

Success?

Reflections
by the Pond
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WE ARE A RESULTS-ORIENTED SOCIETY. Our definition of success is based on tangible, observable results. Which means, of course, that we deem something successful when it is agreeable to human sensibilities. If a man or woman takes home a dependably large salary from their work, they are deemed successful. If a company is large and reports a substantial profit at the end of each fiscal year, it is deemed successful. If a church worships in a cavernous auditorium and weekly draws thousands of attendees, it is deemed successful.

In 1899 a congressman from Missouri, Willard D. Vandiver, inadvertently created the state's slogan by declaring, "I come from a country that raises corn and cotton and cockleburs and Democrats, and frothy eloquence neither convinces nor satisfies me. I'm from Missouri. You've got to show me."

Civilization as we know it did not begin somewhere in the Mesopotamian delta, but somewhere in Missouri. We all hail from the "Show Me" state, for we all judge success by what we can see.



Not unexpectedly this proclivity is transferred into our relationship with God—and most notably into the service we perform in His name. We determine the success of a pastor by the number of his parishioners, or the size of the church's budget. We determine the success of a missionary by the number of heathen souls converted, or by the number of churches started. We determine the success of every individual Christian by the tangible tick marks of his or her respective calling.

Thus we judge the success or failure of that which is otherworldly by worldly standards.

But God says that what He considers success is not determined by the numbers, but by our obedience to His will.

How blessed is the man who has made the Lord his trust,
And has not turned to the proud, nor to those
who lapse into falsehood.
Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired;
My ears You have opened;
Burnt offering and sin offering You have not
required.
Then I said, "Behold, I come;
In the scroll of the book it is written of me.
I delight to do Your will, O my God;
Your Law is within my heart."

Psalms 40:4,6-8

Even in our service to the Lord and His people, we are not to become preoccupied with visible, calculable results, but are to focus our efforts on *Him*. All that matters is that we are securely in His will for our lives. That established, worldly standards of success are not just irrelevant, but can become stumbling blocks to the one and only level of success that truly matters.

Most of us live only within the level of consciousness—consciously serving and consciously devoted to God. This shows immaturity and the fact that we're not yet living the real Christian life. Maturity is produced in the life of a child of God on the unconscious level, until we become so surrendered to God that we are not even aware of being used by Him. When we are consciously aware of being used as broken bread and poured-out wine, we have yet another level to reach—a level where all awareness of ourselves and of what God is doing through us is completely eliminated.

A saint is never consciously a saint—a saint is consciously dependent on God.

Oswald Chambers