

## GOD'S SUCCESSFUL WOMAN

Joyce Brothers is a well-known, popular psychologist whose book, *The Successful Woman*, speaks to modern women about how to successfully balance career, marriage, and family. Our purpose here is to examine her views in biblical terms, looking first at how she answers four significant questions: Who is man? What is man's problem? Who brings about change? What is the goal? We will then take a brief look at her concept of marriage and how it compares with the Bible. Finally, we will see how God defines success in His Word. Who is **God's** "successful woman?"

Who is man, or woman in this case? Every psychological system addresses this basic question. So does Scripture, which means that these other theories are in direct competition with God's Word on this matter, as are the other three questions to be considered. What does Joyce Brothers claim about the nature of the human being? Her answers are an interesting mixture of the behaviorism advanced by Skinner and the self-actualization theories of Abraham Maslow, systems which are not easily compatible. (She refers to other psychologies as well, but these two are prominent.) She leans toward Maslow, telling us that we have a "craving" to make the most of our abilities, and that we need a "sense of self," a good feeling about oneself apart from career or marriage or other outside forces. She claims that we perpetually "reach for the stars," that we never quite "have it all." (The Bible might call this greed, depending on the motives behind the reaching.) The need to nurture and care for one's children is considered by Brothers to be a part of the nature of women. She also sees guilt (a psychologized guilt *feeling*, as opposed to guilt defined by objective standards) as a major component in female stress. Because we are naturally self-centered from birth (this hits a biblical truth), children are particularly able to induce guilt in their mothers. The behaviorist theory becomes apparent when she offers advice to women in manipulating their husbands to contribute to household chores. She claims that manipulation in general may or may not be a good thing, depending on the objective. She recommends such techniques as positive reinforcement (flattery), operant conditioning, and intermittent reinforcement, all rooted in the concept that man is an intelligent animal who can be trained. A rat experiment is quoted to support her belief that we all need some degree of control in life--something that is slightly difficult to reconcile with the suggestion that husbands be subtly manipulated without their knowledge or control.

**What is man's problem?** Brothers consistently recommends the use of a "Goal Analysis" to set oneself free of the expectations and opinions of others. These "others" undoubtedly include God, considering the lack of any consistent moral values in the examples she cites of questions to ask oneself. Here, as in the rest of the book, Brothers reveals her focus on *self* ahead of all else.

**Who brings about change?** Her predictable answer at this point is *self*. The self-actualizers, she claims, know what they want, feel responsible for themselves, maintain high self-esteem, are guided by *their own* standards, and are here-and-now oriented. No mention is made of the power of God to bring about change or set standards, nor of seeking guidance from others that could be valuable.

**What is the goal?** This question is the primary focus of the book. Brothers sees goals as being individually defined and determined. She believes that women want everything a man has, including success, status, power, prestige, love, marriage, happiness, and fulfillment. She claims that stress is relieved by setting one's own priorities. One woman quoted in her book expressed her priorities as *self first*, then husband, children, religion, and business. There is no set pattern to the priorities, except that Brothers distinctly says you must:

Put yourself first.

Do what makes you happy.

Do what you want to do (self-sacrifice leads to self-pity).

Happiness is defined as the freedom to pursue your own goals. Achievement, motivation, and self-image are linked together in the theory that success is dependent on your ability to see yourself in the future...as rich, successful, loved, or whatever.

How does God answer these four questions in His Word, and how do His answers compare with the ones proposed by Joyce Brothers? First, who is man? He is not an intelligent animal subject to operant conditioning or other training, but a spiritual being who is by nature sinful and rebellious. He is a slave to sin until he receives Jesus Christ as Lord and becomes a slave to righteousness. "Self-actualization" is not a biblical concept. The old self must be reckoned dead as Christ comes to live in the regenerate man, who is a new creation in Him. Spiritual gifts and talents are determined by God and to be used to honor Him and serve others for their good. Man does not need some degree of

control, but to totally trust in and rely on the Lord, who is the only one in total control. He does not need a good "sense of self," but the indwelling Holy Spirit and an identity founded in Christ. What is man's problem? It is not freedom from the opinions and expectations of others. There is no real freedom apart from Christ. Man's problem is his sin and rebellion against God, his failure to meet God's expectations. Who brings about change? Apart from the Lord, the self has no power to do anything, but as Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). The Christian recognizes his accountability before God and his God-given responsibilities, accomplished by the enabling power of God working in him: "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose" (Philippians 2:12). He humbles himself before a holy God, esteeming others ahead of self (Philippians 2:3). He is guided not by his own invented standards, but by the eternal, unchanging laws of God. His citizenship is in heaven, not in the here-and-now world:

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body." (Philippians 3:20, 21)

