

When Things Go Well | Bob O'Dell

SPEAKER	Bob O'Dell
DATE	Sunday, April 28, 2024
PASSAGES	Acts 2; Deuteronomy 32; Luke 10; Ecclesiastes 7; Philippians 2; Hebrews 12
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:06:16 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Everybody has something in their life that is going well, and that season is the harder test, not the easier one. Bob argued that success usually arrives slowly because God is being merciful, that it belongs to more generations than our own, and that the only safe way to hold it is to look at it, look away from it, and go back down to serve.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Two myths cancel each other out: nobody has a life where everything goes well, and nobody has a life where nothing does. Job cursed the day of his birth and then repented of having spoken about things too wonderful for him.
- ◆ The great promises of prosperity in Leviticus and Deuteronomy are addressed to a nation. Bob sees no scriptural basis for reading them as a personal guarantee of physical reward in this life.
- ◆ “When you're on the right track but success is delayed, God is not being stingy — he's being merciful.” Israel was given the land little by little so the wild beasts would not overwhelm them.
- ◆ Jesus modeled looking and then looking away: he saw Satan fall like lightning, and immediately told the seventy to rejoice in something else entirely.
- ◆ God's promises run on a generational clock. A single life is too short for every principle to play out in it, which is why Matthew opens with fourteen generations rather than a birth.
- ◆ Hope Chapel refused to become a megachurch in the late 1980s and chose to invest in people and send them out. Looking back on that and concluding the best days are behind is a temptation, and Ecclesiastes calls it unwise.

- ◆ Going to level one means treating every person in the room with the same care you would give the senior pastor, and investing in someone who has nothing to do with your perceived path.

► 1:06:16

Matt introduced Bob O'Dell as “a pillar among us, one of our wise ones and a dear friend,” and said the morning's teaching was a word for Hope Chapel with a prophetic engine behind it. Bob opened by saying he was not speaking to an audience but to his family, and that the Lord had shown him the night before how he viewed the talk: “You're giving them a McDonald's Happy Meal in the drive-through lane.” In a drive-through, nobody is happy unless the pace keeps moving.

1. Two myths, and the room they leave

► 1:13:06

The first myth is that for some people things always go well. Those people do not exist. Even where the fruit is enormous — Bob named Dallas Jenkins and *The Chosen*, a series that has reached something like a billion people — we know by principle that not everything is going well, because it was not going well for Jesus either. There was constant resistance from the religious leadership, and there was the day he nearly lost everyone. He did not minimize it: “Do you want to go away as well?” Peter did not minimize it either, and his answer is a line Bob and his wife Marissa quote in their own house — where else would we go.

► 1:14:50

The second myth runs the other way: that for some people nothing goes well. Job has the strongest claim to it, and he made it — after a silent week with his friends, the first words out of his mouth curse the day of his birth.

“Then Job answered: ‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.’”

JOB 42:3 ↗; SEE ALSO JOB 3:1 ↗

Bob would not let the point stay abstract. He named Hope's own worst day — Jose and Sarah Manzanares, killed three and a half years ago by a drunk driver in a head-on collision on Thanksgiving Eve, on their way to see family. He named the Fitzgeralds, Chris and Lisa, and asked for prayer for them, which is what Lisa asked him to say. And he noted that they have not used the tragedy as a

reason to stop praising God — they are living out the last line of the Psalms, “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.”

Which leaves nobody standing outside the topic. Something in your life is going well right now — a relationship, your prayer time, some corner of your work, an area of ministry, or just the way worship reliably connects. And sometimes that one thing goes well enough that it spills over and colors everything, the way falling in love does. When that happens, someone notices. It happened to David between Goliath and Saul's jealousy, and it happened to the whole early church:

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul... And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

ACTS 2:42-47 ↗

Bob had the congregation stand and read it, with an assignment attached: find anything in those verses that is even slightly negative. There is nothing. That is the season he wanted to talk about.

2. Success is a snap, but look out for the trap

► 1:33:06

He put [Leviticus 26:1-13](#) on the screen beside its parallel in [Deuteronomy 28](#) — shun idolatry, keep the commandments, and pages of promised success follow. Then he applied the brake. These are corporate verses, spoken to a nation. “I don't see any scriptural basis for the idea that if you do everything well you are guaranteed physical rewards in this life. You're guaranteed rewards — but whether they be in this life or the next life, I say it's in God's hands.”

