

Defining Success in God's Economy

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THE ACCREDITATION TEAM WAS HEADED TO THE airport. The inspection was finished and hospital employees were gathered in the conference room to hear the hospital president's take on how the inspection had gone.

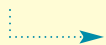
"Let me tell you a story," he said. "I'm walking down the hallway with the inspection team, and suddenly one of them stops Elsa (a food service worker) and asks her 'What's the mission of this hospital?'" The president beamed as he told the story. "Elsa looks this woman in the eye and recites our mission statement flawlessly. Not even a pause! Way to go, Elsa!" The room breaks into applause as Elsa blushes. The president then gives a reasonably upbeat assessment of the inspection.

Later, Elsa sat in the lunchroom with her friends, reflecting on her moment in the limelight. One of her friends asked her if the mission statement made her do her job better. "Of course not," she said. "I work hard because I want a promotion. I memorized that mission statement because my boss told me I had to...frankly, I think it's all a bit silly. Mission? That's suit-talk."

Are mission statements useful? Why or why not?

Are organizational (or personal) mission statements useful in setting our sights on the truly important matters? Why or why not?

What's your own personal mission statement?



Scripture Passages

Matthew 22:36-40

Matthew 28:19-20

Genesis 2:15

Micah 6:8

James 1:27

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Luke 12:13-21

Study

How people define success determines the course they chart for their lives.

If wealth is our measure of success, then pursuit of that wealth will necessarily occupy first place in our list of priorities. If healthy families are the way we measure success, then that will occupy first place. What we determine makes a life a success sets up our expectations, and we plan and work and even sacrifice to hit that goal.

Businesses have recognized this truth for years, making huge investments trying to get workers committed to a mission and vision statement. The hope is that workers

will become so focused on the objective—the corporate measure of success—that it will shape not only the nature of their labor, but also how much they're willing to sacrifice to hit it. What business leaders usually fail to recognize, though, is that most workers don't buy into slogans or mottoes. Unless the mission is obvious, moderately altruistic, and reflects reality, it becomes mere words with little impact. Most jobs and most workplaces no longer provide the kind of security necessary to garner worker commitment, and most workers find that work no longer provides the satisfaction they expected it would. So even when workers have the party line down, it often hasn't been incorporated into the priority, or even the creativity, of their lives.

Ignoring Scripture for the moment, describe how your company officially defines success.

Does your company's culture live up to its mission statement?

How would your family members (parents, spouses, children) say you define success in your life?

Thinking about how you spend your time and energy, what would you say is your mission statement? (Note: Be as candid with yourself as possible. Don't write what you think Scripture might say; instead write what you think your actions say is your definition for success.)

Now list ten ways you measure success. This can be ways you decide if others are successful or measures you apply to yourself, but try to think about what makes you think someone is successful.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

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9.

10.

Now let's examine how God defines success. Read the following Scripture passages and describe what each says about how God decides who's successful and who isn't.

Matthew 22:36-40

Matthew 28:19-20

Genesis 2:15

Micah 6:8

James 1:27

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Luke 12:13-21

These, then, are God's measures of success:

Do you love God?

Do you love others?

Do you tell others about your relationship with God?

Do you teach new Christians what you've learned in your own journey of faith?

Do you perform work that tends His Creation responsibly?

Do you treat people fairly?

Are you merciful?

Do you take care of those who need help?

Is your life permeated with evidence of your knowledge of Him?

Take a moment now to compare God's list to yours. How do the two compare?

Study the differences between your list and God's. How does your list keep you from accomplishing the things God uses to measure success? What steps do you think should be taken to make your list more like God's?

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- How we define success charts the course for our lives.
- Humans tend to measure success in terms of possessions, power and absence of stress.
- God defines success for humans on eternal terms: Are you a follower of Jesus Christ?
- God defines success in eternal terms, but He also has yardsticks for success here on earth. These include: how we worship Him; how much we know of Him; serving others; evangelizing and discipling others; caring for the weak and poor; and how our jobs tend His creation.