

HOW DO I KNOW IF I SUCCEEDED?

Philippians 3:1-16

I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. – Verse 12

INTRODUCTION:

- A. If you're into marketing new products, it's pretty easy to know if you've succeeded. Did it sell? Every year 20,000 new products are introduced in North America. A year later only 20% of them are still around. Here are some of the failures:
- Toaster Eggs – people worried about what they would do to their toaster.
 - Dr. Care aerosol toothpaste
 - Stinkers Garlic Dog Biscotti
 - Steve's Microwaveable Hot Fudge Sundae
- B. In 1917, Bertie Charles *Forbes* formed his first list of the one hundred largest American companies.... In 1987, *Forbes* republished its original 'Forbes 100' list and compared its 1917 list of top companies. Of the original group, 61 had ceased to exist. The remaining 39 survived but did not perform. Only 18 were still in the top 100. As a group their long-term return for investors was 20% less than that of the overall market. (Richard Foster and Sarah Kaplan, *Creative Destruction*, Doubleday, New York, 2001, 7-8)
- C. Larry Anderson, pitcher for the San Diego Padres: *If at first you don't succeed, failure may be your thing.*
- D. I for one am not content to give up so easily. I am confident you feel the same. So let's check in with the Word of God about this whole matter of measuring degree of success.

I. WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT DOESN'T COUNT AS SUCCESS (Verses 1-6)

- A. Who Defines Success? (Verses 4b-5)
1. Paul is the kind of guy who shows up in motivational speeches. In first century, if Palestine had circulated *People Magazine*, Paul would have been on the cover boy. Mothers tucked their Jewish lads into bed with the words, *If you're a good little kosher boy and work real hard, you might grow up to be like Mr. Saul!* (Before he became a Christian, his name was Saul) In his day he was the equivalent of valedictorian, Eagle Boy Scout, and Rhode's scholar. Here he gives the short version of his achievements: **Verse 4**, *If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.* Elsewhere he loads it on: **Galatians 1:14**, *I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.* Academically, he trained under Gamaliel, the most honored Jewish rabbi of the first century.
 2. So, was Saul/Paul a success? He thought so. His parents thought so. His prof thought so. His competition thought so.
 3. But something came along that re-calibrated his success-o-meter. **VERSE 3**, *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh--*
 4. Walker Percy: *You can get all A's and still flunk life.*
 5. Paul took a "no confidence" vote on himself and he lost. But in losing, he won.
 6. Look who defines male success today:
 - When you're 6, it's about how many cool toys you've got.
 - When you're 10, it's all about how good you are on the soccer field.
 - When you're 16, it's all about how cute that girl is on your arm.
 - When you're 21, it's all about the ranking of your university.
 - When you're 35, it's all about the firm.

- When you're 55, it's all about the size of the IRA, the square footage of the house, and the MSRP on the car.
 - When you're 85, it's all about....what?
 - You can't even *walk* around the soccer field anymore.
 - The girl is wrinkled or buried.
 - Nobody listens anymore to your university nostalgia.
 - To the firm you are a forgotten relic.
 - The IRA will last longer than you, and will pass on to the kids who don't visit you much anymore. The home is downsized. The car is a hulk in a wrecking yard cannibalized for parts.
7. *In the monasteries of one order of Trappist monks, the monks dig a grave. Each day the monks go out to stand and look at the grave. When one of their number dies, he's put in the grave, and then a new grave is dug. They do it for perspective.* (Haddon Robinson, "The Grim Shepherd," *Christianity Today*, October 23, 2000, 115)
8. So who is it who defines success? There's a hint here in verse 3, *We who glory in Christ Jesus...* Paul's going to come back to that in a minute.
9. But first he wants to talk about...
- B. Who Defaces Success? (Verses 2-4a)
1. Who is Paul talking about? (**Verse 2**, *Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.*)
- We call them the Judaizers. They were Jews. They professed to be Christians, just like Paul. They were also aggressive missionaries who managed to slip into one end of town just as Paul was walking out the other side.
 - They said lots of nice things about Jesus. They weren't against Jesus.
 - But Paul had forgotten to stress one little thing: *circumcision*. These guys taught that Jesus was an add-on to the Old Testament Law. Paul taught that Jesus fulfilled the Law and put it back on the shelf.
 - The Judaizers were externalists. Paul was an internalist. They wanted to cut skin. Paul wanted to cut the heart.
 - **Romans 2:28**, *A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is **circumcision of the heart**, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.*
 - This is why he calls them *mutilators of the flesh*.
2. What is meant by "flesh"?
- Flesh can mean the biological body.
 - Flesh can mean mankind in general, with an accent on our mortality.
 - Flesh can mean the sinful spirit of the age that is in opposition to the Spirit of God.
3. Legalism appeals to the flesh, i.e., the sinful spirit of the age.
- Definition: Legalism is the human tendency to want to earn something from God, and to think that we can.
 - Two dimensions:
 - The idea that by doing good works we can construct our own salvation. This is, earn our way into heaven.
 - The idea that by doing good works we can construct our own sanctification. That is, earn our way into God's character and God's daily good graces. This is where the Judaizers weighed in. Jesus for heaven was just fine with them. But Jesus for living the Christian life was short change. **Galatians 3:1-4** *You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly*

