

Success Is Within You: 4th Edition

Michael W. Jackson

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Success is Within You is passionate about championing God's power over people's individual successes.

Michael W. Jackson's rousing and testimonial self-help book *Success Is Within You* asserts that God can help a person's dreams come true.

The book begins by asking its audience to define what success means to them. It makes the claim that the universe "withholds nothing from you"—"you only need to claim it." This is centered in the suggestion that God is willing to help people live their highest and best lives: if one asks, then God will provide, as Christian scriptures suggest. To support its notions, the text emphasizes the power of dreams and questions—both presented as valid avenues for seeking God's blessings.

The book's organization is compelling. It moves from general considerations of what success looks like into discussions of the value of dreams; it ends by suggesting a process for connecting with God. Its early ideas about the power of God are built upon well, suggesting how that power might be used to help people who struggle to meet their life's challenges. Positivity reigns: the book dwells on the possibilities and promise that God can bring into people's lives.

The text is written in a preacher's style; it delivers encouragements such as that "it is your Father's good nature to give you the kingdom." This spoken-word approach results in energy, as with the inspirational assertion that "there is always a positive in a seemingly negative experience." Indeed, the book is relentless in its optimism: no matter one's struggles, it implies, there is something to be gained from the experience.

Such work is rooted in a familiar prosperity gospel message, though. The book positions God as powerful and omnipresent. Its core advice is to work to clarify one's intentions before God, in order to allow God to manifest one's desires. Its examples are as various as personal enrichment (like learning to sing like Barbra Streisand) and fiscal wealth—two among the "infinite possibilities" that are available.

But such arguments rest in repetitive faith statements that are forwarded without deeper support; indeed, the book's assertions are said to be self-evident truths, if one goes to the Bible for context. Its theological perspective is still intriguing: it suggests that human beings are God's co-creators, and that the universe reflects the energy that they put forth. But there is no real exploration of this theology, and no real challenges to it are acknowledged, beyond the admission that sometimes bad things happen (a reality that it suggests responding to by "act[ing] responsibly" with the knowledge that "God is always in control").

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JEREMIAH ROOD (April 21, 2022)

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