

How To Be Successful  
January 31, 2010  
Allen Power

- How do most people DEFINE success?
  - Money; Prestige; Power

The late Erma Bombeck wrote:

*Don't confuse fame with success. Madonna is one; Helen Keller is the other.*

- There have been some more noble definitions:

Ralph Waldo Emerson said:

*“The definition of success – To laugh much; to win respect of intelligent persons and the affections of children; to earn the approbation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give one’s self; to leave the world a little better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition.; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm, and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived—this is to have succeeded.”*

- What about a Christian perspective?

In his book SUCCESS God’s Way, Dr. Charles Stanley defined it this way:

“Success is the continuing achievement of becoming the person God wants you to be and accomplishing the goals God has helped you set.”

- What about the Apostle Paul?

In 2 Timothy 4:7-8 Paul writes to Timothy:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing”

John MacArthur said of those verses:

Facing his own imminent martyrdom, Paul had no fear, no despondency, and no desire to stay in this world. He longed to be with Christ and eagerly anticipated the reward He would receive in the next world....Paul measured his own success as a leader, as an apostle, and as a Christian by a single criterion: He had “kept the faith”—meaning both that he had remained faithful to Christ and that he had kept the message of Christ’s gospel intact, just as he had received it. He had proclaimed the Word of God faithfully and fearlessly. And now he was passing the baton to Timothy and to others, who would be “able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

- Some recommend that to define a successful vision for your life you picture your funeral and imagine what you'd like your mourners to be able to say about you when you die.
- When I think of the end of my life a couple of verses come to mind:

Micah 6:8 (New International Version)

8 He has showed you, O man, what is good.  
 And what does the LORD require of you?  
 To act justly and to love mercy  
 and to walk humbly with your God.

Matthew 25:21 (New International Version)

21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

- Here's a question for you: PRIOR to His crucifixion; how do you think Jesus' disciples envisioned SUCCESS for Him and His ministry? What did they think his SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME would be?
  - A military victory over Rome that would restore Israel to power and prominence
- As we look into Mark Chapter 10 we'll see that Jesus had a definition of success and He not only TOLD it to us but he DEMONSTRATED it so we'd be sure to GET IT

Let's begin with Mark 10:32-34

Jesus Again Predicts His Death

32 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him. 33 "We are going up to Jerusalem," he said, "and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, 34 who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."

- If you were here last week this probably sounds familiar
- Back in Chapter 8 and verse 31 and Chapter 9 verse 31 Jesus gave them "shorter versions" of this prophecy
- Now He goes into more details
- He's repeating to them what is about to happen because they just can't get their minds around it

- Look in verse 32. As they followed Jesus to Jerusalem what state of mind were the disciples in?
  - Astonished.
- What about the people who “followed” Jesus and the disciples? What emotion was gripping them?
  - Afraid.
- Why were Jesus followers ASTONISHED and AFRAID because He was going to Jerusalem?
  - The very reason He had been staying out of Jerusalem: The religious leaders of the day were plotting to kill Him. He was going right into the hands of those who were out to destroy Him.

Luke 9:51 (New International Version)

51As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.

Isaiah 50:7 (New International Version)

7 Because the Sovereign LORD helps me,  
I will not be disgraced.  
Therefore have I set my face like flint,  
and I know I will not be put to shame.

- Jesus RESOLUTELY set out for Jerusalem. He had SET HIS FACE LIKE FLINT to do His Father’s will.
- This is Jesus first example of the definition of SUCCESS for us:

Being successful is based on doing God’s will...it means obeying Him and may involve suffering.

Warren Wiersbe writes:

*We must try to understand the bewilderment and fear of His followers, for this was a difficult experience for them and not at all what they had planned or expected. Each new announcement of His death only added to their perplexity. In the first two announcements (Mark 8:31; 9:31), Jesus had told them what would occur, but now He told them where His passion will take place—in the Holy City of Jerusalem! In this third announcement, He also included the part that the Gentiles would play in His trial and death, and for the fourth time, He promised that He would rise again (note Mark 9:9). He told His disciples the truth, but they were in no condition to understand it.*

- If we have any doubts that his disciples were in “no condition to understand” what was about to happen, let’s read verses 35-41 of Chapter 10:

The Request of James and John

35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask."

36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory."

38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?"

39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John.

- He's just told them in some detail what is going to happen to Him and they immediately ask Him THIS KIND OF QUESTION
- What does that tell you about James and John's definition of success at this point in their lives?
  - Position and power.
- Matthew 20:20 and 21 gives another account of this incident...

Matthew 20:20-21 (New International Version)

A Mother's Request

20 Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him.

21 "What is it you want?" he asked.

She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."

- Matthew tells us they got their "mommy" to ask Jesus for these places of prominence!
- Some scholars argue that when they used the term "in your glory" they meant in His ETERNAL KINGDOM not an EARTHLY KINGDOM
- Either way, it's clear they were "jockeying for position"
- How did Jesus respond?
- Verse 38 of Chapter 10: You guys have no idea what you're asking.
- Then He poses a question: Can you drink the cup I have to drink? Can you go through the baptism I have to go through?
- Of course, they said YES!
- Jesus said: You're right...you WILL.

Acts 12:1-2 (New International Version)

## Acts 12

1It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.

- And John...John would live to a ripe old age EXILED to the Isle of Patmos...but He too would experience great suffering
- Then Jesus makes it clear: To sit on my right or left is not mine to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.

Even Jesus as the God/Man had to obey the Father's will. If Jesus couldn't overrule His Father's will...how silly of us to think we can!

