

Four Keys to Successful Living (Part 2)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, my friend. I am so glad that you're here. We began a message last time. Don't worry if you didn't catch part one. This is going to be complete in and of itself. We're talking about *Four Keys to Successful Living*. I think everyone wants to be successful. You want to be blessed and be able to be a blessing to someone else. What I'm going to share today is so practical you're just going to get it. Grab a cup of tea. Grab your Bible. Let's sit down and get into the Word together.

I've said it many times, and it is true. If I could sit down with you in your living room or in your kitchen, and we put on a kettle, make a pot of tea. And we just sat down at that table; maybe there were some things that you'd want to pray about. I'd love to grab your hands and go to God together in prayer for those things, or just sit down and talk about God's Word or talk about beautiful Jesus. I am so grateful for the Lord's grace in my life and what He has done for me, and what He continues to do for me. I am so grateful for the blessed Holy Spirit, who strengthens us daily, and comforts us, and guides us.

If we could just sit down and talk about those things together, I'd love it. Obviously, it's not possible for me to do that with everyone, so this is sort of the next best thing. If we can, I want to just spend a little while talking about the Word of God. We're speaking about *Four Keys to Successful Living*. If you were with us last time, we talked about discovering our purpose. That God has individually wired us up, and the work of our life should flow out of that individual wiring. I'm not going to go over all that again. We're going to move to the second key to successful living.

First one, find your purpose. The second one is to have passion, to live with passion. For whatever you do, determine not to just live or just to exist, but you want to really live. You don't want to just exist and get through one day. Listen, I realize there are people watching me right now, and that describes you. For you just to make it through another day is monumental, and I just want to tell you God sees you, and He wants to help you. I know some of you that are watching right now, you have titanic struggles that are going on in your life. You battle a deep, dark depression.

Listen, God loves you, and He wants to help you. He wants your mind to be free from that depression, and He doesn't want you to just basically be existing. He does want you to live. I want to talk to you about passion. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 9:10 NKJV,

¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with (all) your might.

Colossians 3:23 NIV says,

²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.

Whether you're a preacher, a writer, a teacher, a singer, or an organizer, do it with passion. I had a friend. He's in heaven now. When we first got to know one another, he was a member

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of the church. Started coming to the church with this family, and he asked me if I wanted to go bow hunting. Hunting with bows and arrows with him. I said, "Sure." We went out in this wilderness area, and we've got these bows and arrows, and I can tell he's nervous, not of what we're hunting or the fact that I was dangerous with a bow and arrow. He was nervous because I was his pastor. I don't know why some people, they get that way. They get around their pastors like they're tongue-tied.

I could tell he was nervous. He was wanting to not say the wrong thing or something, and I just thought, "Man,"—I'm thinking to myself, "We got to get through this." We're standing down at the bottom of this hill filled with brush, and at the top, there's an old rusty barbed wire fence. Which, if you don't know, barbed wire, it's got these sharp points on it. If your clothes get caught, they'll get ripped on it, and it can cut your flesh pretty good. We're at the bottom of this hill, and I could see this barbed wire hill at the top. There's this huge sticker bush with thorns in it next to us.

He's standing there, and I said, "I'll tell you what." He said, "What?" I said, "I'll race you to the top of that hill." He said, "What?" I said, "I'll race you to the top of the hill." He said, "Okay." We set our bows down, and I shoved him into the sticker bush. Then I started laughing at him. I'm running up the hill. I'll never forget the look on his face. He gets this huge smile, pulls himself out of the sticker bush, and he's racing up the hill. He catches me right near the top. We're up at the top, neck, and neck, and he dives through the barbed wire fence just to win.

I remember thinking, "Okay. I just learned something about this guy." Now, I pushed him in the sticker bushes, yes, to be naughty. But I'll tell you what? From that point, on there was no nervousness. It was just him out with one of his buddies. We were dear friends until the day that he went to heaven many years later. I learned something about him that day. He was a passionate man. He had a very successful business, and he was very passionate about his business. The same way he was about running up the hill to win that race against his pastor. Passionate. I thought about everything that he did; he was passionate about it. He was all in.