portrayed as crucified. 2 I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? 3 Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort? 4 Have you suffered so much for nothing-- if it really was for nothing?

- Here's the take-away from **Verse 3**: *No human effort can ever construct spiritual worth. You can't make a meal out of rocks no matter how hard you try and you can't make spiritual life out of flesh efforts.*

5. OK, that's what success IS NOT. But what IS IT?

II. WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT REALLY COUNTS AS SUCCESS (Verses 7-11)

A. One Thing Is All-Surpassing

1. One way to look at it is: *What would you die for?*

- As a leader I regularly get involved in handling disagreements and conflict. If I am stupid, I will always try to win every contest. I've learned that you choose your battles carefully. Some things just aren't all that important in the big picture. I've learned to look at a conflict and quietly ask myself if this is something I'd die for. Now I have a pretty healthy survival instinct, so I think about this question rather thoroughly. There are things that I would die for, but they are really big things. So I don't sweat the small stuff. And I don't worry about defending myself or sticking up for what I might call "my rights."
- I learned that from Paul. He didn't fundamentally care what people thought of him. Jail or freedom...who cared?! But he would die for Christ. He would go to the mat for the purity of the Gospel message of salvation by simple faith in Jesus Christ who died for our sins.
- Paul would risk any danger just to imagine Jesus whispering to him at the end of the day: *Way to go Paul. Love what you did for me today!*

2. Another way to look at it is: *What would you live for?*

- At our November Men's Adventure Dinner we had **Graham Kerr** as guest speaker. He told the story of how his wife found Jesus and was rescued from drug abuse and institutionalization. Graham felt excluded. He walked out to an old tree on his east coast estate on Chesapeake Bay and he talked to the tree. As he mulled things over, God began to do something in his heart. He looked across the spacious lawn at his columned mansion and he said it was if all the lights went out in the windows. Ditto for the sailboat, the power launch, and the luxury automobiles. In a spiritual epiphany he perceived that he worked for those things. He was spending his life on those things. He was a slave to a human definition of success.
- That was the first step for his heart to turn from worldly success to spiritual success; from serving stuff to serving the Savior.

3. Jesus spoke to this. He told the story of a man who had it all. Moral of the story: **Luke 12:20**, *"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" 21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."*

4. **Luke 9:25**, *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?*

4. Little secret. We Christians think we can have it both ways: gain the world and gain our soul. Reality check time:

- **Luke 6:24**, "No one can serve **two masters**. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.
- **Luke 9:23**, Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must **deny** himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

