

Introduction

Some years ago, a Christian came to my office and said: **"I want to be able to correctly interpret and apply the Bible. How do I do that?"** So I told him. I gave him a 150-page study I wrote that teaches how to correctly interpret and apply the Bible. I told him to master its contents and then read at least three books from the Old Testament and three from the New, using a good commentary with each, which I offered to lend him when he got to that. **"But that will take several years,"** he objected. **"Yes, it will,"** I replied. Whereupon he gave me back the study and said he'd never get around to doing it.

That conversation illustrates a fundamental law of human life. It's the law of process and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Salvation as Process

Let's start with what is the ultimate achievement in human history – salvation. God prophesied it in Genesis 3:15 and began it in 9:18-27.

This narrative took place several years after Noah, his wife, his three sons, and his three daughters-in-law came out of the ark after the flood. Verse 18 identifies his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and his grandson by Ham, Canaan. Verse 19 adds the detail that all human beings descended from them. Generally, the Semitic peoples (Jews and Arabs) descended from Shem. The Canaanite peoples that inhabited the Promised Land descended from Ham's son, Canaan. And the European peoples descended from Japheth. Since my ancestry is European, I'm a descendent of Japheth and so are most of you.

Verses 20-24 record a sad episode in Noah's life, one in which his son Ham disrespected him. He then uttered the oracle of verses 25-27 as a result. In that oracle, God set down the generalized futures of the nations that came from the three sons. First, in verse 25, it stated that the nations that came from Ham's son Canaan would be subservient to the nations that came from Shem and Japheth. That was fulfilled in the

Israelites (from the line of Shem) and the Romans (from the line of Japheth) conquering the Canaanite nations in the Promised Land. Second, in verse 26, the oracle restated that the line of Shem, the Israelites, would conquer the line of Canaan, the Canaanites. And third, in verse 27, it restated that the line of Japheth, the Romans, would also conquer the Canaanites.

Notice two critical details. First, in verse 26, "**the LORD**" (God's personal name, Yahweh) would be the God of Shem's descendants. That was fulfilled in God choosing Abraham and his descendants, the Israelites, to be His people in Genesis 12:1-3. The second detail is in verse 27. Japheth's descendants, the Europeans, would dwell in the tents of Shem's descendants, the Israelites. That was fulfilled in God saving the "Gentiles" (see Ephesians 3:6) through the finished work of Jesus and His disciples carrying out the Great Commission.

You can see that this oracle in verses 25-27 was the first step God took in His plan of salvation. In it, He chose the line of Shem to bear the Messiah, Jesus, and established His purpose - to redeem all peoples. He then acted to carry out that purpose over the next 6,000 years, finally culminating in the finished work of Jesus.

That teaches us something about salvation. Most Christians view it as an event - the substitutionary death of Jesus. But it wasn't just that. It was a process as well that began in verses 25-27 and that unfolded over the course of the next 6,000 years. The Old Testament records that process unfolding and makes clear that without it, the event would not have occurred.

The Law of Process

God achieving salvation as I just explained it illustrates what is called "**the Law of Process.**" That law, simply stated, is this. What we experience or do in a moment of time is usually the result of what we experienced and did over many moments of time. Most events are climaxes of processes that led up to them. That's true of a good or

bad speech, a promotion at work, a bankruptcy, a divorce, an "A" or an "F" grade, a touchdown pass, trust in God, and more.

What I'm really talking about here are failure and success. There are particular objectives or goals that all of us want to achieve. Our objective may be to acquire a possession, have an experience, solve a problem, or do something good. Whatever it is, failure is not achieving it. Success is achieving it.

Now, many people think that failure and success are events. They think they occur in a moment of time and what we did or didn't do in it. But they rarely do. They almost always occur over many moments of time instead and what we did or didn't do in them. Listen to what John Maxwell writes in his book *Failing Forward*: **"Success is not a destination – not a place where you arrive one day. Instead, it's a journey you take. And whether you succeed comes from what you do day to day. Success is a process."** He's right. Success is a process, and so is failure. They almost always occur over many moments of time and what we did or didn't do in them.

When I went from grade school to junior high, 7th grade, years ago, I was in a class of students who were taking 9th grade English, Math, Science, and Language. I'll never forget the final English exam at the end of the first semester. That's because I got an "F" on it. But here's what I want you to see. The "F" didn't show that I failed a one-time event, the exam. It did show that I failed in the process leading up to that event. Cocky and acting as if I were still in grade school, I hastily read assignments, didn't listen and take good notes in class, and casually studied for the exam. The next semester though I got an "A" on the final exam. Similarly, that "A" didn't show that I succeeded at a one-time event, the exam. It did show that I succeeded in the process leading up to that event. I carefully read assignments, listened and took good notes in class, and diligently studied for the exam.