I have another friend that, in his country, he would hold meetings for ministers. I went to some of them as well. He actually held them in other countries as well. In his country, he did this one meeting, and as I recall, he called it "500 plus." It was just for pastors with 500 people in their church or more. He wasn't doing it for the purpose of being exclusive or saying, "Well, we're better than a person that's pastoring a smaller church." It was just a one-off thing that he did to deal with some of the unique challenges that a pastor of a larger church would have than, say, someone with a smaller church wouldn't have. The truth is there are unique challenges.

The Bible says in the book of Proverbs that, "Where there's no oxen, the stall is clean, but much increase comes by the strength of the ox." Meaning if you don't have any oxen in the stall, you don't have to shovel out any of the stuff that they leave in there. You don't have to deal with the you-know-what I'm talking about. If you want the increase that the ox brings, you have to deal with a lot of stuff. If you have a lot of oxen, you've got to shovel a lot of, yes, you-know-what. The more you grow, the more you-know-what you have to deal with. The larger your ministry is, the larger your business is, the more you-know-what you have to deal with.

The purpose of the meeting was just to deal with the you-know-what factor of pastoring a larger church. Well, to condense the story down, my friend had made the acquaintance of the leading atheist in their country. I say "The leading atheist" in that he was the most well-known. If the news media wanted a quote from an atheist or wanted the view of an atheist on a particular subject, this is the guy that they would talk to. He was known across the country as a very articulate, very intelligent man but an atheist.

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My friend, who'd become acquainted with this guy and actually struck up a friendship with him, said, "You know what? We have this pastors' conference, and the pastors of all the largest churches in the nation are going to come, and I want you to be the guest speaker." The atheist said, "What?" He said, "Yes, I want you to talk to them." He says, "Why would you want me to speak to the pastors?" He said, "I would want you to talk about this subject. Why you wouldn't come to church and why you think most people in our nation don't come to church? Why do people stay away from church?" The guy said, "Okay. I'll do it."

I'll never forget it. As my friend told me the story, there they are. This guy gets up and takes the microphone. It's a room full of pastors from the most influential churches in the nation. His opening line was this, "I feel like a lion in a den of Daniels." Everybody just cracked up. They started laughing, and it eased the tension in the room. Then he said, "I've been asked to speak to you about why I won't come to church, and why most people in our nation won't come." He says, "I'll tell you that the main reason that people don't come to church is we see no passion in the pulpit."

He had their attention. He went on. He said, "If the message you preach is true. If Jesus really is the Son of God, and if he's really the way, the truth, and the life, and if there truly is a God and there's no other way into a relationship with Him except through Jesus Christ. And if you die without embracing Jesus Christ and you go to a place called hell, and hell is really like the Bible describes it," he said, "it must be the highest blasphemy before God for you not to be absolutely passionate about your message."

He said, "I see no passion in the pulpit." Man, he had their attention. It is so true. Nobody is going to come listen to some sleepy preacher that doesn't seem like he even believes in what he's talking about himself. People are attracted to passion. They want to see someone that's burning with a fiery zeal for what they do. It's true about church, but it's true about everything else. People are attracted to passion.

Life itself is a gift that should be enjoyed. It should be celebrated. Don't sleepwalk through life. Give generously. Sing your lungs out. Dance like nobody is watching you. Live with passion. You know, in John—Excuse me. Let me read the verse. Philippians 4:2—No, wrong verse. It's Jesus. Yes, it is John's Gospel. Sorry about that. John 2:13-17 NKJV. It talks about Jesus and his passion, and it says this,

¹³ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

¹⁴ And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. ¹⁵ When He had made a whip of cords—

Now, this is not the Jesus you hear about too often.

¹⁵ When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables.

¹⁶ And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" ¹⁷ Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal (or passion) for Your house has eaten Me up."