B. What Is That One Thing?

1. Paul's multiple descriptors:
 - Knowing Christ*
 - Gaining Christ*
 - Being found in Christ*
 - Having the righteousness that comes from God*
 - Knowing the power of Christ's resurrection*
 - Sharing in Christ's sufferings*
 - Becoming like Christ in His death*
 - Attaining to the resurrection from the dead*
2. In one clear sentence: What really counts as success is this: *to be like Jesus Christ.*
3. Cut Paul and He would bleed Jesus. Cut you and what would you bleed. Cut me and what would I bleed. In other words, what is my passion....what shows up in my checkbook ledger and in my Daytimer?
4. Bill Bright of Campus Crusade died last summer. A week before he died he wrote these words: *Of course, if the Lord tarries, my day to enter glory will eventually come. What a wonderful day that will be! But it is a win-win situation for me. If I go, I will be with my wonderful Lord whom I have swerved for almost 60 years. If I stay, I will be able to joyously serve Him even more than I have in the past.* (Column he wrote a week before he died, July 13th, 2003)

III. WE NEED TO KNOW HOW TO PURSUE SUCCESS

A. Imagine the Destination (**Verse 12**, **Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of *that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward *the goal* to win *the prize* for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.)**

1. Albert Einstein said that in his work imagination was more important than information.
2. Imagine with Christ [***that for which Christ took hold of me***]
 - Call it Christ's dream for my life
 - MAXWELL PARENTING DREAMS**
2. Imagine it humbly [***not that...***]
3. Imagine it possible [***the goal***]
 - **DALLAS WILLARD:** The central claims. It's possible. *My central claim is that we **can** become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him is the overall style of life he chose for himself. If we have faith in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in... (ix)*
 - ...we do not have the strength we should have, and Jesus' commandments become overwhelmingly burdensome to us. In fact. Many Christians cannot even believe he actually intended for us to carry them out. So what is the result? His teachings are treated as a mere ideal, one that we may better ourselves by aiming for but know that we are bound to fall glaringly short of. (2)

4. Imagine it valuable [*the prize*]
- John Piper: *We need to know God and to find in Him a treasure more satisfying than any other person or thing or relationship or experience or accomplishment in the world.... We must be more satisfied in all that God is for us in Jesus than we are in anything else.*
(www.desiringGod.org)

B. Pursue the Journey

1. Success involves movement (**Verse 12, I Press on**)
- *The Rev. Paul, Apostle
Independent Missionary
Corinth, Greece*

Dear Mr. Paul:

We recently received an application from you for service under our board. We have made an exhaustive survey of your case and, frankly, we are surprised that you have been able to “pass” as a bona-fide missionary.

- 1. In the first place we are told that you are afflicted with severe eye trouble which is almost certain to be an insuperable handicap to any effective ministry. We normally require 20-20 vision.*
- 2. Secondly, we take a dim view of a full-time missionary doing part-time secular work, but we hear that you are making tents on the side. You admitted in a letter to the church at Philippi that they are the only group supporting you. We wonder why this is.*
- 3. Further, is it true that you have a jail record? Certain brethren report that you did two year’s time at Caesarea and were also imprisoned in Rome.*
- 4. Moreover, it is reported from Ephesus that you made so much trouble for the businessmen there that they refer to you as “the man who turned the world upside down.” We feel such sensationalism has no place in missions. We also deplore the “over-the-wal-in-a-basket” episode at Damascus.*
- 5. In one of your letters you refer to yourself as “Paul the aged.” Our new pension policies do not anticipate a surplus of elderly recipients*
- 6. Your ministry has been far too flighty to be successful. First Asia Minor, then Macedonia, then Greece, then Italy, and now you are talking about a wild-goose chase into Spain. Concentration is more important than dissipation of one’s powers.*
- 7. Finally, Dr. Luke the physician reports that you are a thin little man, rather bald, frequently sick, and always so agitated over your churches that you sleep very poorly. He indicates that you pad around the house praying half the night. Our ideal for all applicants is a healthy mind in a robust body. We believe that a good night’s sleep will give you zest and zip so that you wake up full of zing.*

We regret to inform you, Brother Paul, but in all our experience we have never met a candidate so opposite to the requirements of our mission board. If we should accept you we would be breaking every principle of current missionary practice.