Changes are brought about in this life by the Holy Spirit, using God's Word and loving guidance from other believers. What is the goal? Unlike all worldly systems of psychology, the Christian's goal is to live a life pleasing to God and to be conformed to the image of His Son. His goal is not selfish ambition, but to serve and love the Lord, caring for His sheep. His focus is eternal, and he seeks to lead others into the kingdom of God. The ideas promoted in this book are opposed to biblical truth, as might be expected from an author who offers advice without a claim to Christian faith or a foundation in God's Word. The three statements quoted earlier and central to this book must be reversed and restated, replacing self with **God**:

**Put God first.**

"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." (Proverbs 16:3)

**Live to please God. Do what makes Him happy.**

"So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what

is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:9, 10)

**Do what God wants you to do.**

"Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14)

This book also contains a great deal of advice regarding marriage. The theme of "self first" is carried through in this area as it is in discussions of career. Brothers claims that men want to be dominant, and that those with working wives feel inadequate, with their power and privilege eroded. She claims that there are power struggles in marriage that sometimes cannot be resolved. One of these revolves around money, which she says is power. Marriage, she says, is knowing you are the most important person in someone else's life, and this is the source of happiness and security. Self is still first, however. She speaks of the "bookkeeping of marriage" and insists that when you make a decision in favor of your spouse, he "owes you one." (Nothing could be further from the biblical truth. See 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.) In discussing moves due to a husband's transfers, she continues her insistence on selfish ambition, suggesting that the wife remain behind, at least temporarily, if the move would cause resentment or martyrdom or abort her own upward career climb. Brothers claims that marriage isn't as appealing as it once was to women. They may receive more "warm fuzzies" from their work, which is described as a "seductive mistress," a "temptation," and even one's "salvation." Love is mentioned, and a couple of different definitions are offered. One is "a state of existence, a tacit set of contracts, a moral arrangement, a changed sensibility, an altered identity. It is a process, not an event." Brothers claims that these are some of the "wisest words" ever spoken about love and marriage, as she quotes psychiatrist Dr. Willard Gaylin. These "wise words" bear more resemblance to a business partnership than the truth set forth in 1 Corinthians 13 and other Scriptures. She does later say that "true love is when you are as concerned about the other person as you are about yourself." This is much, much closer to the Word of God, but without Him, it cannot last long but will quickly deteriorate into the old concern for self. None of this has much to do with the biblical view of marriage, where each partner is committed to the Lord first, and spouse is ahead of self. A full discussion of marriage is beyond the scope of this paper, but here is just a brief nudge in God's direction:

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which He is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church--for we are members of His body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." (Ephesians 5:22-32)

## **God's View of the Successful Woman**

The Bible's view of success in life is vastly different than the opinions set forth by man. Following are six basic principles with supporting Scripture references.

**1. Put God first in all of your efforts.** Jesus Christ is the foundation for our work as Christians:

"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light.

It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." (1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

The successful Christian must be willing to deny himself and take up his cross along with Christ.

"Then He said to them all: 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self (soul)?" (Luke 9:23-25)

Our faith in the Lord is a key to real success:

"...Jehoshaphat stood and said, 'Listen to me, Judah and people of Jerusalem! Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in His prophets and you will be successful.'" (2 Chronicles 20:20)

Putting God first includes a willingness to be meek, in contrast to the self-assertiveness valued by the world, and even to endure persecution for the sake of furthering the gospel of Christ:

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3, 10)

**2. Keep God's commandments.** Godly success is tied to observing God's commandments. That doesn't mean that we are without sin, but that the heart desires righteousness:

"...you will have success if you are careful to observe the decrees and laws that the Lord gave Moses for Israel. Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged." (1 Chronicles 22:13)

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matthew 5:6)

**3. Live to please God rather than self.** Success, from God's perspective, is achieved when our focus is on pleasing Him rather than pursuing selfish ambitions:

"Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10)

"And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again." (2 Corinthians 5:15)

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism."  
(Colossians 3:23-25)

One of the goals in living a life pleasing to God is to be conformed to the image of His Son:

"For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified." (Romans 8:29)

**4. Fulfill the Great Commission.** As we live to please God, nothing could be more important than obeying the command of Jesus Christ to spread the gospel and bring others into His eternal kingdom:

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'  
(Matthew 28:18-20)

**5. Love one another.** Worldly success can never match the call of Christ to extend His love to others:

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My Name. This is my command: Love each other."

**6. Look to the treasures of heaven, not the treasures of earth.** God doesn't judge success in the monetary terms of the world. We may be financially successful, or we may just barely have the means to survive, but neither poverty nor riches is the measure of a successful Christian life.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.'" (1 Corinthians 9:24, 25)

"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?" (Ecclesiastes 5:10, 11)

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets." (Luke 6:24-26)

"And He told them this parable: 'The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'" Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.'" (Luke 12:16-21)

The counsel of Jesus to the rich young ruler who inquired about what he must do to inherit eternal life: "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." (Luke 18:22)



God's view of success is foolishness in the eyes of the world, whose theories, opinions, and success bring nothing of eternal value. It is to Him, and the Word He has given to us, that we must look in order to become **God's** successful man or woman.

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