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## **FAITH, YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL TOOL FOR SUCCESS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

All over the world there is one most sought after objective - success. It is very doubtful if any person would wish to be unsuccessful no matter whatever venture the person is engaged in. We want to be successful in our business, our academic work, our human relations and in our spiritual life. Sadly enough, not many of us are employing the much-needed psychological tool - faith.

Psychology as a discipline, among other things relates to how our mental set influences our behaviour. In an emergency situation where our life is threatened, we could jump heights, which we would under normal circumstances not dare to. What then accounts for our ability to jump under the emergency situation? Is it because under such conditions we perceive that jumping to safety is imperative for our survival and therefore throw away any trace of doubt and have an unwavering mental set to jump?

What if we had entertained doubt (negative mental set)? Although faith is not only limited to such crucial phenomenal moments, like gold, faith glitters more when tried in the fire of urgency, crucially, imperativeness and human helplessness. For example, when the people of Israel came to the raging Red Sea which had overflowed its banks and with the Egyptians at their heels and also they could not go to their left or right, they found themselves in a strait and helpless situation. However, God graciously responded to their little faith and parted the Red Sea into two for the people of Israel to cross to safety on dry ground. (Exodus 14). Queen Esther, after her faith was kindled by her uncle, Mordecai, declared a 3-day fast for all Hebrews and she afterwards with faith went forth to the King contrary to the prevailing norm to the saving of the Hebrews from annihilation. (Esther 4 - 9). The three Hebrew boys who by faith refused to worship the golden statue of the king of Babylon were saved even in a burning furnace. (Daniel 3). Similarly Daniel was saved from the lions' den

because he trusted and had faith in his God (Daniel 6). The list of people who by faith changed their hopeless situation to one of hope is by no means exhaustive. Christ Jesus based all His healings and miracles on the positive mental set of the people or persons concerned – your faith (positive mental set) has made you whole or healed you (Luke 8:48, Luke 17:19).

How many successes have eluded us because of having a negative mental set instead of a positive mental set (faith)? The purpose of this paper is to underscore the fact that most of our failures (barring the will of God), are due largely to our lack of faith. Additionally, this paper seeks to emphasize that if we have faith (positive mental set) then we would succeed in everything that we do. Our Lord Jesus Christ said if we believe (that is if we have faith) all things are possible (Mark 9:23). In other words, if we have a positive mental set, we shall succeed in everything we do. Ultimately, this essay seeks to help people to succeed in life.

This paper is divided into eleven sections. Beginning with the Introduction, the paper proceeds through the following sections; Background; The Concept of Success; What is Faith?; The Dynamics of Faith; The Essence of Faith; Faith at work; Negating Doubt to boost up Faith; Summary and Conclusion; Bibliography; and finally ends up with Appendices.

## **BACKGROUND**

Appendix II provides two perspectives of looking at the same issue - the driving force for achieving ends or goals (success). From the perspective of the psychologist, the means to achieve success is positive thinking. From the perspective of the religious person (Christian), the means to success is faith. Whereas true faith (Christian faith) emanates from love for and leads to or focuses on God, not all positive thinking leads to God. Exclusive positive thinking leads to or focuses on man (male/female).

The dichotomy between positive thinking and faith is not mutually exclusive. There could be a Christian who thinks positively as well (having both faith and positive thoughts). Such a person falls within the section indicated "B" in the Venn diagram in appendix I: that is the point of intersection between A and C (positive - thinking and faith) expressed mathematically as follows:-  $A \cap C = B$ . There could also be a Christian who does not have positive thoughts or does not think positively and therefore fails as a business person. This situation is indicated by section C in appendix I. On the other extreme, there could be a person who only thinks positively (without faith) and therefore all his/her successes are limited to this earth and not beyond. Such a person has no hope after death. Faith in God however transcends this earth to eternity.

In the integration of faith and learning, it is crucial that we teach from the known to the unknown. In this sense, students (especially students of psychology) who already uphold the concept of positive thinking should be linked up to faith in God. In this paper, for the purpose of integration of faith and learning, positive - thinking is equated to faith within the framework of achieving success in life (Appendix II).