He went looking for counterexamples and tested them honestly.

“Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established” does not say when, and does not say you will be the one who establishes it — he pointed to John Beebe's unfinished screenplay as work that will still be established without its author here to do it. “Seek first the kingdom of God” promises that “all these things” will be added, and Bob admitted he had never checked the context until preparing this message: the things in question are food, drink and clothing. The basics, which is wonderful, and not the same as all the success we want.

► 1:37:14

“But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.”

DEUTERONOMY 32:15 ↗; CONTEXT DEUTERONOMY 32:12-16 ↗

That is the trap in one verse, and Bob noted that Matt had stopped on it too during his survey through the Bible. So how does God keep us out of it? Often by slowing us down. In 2000, Bob started a company called Wintegra with his Jewish boss, Kobi, at the height of a market where people were selling companies for millions inside three months. He was genuinely worried about what quick success would do to his heart, and remembers something like a hand on his shoulder saying it would be okay. The market crashed six months later and the company ground through ten slow years before it grew fast. “Wealth gained hastily will dwindle, but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.”

The pattern is written into the conquest itself:

the LORD would clear the nations away little by little, lest the wild beasts grow too numerous. Hope Chapel's own renown in Austin, Bob guessed, took seven or ten years to arrive, and he thinks that was a mercy too.

► 1:42:08

And when success does come, the discipline is two-beat. Jesus sent out the seventy, they came back with a staggering report, and he answered it in a single sentence with a hinge in the middle:

“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven... Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

LUKE 10:18-20 ↗

Look, then look away. He did the same thing in Mark 1 — healed everyone who came to him, then left the crowds.

3. A generational view: it's not all about you

► 1:44:17

Both of those chapters of promised success go on to predict failure, and then predict grace anyway — and the grace is stated in generational terms.

“Then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with

The Deuteronomy parallel names the same three fathers in the opposite order (Deuteronomy 29:13).

Bob does not claim to know why the order flips, and said so, which is part of what makes the Bible worth staying with.

The New Testament opens the same way — not with a birth but with fourteen generations, three times over. A single life is too short for God to play out every principle in it.

► 1:47:54

He made it personal twice. His mother Virginia declined for nearly twenty years, much of it lying in a nursing-home bed — a woman who knew the word and taught it well, and the family grieved her long before she died. God later showed Bob that a very real part of his work in Israel had been sown by her during exactly those years, though she never lived to see it. Then, going through his grandmother Fanny's possessions, he found a painting she had made many years earlier of an old Native American woman. Fanny had struggled most of her life to believe she was made in God's image or that her life mattered; Jesus met her and corrected her before she died. The painting hangs in Bob's office now, and he sees her as connected to a work with a Native American tribe that nobody could have predicted.

“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”

HEBREWS 11:13 ↗

Bob's nugget from this: death releases life.

Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone.

“After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son.”

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints — and precious, he insisted, cannot mean private. It spills over into blessing. So if Hope moves into a season of remarkable blessing in three or five years, the question is whether the room will remember Dan Davis, Ariel Sininsky, Cotton H., Dottie Lynn and the others who poured in, or agree with the enemy that we did it.

4. A big red light is proudly seen, but humble just gets graced with green

► 1:54:23

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble — and Bob read the opposition as affection. The red light exists to stop us long enough to look around and ask what is going wrong. He carries a picture of it: a road with two ditches, pride on one side and fear on the other, running as “I can” and “I can't,”

with “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” down the middle. Pride, he said, is the hardest thing to fight when success arrives.

Hope faced that in the late 1980s with a real opportunity to move to the suburbs and become a megachurch before megachurches were fashionable, and said no — invest in people, send them out, plant churches. The mistake available to us now is not that decision but our reading of it: concluding that Hope's best days are behind us.

“Say not, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.”

ECCLESIASTES 7:10 ↗

The kingdom has advanced further today than it had then. Two more nuggets came from watching Jesus here: he looked outside himself — “Father, glorify your name” — and he looked to what was still coming, giving credit to a Spirit who had not yet arrived.

5. Go down, dogs, do not play up there

► 1:59:29

The last heading comes from *Go, Dog. Go!* — two dogs playing tennis on top of a hot air balloon, basking in the moment with no idea how dangerous it is, and the voice from below telling them to come down. Bob's version of coming down is what he calls level one: the Lord told him to treat everyone at Hope with the same care and attention he would give the senior pastor, and every child with the interest he would give his own. His nugget: the more esteemed you are by others, the more you need to balance it by finding someone to invest in who has nothing to do with your perceived path.