Most sincerely,

J. Flavius Fluffyhead

*Secretary, Foreign Mission Board (Hans Finkel, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*, VictorBooks, Wheaton, IL, 1973, 78, adapted source unknown)*

2. Success involves **sweat** (**Luke 9:23**, *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must **deny** himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*
Verse 3, Straining toward what is ahead
- ❑ Max DePree: *You might even say that people who never fail have not been trying hard enough – or have sailed their boats in small and perpetually calm ponds. (Leadership Jazz, Doubleday, 1992, 165)*
 - ❑ Chuck Swindoll has a statement taped to the wall of his study that he reads almost every day:
 - *For every achievement there is a price.*
 - *For every goal there is an opponent.*
 - *For every victory there is a problem.*
 - *For every triumph there is a sacrifice.*
 (William Henry Ward)
3. Success involves **acceptance of discrepancy**
- ❑ Hockey great Wayne Gretzky: *You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take.*
 - ❑ *On August 6, 1999, a major-league baseball player stepped up to home plate in Montreal and made another out—the 5,113th of his professional career..... If a player made all of those outs consecutively, and he averaged four at bats per game, he would play eight seasons (1,278 games straight) without ever reaching first base!....*
Was the player discouraged that night? No. Did he think he had failed himself or his team? No. You see, earlier in the same game, in his first plate appearance, that player had reached a milestone that only twenty-one other people in the history of baseball have ever achieved. He had made his 3,000th hit. That player was Tony Gwynn of the San Diego Padres.... Tony's ability to succeed consistently only one time in three tries has made him the greatest hitter of his generation. (John Maxwell, Failing Forward, Thomas Nelson Pubs., Nashville, 2000, 11-12)
 - Maybe a better story for most of us is the story of Daniel "Rudy" Ruettinger, oldest of *fourteen children in a poor working-class family.... As a high school senior, he began dreaming about attending Notre Dame and playing football there. Rudy had some liabilities: he was slow, 5'6, 190 lbs, "D" grade point average. He finally clawed his way into Notre dame at age 26. He got on the team as a scrub and worked his way up to sixth string. And in the final game of his final; season, Rudy lived his dream by getting to play.... "When they snapped the ball for the last time, I put the moves I'd rehearsed in my mind on the guy over me and I got the quarterback."*
Overjoyed, the team carried him off the field in celebration. Rudy says that's the only time that's happened to a player in the history of Notre Dame football.
It took him six years to talk Hollywood into to making his story into a movie. The people in Hollywood told his, "You're not Paul Horning or Joe Montana." Rudy agreed. "There's only one of them," he explained. "There's a million of me." (John Maxwell, Failing Forward, Thomas Nelson Pubs., Nashville, 2000, 31-33)
 - Have I succeeded this past year?
 - What was my passion?
 - What was I living for?
 - What did I do to advance the Kingdom of God?
 - How am I closer to Jesus now than I was 12 months ago?
 - Paul wrote to Timothy: *Let your **progress** be evident to all.*

CONCLUSION:

A. Last summer Fox Sports interviewed Mike Tyson: *I'm just looking forward t go to the other world. 'Cause I really hate the way I live now.* (World, July 19th, 2003)

B.

*I had walked life's way with an easy tread,
I had traveled where pleasures and comfort led.
Until one day in a quiet place,
I met the Master face to face.
With station and rank and wealth for my goal,
Much thought for my body but none for my soul,
I had entered to win this life's mad race,
When I met the Master face to face.
I built my castles and reared them high,
Till their towers had pierced the blue of the sky;
I had sworn to rule with an iron mace,
When I met the Master face to face.
I met Him, and knew Him and blushed to see,
That His eyes full fo sorrow were fixed upon me;
I faltered and fell at His feet that day,
While my castles melted and vanished away.
Melted and vanished and in their place,
Nothing else could I see but the Master's face.
My thoughts are now for the souls of men,
I've lost my life to find it again;
Ever since that day in a quiet place,
Where I met the Master face to face.*

(Charles Swindoll, *Paul: a Man of Grace and Grit*, W Publishing Group, Nashville, 2002, 228-229, author/source unknown. Public domain)

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