## **THE CONCEPT OF SUCCESS**

Success as a concept means several things for several people. For one person, getting good grades at school is success. For another person, getting plenty of money irrespective of the means employed is success. For yet another person, success means getting a good looking, understanding and loving spouse as a life partner. In all these instances we are faced with a parochial and restricted meaning of success – the mere achievement of one's goals in any aspect of his/her life.

Several people have achieved their set targets or goals but the question is whether they were really successful: for example after achieving world fame as a writer and historian, H. G. Wells wrote the following: "I have no peace. All life is

at the end of the tether.” Howard Hughes, after becoming one of the world’s wealthiest tycoons, held himself up in eccentric seclusion for years and finally died of malnutrition. Ralph Barton a famous American cartoonist took his life after leaving the following note – “I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes; I have gone from wife to wife and from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up twenty-four hours of the day. Ernest Hemingway who was a leading writer of his day and was considered successful blasted his head apart with a shotgun after being haunted by paranoia:<sup>1</sup> Solomon after achieving much in life wrote in Ecclesiastics 1:2 and 12:8 – “ Vanities of vanities, says the preacher, all is vanity”.

However in the real and broader sense, success is the optimum achievement of physical, emotional (psycho-social), intellectual and spiritual goals. It is the holistic maximal development of a person. Success is the fullest exploitation of our whole potentiality. In other words, success is living and growing to our maximum potential as persons – being all that we can be or better still, being all that God wants us to be.

It is evident that the restricted meaning of success focuses on only specific aspects of our life, like the intellectual and most often the physical aspect in the form of financial achievements. In a sense the parochial meaning of success is not mutually exclusive of the broader meaning. In fact the restricted meaning is the subset of the broader meaning.

1. culled from Benson D. (1977) – The Total Man

Whether we are looking at the restricted meaning or the broader meaning of success, one thing is certain: - that success has to do with the achievement of set goals. The Cambridge International Dictionary of English defines success as “the achieving of desired results.” The achievement of desired results implies that the set goals must be socially and morally acceptable.

The question is whether all people achieve their set goals. In other words, do all people attain success? This paper would demonstrate that the main difference between people who succeed and those who do not is that those who succeed have faith and those who do not succeed do not have faith. Put in psychological terms, those who succeed have a positive mental set (faith) and those who do not succeed have a negative mental set (faithless). According to E. G. White (1900; 354), “success is not the result of chance or of destiny; it is the outworking of God’s own providence, the reward of faith and discretion of virtue and persevering effort.” (Emphasis mine).

## WHAT IS FAITH?

In Hebrews chapter eleven verse one, we read the following about faith, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”. The English translation of faith in Greek is *pistis*, which means “a firm persuasion, a conviction based on hearing”. Rasi (2001:2) describes faith as follows: “Faith is an act of the will that chooses to place its trust in God in response to His self-disclosure and the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our conscience.” (emphasis supplied).

Faith is also a continuum; from the mundane to the spiritual. On the one end (mundane), we may have faith in the chairs we sit on that they would not collapse beneath us. One may also have faith in his car (its performance) that it would take him wherever he is going without breaking down on the way. On the other extreme end (the spiritual), we may have faith in the saving grace of God to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Savior. Somewhere in between these

extremes of faith, we may have faith in our friends, parents, children, teachers or even students.

Faith has intellectual, emotive and behavioral components. The intellectual component involves the mental picture, knowledge, facts, plans and ideas or the substance of what one believes in or hopes for. The emotive aspect relates to the strong desire and undiluted willingness and motivation for achieving set goals. The behavioral component or aspect is the expression of the intellectual and or emotive components of faith in practical and physical terms. It has to do with the actions that are needed to bring about desired results. It is the executive dimension of faith. All these components of faith must be present before success can be achieved. The man who brought his son to Jesus for healing probably had only the behavioral and intellectual aspects of faith (but probably not the emotive aspect) when he pleaded; "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Rasi parallels these levels of faith. He observes that belief (intellectual faith) is the mental act or habit of accepting as true, factual or real a statement or a person even though this might be erroneous. (Rasi 2001:2). He calls the emotive faith the will and explains that it is the ability and power to elect a particular belief or course of action in preference to others. He further refers to the behavioral or psychomotor dimension as choice – which is the free exercise of such ability (emphasis mine). So in the episode above, the man having been disappointed by the disciples to heal his son wondered whether he had come to the right place after all. He wondered at what he might have heard (intellectual). So in a state of confusion and despair, he tells Jesus, "but if thou can do anything, have compassion on us and help us" (emphasis mine). This indicates a lack of the will - the ability and power to elect a particular belief or course of action in preference to others.