"Passion for your house has eaten Me up." When was the last time you were eaten up with passion about something? When was the last time you were eaten up with zeal about something? A friend of mine was telling me that he and his family—I think they were in Colorado

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on a vacation skiing. He and his wife skied for a few hours and then went to the lodge. They're sitting outside enjoying a cup of coffee and this beautiful scenery. They can see the slopes, and they notice there's a couple of maniacs coming down through the trees.

They had gotten off the slopes, and they were going at breakneck speed down through the trees. Just dangerous. He looks at his wife, says, "Look at those idiots." Says, "One of those guys is going to break his neck." They're watching them. She says, "Yes, that's crazy." As they get closer and closer, he says, "Oh my gosh. Those are our sons." He immediately went and got them both helmets after that. When he told me the story—Now, I didn't say it to him, but I thought, "Well, of course, they act just like you do." He was the same way. He was just passionate about everything that he did.

If there was a flight of stairs and we were together, he'd want to race me up the stairs. If we were doing whatever, he was passionate. He was a passionate preacher. Passionate about life, and his boys were the same way. Again, people are attracted to passion. It is contagious. 2 Corinthians 9:2 NKJV says this. It says,

² For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal (your passion) has stirred up the majority.

There's something very stirring about passion. It affects other people. Passion and zeal get off on other people. One day, I was flipping through the channels on a television, not really interested in anything. I came on this channel, and this guy is talking about bird dinosaurs. I couldn't have been less interested, but something about the guy caught my attention. He was so passionate about these bird dinosaurs and what they looked like, and how fast they could run. What their claws looked like, and how they would attack their prey. He was so passionate I thought, "Okay, I'm in." I listened all the way in as this guy talked about bird dinosaurs, but it was his passion that hooked me.

In one of D.L. Moody's meetings, it said that a man was there, and he asked one of the other congregants. He said, "You come often to hear him?" He says, "Oh, yes." He says, "You come because you believe the things that he preaches?" This was the response he got. He says, "No. I don't come because I believe the things he preaches. I come because he believes the things he preaches." There was passion there. There was zeal there. God does want us to live our life with passion. Now we come to the next thing, the next key to a successful life, and that's peace. We need to pursue peace. The Bible says in Psalm 34:14 NKJV,

¹⁴ Seek peace and pursue it.

Seeking peace is a great pursuit. It's a good thing to do. There is peace with God, and there is the peace of God. Those are two different things. Peace with God that comes through salvation. I remember reading about Henry David Thoreau, the great American naturalist and brilliant writer. On his deathbed, a friend of his said, "Henry, have you made your peace with God?" Thoreau answered this. He said, "I never knew that God and I were at odds." Now, that's a very clever answer, but unfortunately, it's an inaccurate one. It's an uninformed answer. The Bible says in Colossians 1 that, "Christ made peace through the blood of His cross." My friend, the truth is that the whole world was at enmity. We were enemies with God.

The whole world is guilty of sin. The Bible says, "When we were God's enemies, Christ died for us, and He brought peace through the blood of His cross." The only way you can have peace with God is to put your trust in His Son, Jesus Christ, who died for you. Who bore your sin and

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the penalty for your sin on Calvary's tree. Once you have peace with God, you can have the peace of God. Philippians 4:6-7 NKJV says this,

⁶ Be anxious (be worried) for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Don't worry about anything but pray about everything. If you do, it says, the peace of God will garrison, will guard, will set a perimeter around your heart and mind, and will guard you from those anxious thoughts. Keep your cares cast upon Him. Jesus, in His teaching, said, "Do not take an anxious thought for tomorrow. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." That's so true. To worry about tomorrow is to pull tomorrow's clouds over today's sunshine.

It's almost as if God has put a 24-hour fuse in our hearts. Let me explain that. In our old home, we had an air conditioning unit. At the house we live in now, we don't have air conditioning. Some days I wish we did. At our old house, we had an air conditioning unit, and it was a blessing. There was something wrong because there would be some surge of power, something would happen, and we would blow a fuse. I had electricians come out, look at the thing, and none of them could figure it out. It always worked perfectly when they were there, but literally every week, we would blow a fuse, and no one could figure it out.

