



Success



Defining Success

In its narrowest sense, “success” simply means achieving some sort of goal or standard. However, we often talk about people being “successful” (or unsuccessful) as though there is a universal standard of success that we should be pursuing. The pursuit of “success” is a major motivation in life for many, who perhaps hope that achievement of some measure of success will bring satisfaction, fulfillment, or meaning to life. But what does the Bible say about the “success” that we often pursue, and what does it say is worth pursuing?

1. In what ways do people usually measure the success of someone’s (or their own) life or efforts?

2. What does the Bible have to say about some of these measures of success, and the implications in someone’s life of pursuing these measures?
 - 📖 **Possessions and wealth** – Matthew 6:19-21, 24 (Jesus, speaking to a crowd in what is often called the “Sermon on the Mount”)

 - 📖 **Personal accomplishments** – Ecclesiastes 2:9-11 (King Solomon, who was known for his wisdom and many accomplishment as king of Israel)

 - 📖 **Status, recognition** – Luke 22:24-25 (Jesus’ apostles are arguing about who would be the greatest)

 - 📖 **Strength, power, wisdom** – Psalm 20:7-8, 1 Corinthians 1:25-31

Boasting of Success?

To people who boast of their own successes, and who consequently go their own ways away from God, Jeremiah 9:23-24 was written:

²³ This is what the Lord says:
 “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom
 or the strong boast of their strength
 or the rich boast of their riches,

²⁴ but let the one who boasts boast about this:
 that they have the understanding to know me,
 that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness,
 justice and righteousness on earth,
 for in these I delight,”
 declares the Lord.

Paul's Success?

The Apostle Paul could have boasted of his heritage, of his education, and of his righteousness and zeal (see Acts 22:3-5), all things that would make him appear successful in his culture.

However, he would instead proclaim:

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.
(Philippians 3:7-9)

3. How do you think he could consider all those things that he could have boasted about as a “loss” compared to knowing Christ (Jesus)?

- **Important Note:** Those who truly know Jesus will obey him (*1 John 2:3-6*), and their desire will be to pursue the “kindness, justice, and righteousness” in which God delights (*Jer.9:24*).

4. Near the end of his life, Paul said: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”



What fight had he fought, or race had he finished? How would having Paul's view of a successful life change how we live our lives at work, home, and everywhere else we go?

Reflection & Application

- Do you yet know Christ (Jesus) who finished (successfully) his work of dying on the cross to provide forgiveness for sins, and rising from the grave to proclaim life for those who trust in him? If so, are you pursuing the kind of “success” that will allow you one day to say, like Paul, that you have fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith, or more importantly to hear your Lord one day proclaim “Well done good and faithful servant!”
(Luke 19:17)