The fact that all these three dimensions of faith (intellectual, emotive and behavioral) have to be present before faith becomes operative and effective saves us from being presumptuous. We must be circumspect and evaluative

of our strengths and weaknesses. By having faith one does not become a superman, capable of doing everything or anything. For example one does not by having faith increase his height or change his skin color. In fact, faith is enhanced when we are convinced of the need, necessity and sometimes urgency to act in a certain way. This intellectual aspect of faith is enhanced when we are convinced of the rightness of our endeavor. Consequently, faith is boosted up when we act according to God's will – the ultimate measure of rightness.

The Bible tells us that we receive what we ask if it is in accordance with God's will.(1 John 3 : 22; 5 : 14) Jesus Christ was never presumptuous. He did not jump from the pinnacle at the instance of the devil because it was not right – not according to God's will. Therefore faith begins with the intellectual (knowledge) and culminates in the behavioral dimension – the execution of what is believed. Rasi, as quoted above, also indicates that faith comes about as a result of man's response to God's self disclosure and the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our conscience. Faith appears to be a learnt behavior, which comes through knowledge (Romans 10:17).

### **THE DYNAMICS OF FAITH**

Faith is also dynamic and either diminishes or increases (grows). David's faith grew from killing a bear and a lion on the fields to killing Goliath, the dreaded Philistine giant (1 Samuel 17:35 - 37; Luke 17:5; Luke 22:32). According to J. O. Fraser (1982), "Faith is like a muscle which grows stronger and stronger with use, rather than rubber, which can be stretched to almost any desired length." A toddler who successfully takes the first step is motivated to take more steps until he/she walks perfectly well. Ellen G. White (1948: 10) succinctly expressed the dynamism of faith in the following: "We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history". In other words if we remember the successes the Lord has granted us



in the past and even now, it gives us increased faith that He would see us through the future successfully.

Psychologists have confirmed this built-up knowledge principle as the basis of faith and behavior. Every experience we go through makes an impression in our memory (mind) and this affects what we do afterwards. We draw upon this knowledge or memory continually and bring from it confidence (faith) or the lack of it (faithlessness). According to Schwartz, as quoted by Dawson (1972: 28) "this Memory Bank" is where we deposit our thoughts and experiences (both positive and negative) and from which we withdraw according to our need. If we withdraw from the bank thoughts of failure, we shall lack self-confidence (which alludes to faith) and fail; if we withdraw positive thoughts, we go on with faith to succeed.

We are to grow more and more in faith. The disciples pleaded with the Lord, "increase our faith (Luke 17:5). Faith can therefore either increase or decrease depending on whether we get positive inputs or negative inputs into our system.

### **THE ESSENCE OF FAITH (POSITIVE THINKING OR POSITIVE MENTAL SET)**

Since what we put in our memory store is what we draw out and that influences our life, it is very important what we put in our memory store ("Memory Bank"). If we entertain thoughts of failure we are bound to fail. It is therefore important that we deposit only positive thoughts so that we cash success from this bank. The Holy Bible says that as a man thinks (in his heart) so is he (Proverbs 23: 7). Therefore, if we think positively we would be successful but if we think negatively we shall fail. It is therefore important that we think positively.

Peale (1952) underscores the importance of positive thinking in the following words: "You are never defeated by anything, until you accept in your mind, the thought that you are defeated; you are never defeated until you accept the image

of defeat... what your mind can conceive and believe, your heart desire, you can achieve..." (pp.17, 29).