“...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:6–7 ↗

Jesus did not go to level one. He went to level zero — emptied himself, and gave his life as a ransom for many. Bob pointed to the work happening through FAM and Safe Families as Hope's version of going down. And he asked what the payoff would be if the church did it well. Not a megachurch. “Our DNA is to invest in people.” What if the legacy of a congregation meeting in a modest building on a street most people have never heard of is that its people go out and do things that change the world — and God favors it simply because it wants to make his name great.

6. The door, and the word held since 2016

► 2:05:37

Two stories had been left open all morning. The first: at twelve years old, locked out of his own house because the hidden key was gone, Bob decided to pray a prayer of faith that God would open the door. He reached for the knob, and it did not open. He prayed again. It did not open. He was crying by now and would not quit, and after nine or ten tries the door opened. At dinner one of his parents said they ought to check that door, so he went back out, locked it from the inside, and had it open again in twenty or thirty seconds of jiggling. He walked away not knowing whether it had been a miracle — and neither lost his faith nor gained a swelled head. Years later he understood: “That was the miracle. God threaded the needle of my heart.”

The second: the documentary *Tonkawa: They All Stay Together*, made with Filipe Adams from Hope and Andrew Richie, which led to a quote of Bob's opening the first article Texas Highways ever ran on the Tonkawa, then to the tribe purchasing the site of their creation story, then to the front page of the *Austin American-Statesman* on December 31 and a national pickup by *USA Today*. He had been hinting all morning that someone at Hope prophesied it. It was Jose Manzanares — painting a room in 2016 with Bible teaching on the radio, who came and found Bob and said the Lord had told him, as surely as he had ever known anything, that something really good was coming to his household.

► 2:14:40

Bob and Marissa would not keep it. They prayed to open that word to every household at Hope — past, present and future, every visitor, and since Hope keeps no membership list, anyone who ever hears the message and takes it in faith. Then, in character, he immediately looked away from it, back down to level one, and closed where the whole morning had been heading.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.”

HEBREWS 12:1-2 ↗

Something good is coming: Jesus is coming again, in glory. And when we see his face, Bob said, we will know more than ever before what it means when things go well.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [John 6:67–68](#)
- [Job 3:1](#)
- [Job 42:3](#)
- [Psalm 150:6](#)
- [Acts 2:42–47](#)
- [Leviticus 26:1–13](#)
- [Deuteronomy 28:1–14](#)
- [Proverbs 16:3](#)
- [Matthew 6:33](#)
- [Deuteronomy 32:12–16](#)
- [Deuteronomy 32:15](#)
- [Proverbs 13:11](#)
- [Deuteronomy 7:22](#)
- [Luke 10:18–20](#)
- [Mark 1:32–38](#)
- [Leviticus 26:42](#)
- [Deuteronomy 29:13](#)
- [Matthew 1:1–17](#)
- [Hebrews 11:13](#)
- [John 12:24](#)
- [Genesis 25:11](#)
- [Psalm 116:15](#)
- [James 4:6](#)
- [Philippians 4:13](#)
- [Ecclesiastes 7:10](#)
- [John 12:28](#)
- [Philippians 2:6–7](#)
- [Mark 10:45](#)
- [Hebrews 12:1–2](#)

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Name the thing in your life that is currently going well. What has it been doing to your heart that you have not looked at closely?
2. Bob said delayed success is mercy, not stinginess. Where have you been reading a delay as God withholding something from you?
3. Jesus looked, and then looked away. What would looking away from your own good news actually require of you this month?
4. Who poured into your life or into this church, and never saw the result of it? Whose name should be spoken out loud the next time something goes well for you?
5. Level one means investing in someone with nothing to do with your perceived path. Who is that person, and what is the first step you take this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Bob O'Dell is a longtime member of Hope Chapel, introduced by Matt Ryniker as “a pillar among us, one of our wise ones and a dear friend.” He came to faith around age ten in a Baptist church in Clearwater, Florida, and his family was shaped by the Jesus movement of the early 1970s. He co-founded a technology company, Wintegra, in 2000, has a long-running interest in work related to Israel, and produced the documentary *Tonkawa: They All Stay Together*. He and his wife Marissa prayed together over the congregation at the close of this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ot49wehTD-M&t=3976s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.