

LIVING FOR HIS GLORY

The Measure of Real Success · Authenticity Through Accountability ·

The Eternal Scoreboard

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The Measure of Real Success

“...the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.” 1 Corinthians 3:13

Do you feel successful in life? If so, why? If not, why not? What is the measure of your evaluation?

Sadly, many evaluate success by false standards or subjective feelings. Neither is a true measure. The external, materialistic measures of this world are ultimately temporal and meaningless. King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:28-37) paraded the success of his skill, position, and wealth, only to face the fragility and emptiness of this approach. He is but one of countless examples of those who achieved and accumulated, only to still find a huge hole in the soul, overwhelmed with confusion and dissatisfaction.

Likewise, our self-assessments of success are often very limited and short-sighted. Like Mr. Holland in the film *Mr. Holland’s Opus*, who felt very insignificant until he suddenly realized the amazing impact of his life, we, too, can lose sight of the real goal among the fog of the daily grind.

I heard a definition of success many years ago that I have never forgotten: “Success is when the people who know you best respect you the most.” While we can’t measure this ideal of success, we certainly can embrace and pursue it for our gain, others’ good, and God’s glory.

The Right Definition

Why is this definition important? I see several reasons. This kind of success values *people over productivity*. Those who neglect or disregard people in their hot pursuit of the almighty dollar, the bigger organization, or the next prominent title really lose in the contest of life. They have traded temporal things in exchange for the eternal value of souls. Jesus reminds us that, like Him, we are not here to be served (in pursuit of personal ambitions) but to serve and give our lives away for the needs of others – especially those who know us the best. When our quest for the goal leaves a wake of wounded souls and broken hearts, we have lived a very misguided life.

This definition elevates *integrity over impressiveness*. We all know the allure of living an impressive life where the crowds, the customers, and the clients all sing our praises. But the despair of knowing that the real substance of our life is unraveling behind the scenes is tormenting. I think the proper balance is found in the familiar quote, “If it doesn’t work at home, don’t export it.” Success starts at the core of who we are, the people to whom we relate most closely, and the life we conduct when the crowds are not tracking us.

Most importantly, this kind of success elevates God’s glory over ours. In our own fleshly talent, personality, and determination, we can all “succeed” at a lot of things. Only Christ, by His grace and indwelling power, can shape a life of highly respected and truly genuine character. As Jesus said, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing... By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” (John 15:4, 5, 8)

Living Toward Real Success

How do we progressively journey toward this destination of success? First, we must live in daily spiritual reality. The inner part of our- selves must be renewed day-by-day so that we do not conform to the values and visions fed to us by a superficial society. Instead, we must live out of a transformed “core “developed each day from glory to glory in the reality of His presence and Word.

Second, we must live with regular relational conscientiousness. We’ve heard the wise advice about keeping short accounts. We do this by regular, self-honest confession of our sins and failures toward God (1 John 1:9). We also must do it by making sure that we address all offenses on our part and any harbored bitterness toward others with the daily resolve of a clear conscience. Paul said in Acts 24:16, “I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” Jesus warned against our tendency to go through the motions of a religious life without a radical commitment to valuing authentic relationships (Matthew 5:24). When we fail to do this, not only are we miserable inside, but we lose our respect in rapid fashion. I learned a long time ago that my kids did not expect me to be perfect; they just needed me to be honest and make things right when I was wrong.

Also, we must live with Spirit-controlled consistency. Really, a life where those who “know us best respect us the most” can only occur under the moment-by-moment control of the Spirit of Christ. He produces the fruit of a respectable life in us (Galatians 5:22-25). The

portrait of a successful life is painted from the palette of the Spirit's love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Left to ourselves, we are all dis-respectable jerks. Under His control, we can be an immense blessing to others – especially the ones who know us best.

So, here's to your success. May it be real and rewarding for you and the ones who love you –and want to help you succeed.

Authenticity Through Accountability

“A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment.

Proverbs 18:1

Poet and preacher John Donne wrote, “No man is an island, entire of itself...” This is especially true of Christ followers and accents a necessary practice of those who have been baptized together by the Spirit into one body. In fact, we are an integral part of one another as believers. We need each other for the sake of encouragement, mutual ministry, fulfillment of our shared mission, and personal character development.