The "F" grade and "A" grade I got teach us what failure and success almost always are - processes not events.

Don't Count on Events

Which makes clear what we shouldn't do - count on event.

Many people do. I once talked with a man I met in a convenience store. He had just purchased lottery tickets and told me why. He had over \$20,000 in credit card debt and was hoping for a big win to pay it off. He was relying on an event, winning the lottery, to solve the problem he had. So many people do what that man did. They count on event to achieve the objectives they have.

There's a reason they do. It's because they want to achieve them quickly and easily. Event is obviously much quicker and easier than process is. So, they ignore process and count on event. They look around for quick fixes or easy ways out for what they want or need.

Credit cards illustrate what I mean. Credit cards originated in the United States in the 1920's, with the first bank credit card appearing in 1946. They're a huge success of course because they enable us to rely on event. They replace the long and hard process of saving with what appears to be a quick fix or easy way out for acquiring what we want.

But the law of process shows us. Ignoring process and counting on event is a formula for failure. People who do so aren't going to achieve very many of the objectives they have.

Sanctification, the Holy Spirit transforming us into the likeness of Jesus, is an example of what I mean. My church taught me when I was growing up that sanctification is an event. It's a second and definite work of grace after the first work of grace, salvation. In that work of grace, the Holy Spirit comes upon us in a moment of time, eradicates our old sinful nature, and creates the nature of Jesus in its place. Sanctification is an event and so that's how I went about it. I'd go to the altar at the end of a church service and pray for this one-time second work of grace. But I'd still be same as I was before and so I'd go to the altar again. And on it went. If the *Guinness Book of World Records* had a record for "**Most times to the altar before the age of 18,**" I'd probably hold it. I was trying to achieve something that's a process,

sanctification, by counting on event and failed.

But it isn't just sanctification is it. Most of the objectives in life that we desire to achieve are processes. And if we count on events, we're going to fail and not achieve them.

Commit to Process

So, don't count on event. Commit to process instead. Remember that achievement is almost always the climax of a process that leads up to it. So, we commit ourselves to that process. We commit to process by doing two things.

First, we figure out what the process is that leads to the objective we want to achieve. We learn the means for achieving it. The means for achieving objectives are usually well known. It usually takes only a little thought and effort to figure out what they are. So we put forth the thought and effort. On occasion, the means are not well known and require research and study to figure out. So, we research and study. However we do it, we do it. We figure out what the process is that leads to the objective we want to achieve.

Once we figure that out, we then actually pursue the process. That is the second step. We thoughtfully and persistently carry out the means that are known to be effective in achieving the objective we have. Doing that requires intention. Intention is an act of our will that we complete by deciding. So, we make and carry out the decision to pursue the process that leads to the objective we want to achieve.

So that's how we commit to process. We figure out what the process is that leads to the objective we want to achieve. We then thoughtfully and persistently pursue that process.

We need to do both of those things with all the objectives in our lives especially the defining ones. I've already mentioned two of those: being able to correctly interpret and apply the Bible and sanctification (becoming like Jesus). Here's a third - loving God with our whole being.

I'd say two things about loving God with our whole being. First, it's

the ultimate achievement in human life. Second, it's process not event.

Many preachers, teachers, and Christians don't grasp that. They talk and act as if it's an event. They tell people to love God but don't explain how, supposing that they can, on the spot, in that very moment, do just that. But they don't do just that because they can't. And not knowing they can't, they feel guilty they don't.

If you and I tell someone to love God, we should also tell him or her that doing so is a process and then explain what that process is. In a nutshell it's this: understand, engage, know, and love. We commit ourselves to understanding God. Because we understand Him, we're able to engage Him. Because we engage Him, we come to know Him. And because we know Him, we come to love Him.

Some people try to bypass the process by relying on event. They try to will themselves to love Him on the spot. Or they pray that the Holy Spirit will zap them and make them spontaneously love Him.

But it doesn't work because loving God with our whole being is process not event. So, we commit ourselves to the process. We make and carry out the decision to understand and engage God. Knowing and loving Him then occur as a natural consequence of we doing so. I've written a study titled *The First Aim* that explains this process in detail and how we carry it out.

Conclusion

We see then that the most defining achievements in our lives are processes not events. Which leads me to this question in closing. What is the achievement that is most on your mind right now? Maybe it's some possession you want to acquire, some experience you want to have, some problem you want to solve, or some good you want to accomplish. Whatever it is, remember the law of process. Achievements are almost always climaxes of processes that led up to them. So, commit yourself to process not event. You'll succeed far more than you'll fail if you do.