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WHAT IS TRUE SUCCESS?

WHAT could be worse than failure? False success. After all, when you fail at some endeavor, you can take steps to correct the situation. At the very least, you can learn from the experience and resolve to do better next time.

False success is different. Under its influence you can think you are winning when in fact you are losing. By the time you see the need to change, it may be too late.

Consider an example. Jesus Christ once asked: “What good will it do a man if he gains the whole world but loses his life?” (Matthew 16:26) That thought could well apply to those who devote themselves to the pursuit of money and all it can buy—the epitome of false success. “Thinking only in terms of the next major promotion, making more money or acquiring more stuff, fails to feed the soul,” writes career counselor Tom Denham. “Simply measuring success in monetary terms is shallow and will leave you empty in the long-term.”

Evidently, many people today would agree. In one survey conducted in the United States, “having a lot of money” came in 20th in a list of 22 “contributors to having a successful life.” Closer to the top were such things as good health, good relationships, and a job that you love.

Clearly, many people can distinguish between false success and true success—at least when they are asked. It is more challenging, however, to make decisions that reflect the proper view of success.

HOW DO *YOU* MEASURE SUCCESS?

To test yourself, think about the following hypothetical scenarios.

Who would you say is truly successful?



☐ ALEX

Alex owns a business. He is honest, hardworking, and courteous. Alex's business has flourished, and as a result, he and his family live comfortably.



☐ CAL

Cal owns a similar business, and he makes far more money than Alex. In an effort to beat the competition, though, Cal has become a workaholic and has numerous illnesses.



☐ JANET

Janet is a middle-school student who studies diligently and loves to learn. As a result, she gets good grades.



☐ ELLEN

Ellen gets even better grades than Janet and is an honor-roll student—but she cheats on tests and has little real interest in her education.

If you said that **Cal** and **Ellen**—or **all four** individuals—were successful, you might be measuring success by results only, regardless of the means by which those results were achieved.

On the other hand, if you chose only **Alex** and **Janet**, you probably measure success by a person's character traits and work ethic. It makes sense to do so. Consider the following examples.

- Which is better for Janet's *long-term* welfare—that she get the highest grades or that she nurture a love of learning?
- Which is better for Alex's children—that they have everything money can buy or that they have a father who shows that he values spending time with them?

The bottom line: False success is based on image; true success is based on proper values.

Substance?

HOW TO ACHIEVE TRUE SUCCESS

The Bible encourages a proper view of success. It does *not* teach that success is attainable only by a fortunate few. On the other hand, it does not endorse the storybook fantasy that if you simply ‘follow your dreams’ all your wishes will come true. That notion—which is all too often spoon-fed to children from an early age—will likely lead to disappointment.

The fact is, real success is within the grasp of anyone—but it requires effort. Consider the following principles.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:

“A lover of silver will never be satisfied with silver, nor a lover of wealth with income.”—Ecclesiastes 5:10.

WHAT IT MEANS. A materialistic lifestyle does not guarantee satisfaction. In fact, it tends to do the opposite. “People whose primary motivations are financial are much more likely to be anxious and depressed than people who value strong relationships with others,” writes Dr. Jean M. Twenge in her book *Generation Me*. She adds: “Research consistently finds that money cannot buy happiness—after you reach a subsistence level, income is not significantly related to life satisfaction.”

WHAT YOU CAN DO. Set as a goal something more rewarding than wealth and possessions. “Guard against every sort of greed,” Jesus said, “because even when a person has an abundance, his life does not result from the things he possesses.” —Luke 12:15.



“My Former Success Was Superficial”

Timothy and Charlotte lived in a large home with many rooms. They had a number of luxury cars and took several expensive vacations each year. Yet, at the height of their material success, they gave it up. *Awake!* asked Timothy what changed their thinking.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:

**“Pride is before a crash, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.”
—Proverbs 16:18.**

WHAT IT MEANS. Ambition and conceit will not help you find true success. In fact, the book *Good to Great* notes that company leaders who have achieved long-term success “display a compelling modesty, are self-effacing and understated. In contrast, two thirds of the comparison companies had leaders with gargantuan personal egos that contributed to the demise or continued mediocrity of the company.” The lesson? Thinking too much of yourself is more likely to lead to failure than success.

WHAT YOU CAN DO. Instead of seeking prestige, cultivate modesty. The Bible says: “If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he is deceiving himself”—hardly an indicator of success!—Galatians 6:3.

What kind of work were you doing?

I worked in the music industry and in accounting. Charlotte was a chiropractic assistant, and she also worked in banking. Later, we opened four barber shops. I was considered successful in all these endeavors. In fact, I hardly had to work because I had others working for me. Eventually, though, Charlotte and I decided to scale back. We sold much of what we owned.

Why did you “scale back”?

We could sense that we were not truly successful. The excitement that accompanied each purchase would

quickly pass, leaving us feeling empty, unsatisfied, and unfulfilled.

How did you find true success?

As one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, I had always been active in the Christian ministry. Although for a time Charlotte and I were spending 70 hours each month teaching the Bible to others, the ministry was not actually the focus of our lives. So we sold our businesses and made ourselves available to serve wherever there was a need for more Bible teachers. Today we are serving at the United States branch office of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Since this is part

of our ministry, I receive no pay and no special recognition. We have what we need materially. But that is not the focus of our life.

Do you feel more successful than before?

Absolutely. My former success was superficial. What I have now is bringing me *lasting* satisfaction because I know that the work I am doing is helping to take the Bible’s message to people worldwide and is improving their lives.*

* Jehovah’s Witnesses do not receive a salary for carrying out their Bible education work.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:

“There is nothing better for a man than to . . . find enjoyment in his *hard work*.”
—Ecclesiastes 2:24.

WHAT IT MEANS. If you develop a strong work ethic, you will likely enjoy your work more. In her book *Teach Your Children Well*, Dr. Madeline Levine writes: “Part of feeling successful at something is being good at it and most of being good at something has to do with effort and persistence.” That includes having the resilience to deal with occasional setbacks.

WHAT YOU CAN DO. Work hard to become proficient, and do not give up when faced with obstacles. If you have children, give them (according to their age and ability) the opportunity to work through their problems. Do not be hasty to rush in and fix all their problems for them. Young people find genuine satisfaction—and acquire good training for adulthood—when they develop resilience.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:

“A live dog is better off than a dead lion.”—Ecclesiastes 9:4.

WHAT IT MEANS. If you work secularly, your job should be part of your life—but not your *whole* life. Really, how successful will you feel if you are at the top of your profession but lose your health or the respect of your family? People who are truly successful endeavor to keep their work, health, and family life in proper balance.

WHAT YOU CAN DO. Take care of yourself. Get proper rest. There is little benefit in becoming a workaholic who sacrifices everything—health, family, and friendships—for false success.



WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS:

“Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need.”—Matthew 5:3.

*What is it,
how can you
satisfy it?*

WHAT IT MEANS. Study of the Bible and application of its principles are essential ingredients in true success. In fact, millions of Jehovah’s Witnesses have found that putting spiritual matters first in their individual lives has *reduced* their anxieties over material interests.—Matthew 6:31-33.

WHAT YOU CAN DO. Learn how the Bible can help you to find true success. For more information, contact Jehovah’s Witnesses locally or visit our Web site, www.jw.org. ■