The stance of Peale should not be confused with that of the naturalistic world view nor pantheism which seeks to make man some kind of god. Instead, he links this immense potential of positive thinking with the true source of all power – God. He expresses this link of positive thinking with God in the following words: "Within the mind are the resources needed for successful living...God our creator has laid up within our minds and potentialities, all the potential powers and ability we need for constructive living. Man's duty is to tap and develop these powers" (p. 62).

In a way we could measure success as the extent to which man through faith cooperates with God to bring about God's desired purpose in man's life. White (1967) also stresses the importance of positive thinking as follows:

"The mind should be educated to exercise faith rather than cherish doubt, suspicion, and jealousy. We are too prone to regard obstacles as impossibilities. To have faith in the promises of God, to go forward by faith, pressing on without being governed by circumstances, is a lesson hard to learn. Yet it is a positive necessity that every child of God should learn this lesson...(p. 109). White (1923: 247) continues that "Right thinking lies at the foundation of right action," so if we think positively success naturally follows.

Carbonell refers to the mindset as "self - talk." She observed that what you tell yourself whether positive or negative becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy (Carbonell 2000). It is some kind of "You see what you want to see and hear what you want to hear" situation. If so then, we need to think right and thereby act right. We need to think positively (success) and thereby become successful.

## **FAITH AT WORK**

Faith or positive thinking has and continues to make a difference in people's lives. A lady friend of the author who thought that she was not comfortable with Mathematics determined that she would have nothing to do with it after her first degree. So when the time came for her to have her advanced degree (Masters), she did all in her power to stay clear of Mathematics. However, all the universities she applied to in which she applied for courses that did not involve mathematics did not respond to her application. The only that responded was the one she least wished to attend – an MBA programme which involved her dreaded Maths! Somehow she had to muster faith since she had no other option. By God's grace her faith was rewarded and today she is employed by a big and renowned university where she plays a vital role.

Two patients underwent surgery on the same day and were kept in the same ward. One of them kept on wailing, "I am dying" constantly. The other one apparently a believer in God kept calm. Whoever asked her how she was, was sure to get this answer or reply, "By God's grace." Because of the excessive noise and wailing of the other patient all attention was focused on this patient (even though there was nothing apparently wrong with her) almost to the total neglect of the second patient. However, when one of the doctors went to examine the second and calm patient, to his surprise, he realized that the wound had opened up (and all the stitches were out)! She was therefore rushed to the theatre to correct this problem. Today she is still alive whereas the one who wailed that she was dying really died even though there was nothing wrong with her surgery.

What else can account for this? How come that the one whose surgery was problematic should rather survive but the one whose surgery was faultless should die? What is responsible for this survival if not the faith of the one who survived? Space would not permit the author to account for all that faith has done in people's lives that the author is aware of including the author's own. E.

G. White (1868 – 1871: 149) recounts the effect and results of positive thinking (faith): “We have united in earnest prayer around the sickbed of men, women and have felt that they were given back to us from the dead in answer to our earnest prayers. In these prayers we thought we must be positive, and if we exercised faith, that we must ask for nothing less than life. We dared not say ‘if it will glorify God,’ fearing it would admit a semblance of doubt. We have anxiously watched those who have been given back, as it were, from the dead” (emphasis mine).

The Bible also abounds in acts of faith that brought a difference in people’s lives and most are recorded in Hebrews chapter eleven. However, the case of Elijah would be cited because within this same person we see what positive thinking (faith) did for him and what negative thinking (faithlessness) also did for him. Through positive thinking (faith) Elijah caused fire to come from Heaven to devour sacrifices to the glory of God. However at the threats of Jezebel, Elijah fled (negative thinking or faithlessness) forgetting the God who caused the fire to come from heaven to devour the sacrifice at Mount Carmel was also capable of saving him from the dreaded Jezebel.

