

MARK JENKINS MINISTRIES

P.O. BOX 9043 • KNOXVILLE, TN 37940

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The Measure Of Success

Dear Friend,

What does it mean to be a success? I imagine every person has wondered at one time or another whether or not they are a success, or if they are at least on the road to becoming a success. Determining success requires having something or someone to use as a gauge for measuring ourselves and our accomplishments against. In so doing, we evaluate factors such as: amount of money in the bank, our employment, and social status. But, are these the proper gauges a Christian should use for measuring success as a child of God, especially when you consider this verse? (II Corinthians 10:12)

“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”

From the time we are young children we are taught to compare ourselves against others. Schools teach us to compare ourselves against the entire group to determine our rank. Are we at the top or bottom of the class? This mentality of comparing and evaluating our performance based on the performance of others has been so engrained in us that we don't even know we are doing it.

As a result, we often **predetermine** our own success or failure at something by looking at the success or failure of others. Thus, our assumptions are rooted in what we believe to be true determined by what we can see in this natural world. In doing so, we have completely removed the “God factor” from our equation, and our belief in His Word, and have focused only on this natural world.

Worse yet, we think we know what success is based on what our society has determined to be success. Is what society deems to be success true success? For example, if we leave our country of origin and relocate to a different country will our idea of success change? Let's say we have grown up in the United States where a traditional size family is usually two children and we move to a Latin American country where there is a much greater emphasis on large

families. If we only have one child or maybe even no children are we going to consider ourselves a failure compared to our new peer group?

My point is this, when we attempt to determine if we are successful based on what society defines success to be, we have embarked on a most unfulfilling journey of futility. This is best illustrated by the analogy of “climbing the ladder to success” only to discover that when you arrive at the top of the ladder your ladder is against the wrong building. Sadly, by the time one has made this realization much of their life has passed them by and they are nearing the end looking back with regret.

And, this socially driven mentality has crept into the church. Many ministries have become more focused on what they believe to be success, using the world’s definition of success, and have lost sight of what’s really important; the individuals themselves. Success in the church has become more about congregation size and seating capacity than on building individuals. Messages are preached in an effort to keep both building size and congregations increasing, as if more people and bigger buildings are the mark of success. All too often truth has been sacrificed for the sake of growth.

That’s not to say that there is anything wrong with preaching to the masses. On several occasions we see where Jesus taught the masses, so there is nothing wrong with preaching to the masses. The difference is that Jesus was not looking at numbers for validation of His ministry. In other words, He was not determining His success because of the fact that He preached to thousands. If that were the case, when Jesus was hanging on the cross and the crowds were against Him, could He have still accounted Himself successful?

You see, success in this natural world and success in the kingdom of God are established by two completely different standards of measurement. Success in this natural world is based on standards set by society while success in the Kingdom of God on standards set by God in His Word. So, which one are we going to live by?

Referring back to my point about how society’s measure of success has crept into the church, consider the instance in the Gospel of John in which Jesus’ disciples were leaving Him. Jesus had just taught them some of the most challenging concepts in all His teachings and many who had followed Him decided to leave. (John 6:66)

“From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.”

I have looked at this verse many times and wondered how I would have responded in this situation. These were His close associates, not the casual listeners. Their faces were the ones He had grown accustomed to seeing each day. He watched them, He taught them, and He became familiar with them on a personal level and now they were walking away from Him because of what He taught. In that same situation, what would we have done?

Would we have begun to backpedal and try to convince the people to stay because of fear of rejection? Would we declare that they misunderstood what we said? “Let me explain, you must have misunderstood me! Please come back!” Is that what Jesus did? Absolutely not! (John 6:67)

“Then said Jesus unto the twelve, ‘Will you go away?’ ”

In those few words, Jesus spoke volumes. He was declaring that he did not base His success in the kingdom of God on the responses of the people listening to Him. Nor would He allow their acceptance or rejection of Him to force Him to compromise the truth. Whether or not His followers stayed or walked away from Him had no bearing on what He did because **He did not measure success using the world’s standards.**

In essence, when Jesus looked at His twelve closest companions at this moment of decision He was not trying to convince them to stay. I can see Jesus looking each one of them right in the eyes and saying, “Are you going to stay or are you leaving also?” There was no waffling on Jesus’ part nor was there any compromising of the truth. In other words, “there it is boys either stay or leave, but the truth isn’t changing.”

How could Jesus be this way? Because He was not living His life according to the standards of this world. His measure of success was not based on what the world declared success to be. Jesus lived His life according to the written Word of God and refused to compromise. Jesus showed us that true success does not look like the world’s definition of success. True success in God’s kingdom is determined by God and demonstrated to us by His Word.

