you better start defining it on His terms and doing it His way and not doing it the way Saul did, following his own will and desires.