I finally just bought a whole bunch of fuses, and I kept a drawer in the kitchen full of these fuses. "Oh, we've blown a fuse again," I'd go replace the fuse, and we'd be good again for X amount of days, and then it would blow a fuse again. I'd get another guy out to look at it, and he says, "I don't know what to tell you. Let's try this, let's try that." We never did get that sorted out.

It's as if God has put a 24-hour fuse in our hearts. When we worry about tomorrow, today, we're putting a 48-hour load on a 24-hour fuse, and something's going to blow. It's going to erupt with problems in our marriage. It's going to erupt with broken health. It's going to erupt with problems in the family. The thing is, some people they're not just worried about tomorrow, today. Some people's worries go into next week. Some people worry about next month. Some people's worries go years ahead.

Whether it's worry about your health, about your family, about the things that are going on in the world, about your job security, or whatever it is, the Scripture says, "Be anxious for nothing. Don't worry about anything. But in everything, through prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known. And the peace of God that passes all understanding"—in other words, you just can't even get your mind around it—"It'll guard your mind. It'll guard your heart."

My friend, it's a wonderful thing to live life full of peace. That doesn't mean you don't have problems. I have problems. I have challenges, just like everyone else. I am not exempt from those things. But you know what? I do have the promise of peace in those things, and it is a wonderful way to live. Basically, I sleep great every night. It doesn't matter what's going on because I talk to God about the things that trouble me.

I remember reading a story once about this couple that whenever they would be tempted to worry about something, they had a challenge. They would sit down at the kitchen table, and they would write out the problem on paper. Then they would both lay their hands on it and earnestly pray and ask God to guide them and ask God to intervene and take care of that problem. When they got done praying about it, they would fold the paper in half. They had

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a paper bag taped high on the top of the kitchen door, and it had “God” written on it in bold black letters “God.”

They would stand on a chair once they’d committed that problem to God. One would stand on the chair, and they would drop that paper in the bag. Just a symbolic way to say, “We’ve given this to God, and it’s in His hands now.” Now, one of the unique things they did was make an agreement. They shook hands, husband and wife, says, “All right. If you or if I at any point ever start to worry about that thing that we’ve committed to God, the person that’s worrying has to get on the chair, fish that paper out of the bag, and take it back. Because if we’re worrying about it, God no longer has it. We have it. I thought, “Brilliant. What a great idea.”

I think the truth is, if we admitted it, a lot of us would say, “I’d probably spend a lot of time on that bag fishing papers out of it.” Now, my friend, when you give something to God, leave it with Him. Now, if He directs you to do something, then do it. If you will pray, keep your cares cast on Him. My friend, God’s peace, we’ll keep you. All right. The final thing I want to talk about in these last few minutes is to take time to play. Yes, you heard me right. Take time to play. 1 Timothy 6:17 NKJV says,

¹⁷ God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

You ought to take time to enjoy those things. I remember listening to a missionary once from Borneo. He had come to the Bible College I was in, and I thought, “Man, this is awesome.” This guy, he’s given his life. He’s living in what, in my mind, was the uttermost parts of the earth.

I went and got a seat in the front row, and I thought, “All right. I want to be convicted. Make me feel like I’m not really out there like I should be for the Lord. If there’s any part of me that’s not consecrated and committed, man, I believe God’s going to use you to stir me up. I want to go to the nations of the world. Oh God, my life is yours.” I’m just expecting this guy to sort of lash us. Like, “You need to get out there. Jesus said, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.’” So I’m, with bated breath, sitting on the front row.

And he gets up and says, “I’ve been a missionary for many years in Borneo.” He says, “And I found out you’ll never make it as a missionary; you’ll never make it in the ministry if you don’t have a hobby.” He said, “My hobby is shell collecting. I go beachcombing, and I collect shells.”