By reading and meditating in God’s Word our mind is renewed to the truth and we are transformed in our soul. (Romans 12:2)

“And be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Conforming to this world will never produce God's perfect will for your life. Conforming to this world will produce frustration, a lack of true fulfillment, and despair because true fulfillment only comes from God and fulfilling His will for your life.

Recently, Debbie and I have gone to a few estate sales here in Knoxville. While rummaging through the belongings of deceased people God has used this as an opportunity to drive this point home to me. In most cases, these homes are big, beautiful homes that people have worked all their lives to acquire. They have worked ceaselessly in some cases to have everything arranged just right. Everything looks perfect and has its certain place. The only thing is, they are no longer here to enjoy the fruit of all their efforts.

Now, their beautiful home that they worked so hard to get just right is being rummaged through by total strangers buying their treasures for pennies on the dollar. Where ever their final destination happens to be, heaven or hell, they are no longer able to enjoy the stuff of all of their life of labor on this earth.

If they were someone who only measured success by the standards of this natural world, they are no longer able to account themselves as successful because the measuring stick of success in eternity is far different than that of this world. So, they may have been the "salt of the earth" kind of people, the ones who would do anything for you and bend over backwards to be liked and appreciated by others. Maybe they had the most beautiful cars in their garage and their yards had no crab grass, but they were oblivious to God or His will for their lives.

My point is that from the outside they may have looked like the picture of success, the people others wanted to be like. But, if they measured success according to the world's standards they now have nothing to show for their time on earth. Moreover, if they never cared enough to discover God's will for their life because they were too busy trying to fit into the world's mold they most likely are very disappointed with their results. Are they in their eternal destination enjoying their rewards for a life lived for Jesus, or not? There's nothing wrong with having things, but that is not the reason we're here.

You might be thinking, "Mark that is sure a depressing thought!" It doesn't need to be a depressing thought at all, because since you are still here on earth you are able to make the necessary choices now that will affect your eternal destination. Not only that, but, your choices now will also impact what you take with you from this world into the next. Yes, it is possible for your accomplishments on this earth to pass from this world into the next.

I'm sure that I now have your attention. Some of you are wondering how it is that we can carry any of our accomplishments from this world to the next. I'm not suggesting that we try to line our coffins with money or gold or jewels. But, there is a way to enjoy the fruit of our time spent here on earth for eternity, instead of having them rummaged through by total strangers. You do this by choosing not to live according to the world's standards and instead entering into the transformation process by the renewing of your mind by the Word of God.

In so doing, your thinking will change and you will think more like God thinks, which will in turn cause your desire to line up with His desire for you. (Philippians 2:13)

“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”

The most amazing thing will begin to happen. You will start to want to do what the Lord wants you to do. The challenge then is that as more of this change takes place you will find yourself looking less like what this world says is normal and you will begin to stand out as different. Sadly, you may even begin noticing peculiar looks from others in your church. And most challenging, is when those around you whose opinions you value reject you. In some ways, you are in a similar situation as was Jesus in John 6; rejected because of your stand on God's Word. Take heart, you are in good company.

It may not be comfortable now to have to endure the ridicule of others and the looks out of the corners of other people's eyes. It can be especially difficult when the ridicule and rejection comes from those in the church who are still conformed to this world's way of thinking. But, so long as you are firm on God's Word and confident in your walk with Jesus you will be able to withstand the criticism and rejection from those you may have once held in high regard.

Why go through all of this difficulty anyway? It is a whole lot easier to just be like everyone else and fit nicely into the same mold as the rest of the world. What is most important to you? Spending your life now amassing things that will be left here on earth and rummaged through at some estate sale or making eternal investments now that will pass with you from this world to the next?

Paul speaks about this in I Corinthians 3:13-15

“Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is (14) If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon

he shall receive a reward. (15) If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

For Christians who **will** have their works judged, when the fire lifts and the smoke dissipates what is left standing will truly determine how successful we have been during our life on this earth. My question to you then is this, "If you died today, what would be left once the fire lifted?" That's a question each of us must take to the Lord and have answered. Success then is not something to be measured by this world's standards, but by God's standards established by His word.

What passes from this world to the next is the fellowship you have cultivated with the Lord Jesus Christ and the investment you have made in those God brought your way to disciple. Yes, success is measured by obedience and the lives God has been able to touch through you for His kingdom. It is truly about people, loving people, sharing your life with people and helping them traverse this life looking towards the next. That is the measure of success in God's kingdom, lives touched by God through you.

~ Jesus Loves You!

Mark Jenkins