The Source of Authenticity

The willingness to be genuinely connected and accountable cannot be reduced to a legalistic series of discomfiting questions or a written report to a heavy-handed spiritual advisor. Real accountability springs from the willingness of the heart to be in biblical relationship with other believers. It is the fruit of a deep passion to live an authentic life. “Getting by” is not acceptable for the one who desires accountability. An accountable Christian knows that while he cannot fool God, he can fool others –but he chooses to do neither.

In a recent Strategic Renewal staff meeting, a team member was commenting on Galatians 2:1–10. We began to realize that there was in these verses a powerful example of accountability birthed from a passion for authenticity, as seen in the approach of Paul, the apostle. A portion of the passage says:

“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain... and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and

Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”

Of course, I encourage you to read this section on your own, but here are some profound observations that might help you to desire a genuine and healthy sense of accountability in your life:

- Paul was an apostle called and commissioned directly by Christ who was willing to take the initiative to submit his ministry to the spiritual leaders in Jerusalem for consultation and accountability. He did not let his position of authority or his own experience of spiritual power prevent him from pursuing a submissive approach to life and ministry.
- Paul was well entrenched in his own effective and powerful ministry for about 14 years, but he was still willing to confer with others for evaluation. He stayed open to the teaching of others even when he was already “successful” in his own right. • Paul refused to be a lone ranger. Even in going to Jerusalem, he took Barnabas and Titus with him. It was his custom to surround himself with other godly associates everywhere he went.
- Paul also recognized the importance of mutual accountability as he was forced to confront the powerful apostle Peter on a later occasion (see vv. 11- 21) over a serious breach of truth and uprightness. Even this is an expression of an authentic love for Christ and His truth. Paul knew, as we do, that accountability can be risky. We must be willing to lose our own standing in the eyes of others in order to help them embrace truth.

Much more could be said about this passage, but the bottom line is this: If the great Apostle Paul willingly pursued accountability for how he lived and what he taught, shouldn't we constantly seek to grow in our own character through a humble, consistent, and genuine accountability to others?

Pursuing an Accountable Life

Over the years in my own life, I have realized my own need for this. For more than two decades as a senior pastor, I met every week with the chairman of the elders at my church for spiritual accountability and mutual encouragement. I needed it, and we both benefited. Even now, in more of a “parachurch” ministry, I meet weekly with a spiritual

mentor, gather with a group of men for Bible study, and seek to keep my life as an open book before my wife, family, and co-workers.

I have learned that accountability is not a system but an approach to life and relationships that values transparency, consistency, and mutual submission. Because I know my own weakness and pride despite my desire to live an authentic life, I must pursue accountability regularly – and for a lifetime.

By way of application, consider these questions that might help us all move toward a more genuine accountability for the sake of our authenticity:

1. Am I willing to submit my personality, approach, accomplishments, and plans to other godly believers without reacting in pride and defensiveness? If not, why not?
2. Am I willing to get into a regular covenant relationship with other believers who will care for me, be honest with me, and help me in my spiritual journey? If not, why not? If so, when will I start and what will it look like?
3. Who do I know that could give honest feedback without fear of reprisal or reaction from me? Can I contact them this week? Can I get into a routine of honest, transparent communication with another believer about my life, my struggles, my attitudes, my relationships, and my plans for the future?
4. If I do not do this, what consequences might occur? If I do take this step, what blessings might I expect?

Proverbs 18:1-2 says, “A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; he rages against all wise judgment. A fool has no delight in understanding, but in expressing his own heart.” We have all felt the temptation to withdraw from those who tell us the things we need to hear but do not like to hear. Yet staying the course and pursuing truth-telling relationships is the key to understanding – and ultimately, an authentic life.

The Eternal Scoreboard

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 7:21 (ESV)

One of my most frequent “Danielisms” (as my friends call them) is the saying: “The scoreboard is in heaven.” I guess this is my own version of the familiar adage, “Only one life, twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

Yet in my mind, good theology requires that we take this idea a step further. Not everything “done for Christ” will actually last. The heavenly scoreboard and Sovereign Scorekeeper are profoundly and divinely discriminating.

Remember Matthew 7:21-23. The haunting passage reads, “Not every- one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

That is an astounding and frightening declaration from Jesus Christ, the one by whom God will judge the secrets of every heart (Romans 2:16). Clearly it is not just the things “done for Christ” that last. There is something more. If we are going to understand the real score of life, there are essential truths we must affirm. To do so, let’s examine three basic questions:

1. What is the difference between the earthly and eternal scoreboards?
2. What makes the difference on the eternal scoreboard?
3. Why does it matter?