### **NEGATING DOUBTS TO BOOST UP FAITH (POSITIVE THINKING)**

If faith or positive thinking is all that important and makes difference in our lives, then it is imperative that we deal drastically and do away with our doubts. Carbonell (2000) has outlined five steps in dealing with our doubts. These are

1. Listen in on your inner talk
2. Pick out the messages that are detrimental to your internal dialogue
3. Practice shutting off negative words
4. Substitute the negative with more positive self-talk
5. Maintain a close relationship with God, allowing Him to dwell in you.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Everybody wants to achieve his/her set goals in life and thereby be successful, but the only means is to think and trust that it is possible to achieve them before we can really achieve them. So it is important that we maintain positive thoughts. It is important that we have faith in what we do (positive thinking) and above all trust God. If we believe in what we do and what we do is also right in the sight of God, then nothing can prevent us from achieving our targets.

With faith, we have all the opportunities in the world to become successful. We must therefore have faith so that we become successful in life.

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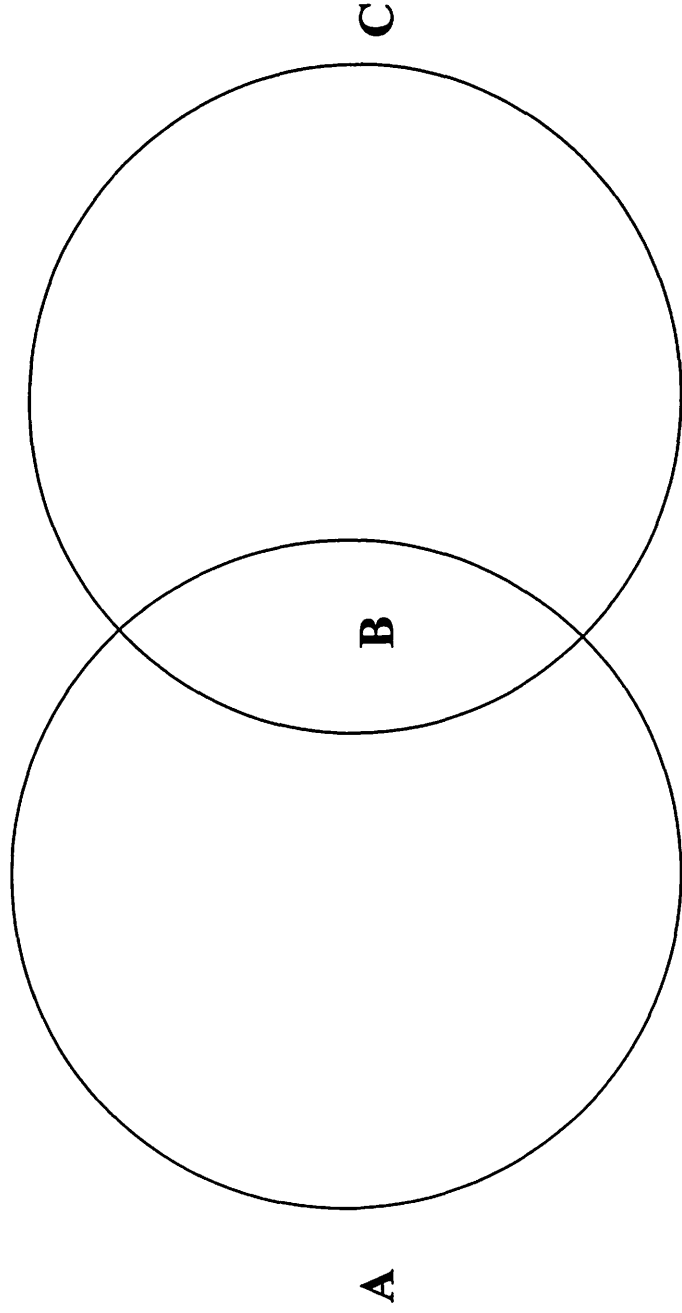
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**APPENDIX I  
POSITIVE THINKING AND FAITH**



**POSITIVE THINKING  
(CENTRED ON MAN-MALE/FEMALE)**

**FAITH  
(CENTRED ON GOD)**



APPENDIX II

POSITIVE-THINKING... FAITH EQUATION