- The other 10 disciples reacted as you might expect. Verse 41 says "they became indignant with James and John."
- Obviously they were indignant because of what James and John asked for
- Why were they REALLY ticked off?
  - They DIDN'T THINK OF IT FIRST!
- Jesus knew it was time for a TEACHABLE MOMENT

Here's an observation:

Have you ever noticed: just when we get too full of ourselves; just when our definition of success gets out of line with His; Jesus takes us aside and sets us straight?

### Verses 42-45

42Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

- In verse 42 Jesus begins a STARK CONTRAST between the pagan view of success and God's view of success
- On the one hand we have those who are REGARDED as rulers of the Gentiles
- Let's pause on that word REGARDED...why did He say REGARDED?
  - These pagan rulers THOUGHT they were the BIG SHOTS...they didn't understand God is the REAL ruler
  - Those with a pagan view of success are only deceiving themselves if they don't understand that TRUE SUCCESS comes from God
- Back to our contrast: Jesus said: These pagans "lord it over" people. They look down on people. In today's terms: They THROW THEIR WEIGHT AROUND.

- They “have people”. There’s a term we hear from time to time about the rich and famous. They “have people for that”. “My people will call your people and we’ll do lunch!”
- The disciples had been looking around them at the Romans.
- Now, the Romans...THEY HAD PEOPLE!
- “When Jesus overthrows the Romans, WE’LL HAVE PEOPLE!”

Quoting Warren Wiersbe again:

*Like many people today, the disciples were making the mistake of following the wrong examples. Instead of modeling themselves after Jesus, they were admiring the glory and authority of the Roman rulers, men who loved position and authority. While there is nothing wrong with aspiring to greatness, we must be careful how we define “greatness” and why we want to achieve it.*

- Jesus finished his CONTRAST
- Not so with YOU!
- Here’s the key point of the whole lesson:
  - If you want to be great, you have to serve
  - If you want to be the leader of people, you have to serve people
- And just to show them that He was leading by example Jesus made it clear:
  - “...even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

John Stott said:

*When we talk about the church being "sent into the world" we are talking about its mission, for that is what the word means. And what is the church's mission in the world? Evangelism yes, but not that alone. For God sends his people out to be his servants and his witnesses. Not one or the other, but both. Jesus came to serve (Mark 10:45) and he came to witness (John 18:37). The same two activities constitute the church's mission.*

In God’s economy SERVICE PLUS WITNESS EQUALS SUCCESS. Being SUCCESSFUL involves seeking opportunities to serve others instead of trying to control them. That spirit of service gives us an opening to witness.

Chuck Swindoll quoting Henri Nouwen writes:

*Nouwen mentions three very real, albeit subtle temptations any servant of Christ faces.*

*First Temptation: To be self-sufficient and self-reliant. Instead of being so self-assured, we need to be open, unguarded, and vulnerable.*

*Second Temptation: To be spectacular . . . a celebrity mentality. In Nouwen's words, "Jesus refused to be a stunt man. . . . He did not come to walk on hot coals, swallow fire or put His hand in a lion's mouth to demonstrate He had something worthwhile to say."*

*Third Temptation: To be powerful . . . in charge. To lead is appropriate, necessary, and good. But to push, to manipulate, to be in full control . . . never! To say it simply, one God is sufficient.*

*Servanthood implies diligence, faithfulness, loyalty, and humility. Servants don't compete . . . or grandstand . . . or polish their image . . . or grab the limelight. They know their job, they admit their limitations, they do what they do quietly and consistently.*

- Then Jesus has an encounter as if to make His point to the disciples...
- As they continue walking they pass through Jericho
- And as they're leaving the city a blind beggar named Bartimaeus begins to scream and shout for Jesus: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"
- And the people start to rebuke the man: Cut it out...He doesn't have time to fool with you. He's on His way to Jerusalem. He's facing death. He has too much going on. He's got too much stress in His life. The last thing Jesus needs is some blind beggar yelling at him as He's trying to get out of town!
- But Bartimaeus screamed even louder: SON OF DAVID HAVE MERCY ON ME!
- Then Jesus stopped.
- And the crowd stopped.
- Jesus said: No, no, no. Don't send him away...tell him to come here.
- Then the crowd stopped rebuking and started cheering:
- Run Bartimaeus run! He's calling for you!
- And Bartimaeus throws off his coat and sprints in his blindness toward the place where they said Jesus was standing.
- This is Him Bartimaeus...right here, right here. And he's standing right in front of Jesus and Jesus asks him the ministry question we should all be asking: "What do you want me to do for you?"
- What a question! This is Jesus. He knows everything. Blind man...healer...guess he might want his sight!
- Wait! That's the same question he asked James and John. He's making a point!
- James and John had answered: We want to be on your right and left. We want to be the most important of your honchos. We want to be the biggest of the big shots!
- Bartimaeus answers..."I just want to see!"
- Jesus says: Go! Your faith has healed you!
- Then you can imagine Jesus looking at His disciples without saying a word.
- His look is as if to say, "See what I mean?"
- If you want to be great be a servant.
- Even as He was on His way to a cruel death and humanly had to be under the most extreme stress imaginable, Jesus took the time to stop and serve.

So, what's the takeaway?

- It's not wrong to want to achieve
- It's not wrong to strive to be the best you can possibly be and even (if God chooses) to be blessed in ways the world sees as signs of success
- But a Christian can be a success with or without worldly riches or prominence
- Jesus modeled it for us:
  - Success as a Christian means obeying God's will and that may include suffering
  - Success as a Christian means we focus on serving and not on achieving a place of prominence and honor
  - Success as a Christian isn't "having people" who we can control...it's about serving people the way Jesus modeled for us.
  - Success as a Christian is one day hearing those words from Matthew 25:21:

21"... 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

That's the definition of Christian success.