What is the Difference?

Probably the best passage to describe the difference between the two scoreboards is Matthew 16:24-27, which reads, “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For

what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

Clearly, the earthly scoreboard is tabulated by the things we do to hang on to the temporal definitions of this life. The cultural icon of the earthly scoreboard is the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Eternity will not reward or recognize what we have done out of a love for this world and things thereof. Net worth and superficial definitions of self-worth do not translate into eternal worth.

On the other hand, Jesus says that eternity will reward those things done in loving sacrifice for Christ, His glory and His kingdom. These grace-empowered deeds focus on “things that are not seen” rather than the things that are tangible and measurable. “For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

I often speak of the wealthy Christian executive who kept a plaque on his desk in his penthouse office that read, “It’s all going to burn.” Everything we see with our eyes is going to burn, rot, rust or go to the dump. All the tangible bells and whistles of the earthly scoreboard will disappear into irrelevance in light of eternity.

What Makes the Difference?

Putting this discussion into a strictly Christian context, how do we know what really registers on eternity’s reward board for a believer? The Bible teaches that not all Christian activity is rewarded. In summary, I have come to believe that it is not just what we do – but how we do it, why we do it, and for whom we do it. It is not just enough to want to do things that matter in eternity. It is imperative that we conduct our lives in the right way, for the right reason, and for the Lord’s glory, not our own.

So, how do we do this? First, Paul gives this defining piece of wisdom: “Now if anyone builds on this foundation (Jesus Christ) with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Corinthians 3:12-15).

Again, the assumption is that everyone in this passage is building on the foundation of Jesus Christ – living for the Gospel and working for eternity. But the sort of work, the

nature of it, and the character of it will be evaluated by the fire of eternal evaluation. Am I doing eternity's work in an un-Christlike fashion, or an injurious way, or with moral compromise? If so, it will ultimately be proven to be merely wood, hay, and straw.

Second, I must ask the "why?" question. This is the issue of my true motive. I can do all the right things for all the wrong reasons. Jesus warned in Matthew 6:1-17 that the external acts of fasting, praying and giving can be done with an impure motive that undermines any eternal recognition of the religious act. Even in diligent service for Christ we must constantly invite the God of truth and the truth of God to expose our motives in the presence of the One to Whom we must all give an account (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Third, I must constantly and prayerfully evaluate the one for whom I am doing what I am doing. The Psalmist declares in Psalm 115:1, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory." This must be our cry, because we serve a God who declares, "My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8).

These matters are hard to define because our own hearts can deceive us. The real nature of our motives can elude us. We can easily justify fleshly methodologies because we are implementing them "in His name." We can mask a self-glorifying accomplishment with a tacked-on "Praise the Lord." But someday, the infallible scoreboard will register the truth about what we've done. All other opinions and voices will be silenced. The score will stand, forever.

Why Does it Matter?

So, why does it even matter? On this side of eternity it matters because we cannot just live the Christian life and conduct Christian service on spiritual autopilot. Not all that we see and experience in our modern-day Christian culture is going to make the grade of the eternal evaluation. Not everything that is big, impressive, reported in Christian magazines, and blessed with "results" is going to register in heaven.

This is not a call to some kind of morbid introspection that immobilizes your spiritual impact. It is, however, a serious call to pure, Christ-honoring, loving and thoughtful service that not only targets eternity but also honors eternity's values here on earth.

Ultimately, it matters because whatever is on our scoreboard in heaven will be directly linked to our capacity to give Christ glory in eternity. Our crowns will all be cast at His feet (Revelation 4:10). Jesus tells us in Matthew 20:16, The first shall be last and the last shall be first. I believe millions of unknown Christians, in all kinds of vocations and locations,

who serve their beloved Savior in pure and passionate ways, will have a great capacity to glorify Jesus in eternity. Likewise, I believe many “renowned” Christian leaders, touting grand exploits for Jesus, will be surprisingly empty-handed on that day.

I am certainly not the judge of the final evaluation around the throne. But I do need to judge my own heart everyday regarding what I do, how I do it, why I do it, and for whom I do it. These concerns must regulate all of my life and service – because the only scoreboard that matters is in heaven.



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