I remember I was so disappointed. I thought, “Can we get a real missionary? You got to be kidding me. Get a hobby? I thought you were going to lash me, and now you’re telling me I’ve got to get a hobby.” It was important. Now, at the time, I sort of just tucked it away and thought, “Well, that was pretty worthless.” Then years later—and some of you, you may know this name, and I don’t share it to—Well, actually, I’ll share the story without telling the name. That’ll make it even better.

A very famous preacher who I had the privilege of knowing, and we would golf together occasionally. This man had gone through major challenges in his life and had brought the gospel to the world. I asked him one day. I said, “What’s the most important advice you can give me as a young minister?” I’m thinking, “All right. This guy, he’s 35 years my senior and has been through more experiences than I’ve been through in a lifetime. Probably in one little finger, he had more experience stored up.”

We’re actually on the golf course enjoying a game of golf. I’m listening to this man that is an absolute legend, impacted the world. In fact, you probably couldn’t go anywhere in the world

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that folks have not heard his name. This is what he told me. I'm asking for the best advice he can give me as a young minister. He said, "Bayless, you got a pretty good golf swing." He said, "I'd suggest joining a country club." He said, "You need to play more golf." Then he said, "Golf is the only thing that kept me alive." Again, I was so disappointed. I thought, "What? That's not what I wanted to hear," but again, I tucked it away.

Two weeks later, I'm doing a conference for a group called "The Apostolics." It's a Pentecostal movement in Australia, and I'm the guest speaker for this conference. They found out I like to golf, so they put me out with one of the old-timers in the movement. Again, a bit of a legend there in Australia. I forget. We're walking together. We're on the ninth fairway, and he's telling me a story. He says, "Bayless, I was one of the pioneers in the movement back in the early days, and we were pretty legalistic. They told us no mixed bathing, no boys and girls in the pool at the same time. Boys were not allowed to wear shorts. Girls, they didn't cut their hair, and we were told it was sinful to play a sport."

He said, "I'm like one of the leading preachers, and my health is breaking down. I go to the doctor, and the doctor does all these examinations, these batteries of tests, and says, 'Well, the truth is there's nothing exactly wrong with you, but these are all symptoms of stress.' He said, 'What do you do to relax?'" He said, "Doctor, I read my Bible. He said, 'Well, good, but what's your outlet?'" He says, "I read my Bible. He said, 'Well, good. You keep reading your Bible, but I'm telling you the stress of the ministry; you're carrying it with you. You're going to go to an early grave if you don't have some sort of an outlet. Some sort of a hobby.'"

He said, "Bayless, I went against denominational guidelines, went against the precedent, and I took up the game of golf." He said, "Man, it was scandalous that I was out on the golf course. One of the premier preachers of the movement." Then he stopped, and he turned, and he looked me in the eye, and he said, "Bayless, golf is the only thing that's kept me alive." I remember thinking I heard the same thing recently just a few weeks ago from this other legendary preacher who said, "Golf is the only thing that kept me alive."

Then I went back in my mind, and I thought about the Borneo missionary, and I realized God was trying to tell me something. I am motivated, but I'm not driven. I do like to play golf, and I've got another hobby. I go jump in the ocean with a spear gun, and I put dinner on the table. I call it my saltwater therapy. It's not just a luxury for me. It is a necessity for me.

God has made us to enjoy these things. I have known many a preacher, they were princes in the pulpit, but they were socially dysfunctional because they didn't have a life outside of the pulpit. Sometimes you need to take time just to recuperate. The Bible says in Mark 6:31 NKJV Jesus said to His disciples,

³¹ "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

Now, my friend, if that describes your life, you need to go to a deserted place. You need to turn off your mobile device, and you need to just rest. You need to start hiking or riding a bike or taking walks, or doing whatever fills your emotional tank. If you're going to live a successful life, number one, discover your purpose. Number two, have passion. Number three, pursue peace, and number four, take time to play. I hope this has helped you. I pray that God would richly bless you. We'll see you again.

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