

Am I really succeeding?

Let us start this message by reading from the words of the Lord Jesus. The verse below is taken from the explanation of the parable of the sower; here the Lord was explaining why many people who have had the word of God planted and growing in their hearts may not bring forth fruit.

*"And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. Matt 13:22**

Deception

Please I hope you noted the phrase "the deceitfulness of riches" in that verse above; I wish to first explain the meaning of deception.

There is a beautiful little town called Kijong-dong in North Korea, within the demilitarized zone (DMZ), just across the border from South Korea. Contrary to what is believed to be the true situation of widespread lack and poverty in North Korea, a locked-in communist country, this village is quite beautiful, especially when looking from a distance. The lights go on and off, and the roads are periodically swept clean, but the truth is that the windows have no glass and there are no residents behind them. This façade, Kijong-dong, also called Peace Village, was built in the 1950's to give the impression to South Koreans that North Korea is a prosperous country where people would rather live. They were encouraged for decades through loud speakers from across the border to just walk across and be welcome as brothers.

But the people of the south and of the rest of the world know the truth –the village is a deceptive façade. The truth is that life inside there is that of loss of freedom and lack of hope. It is a society where God is not worshipped and where prosperity actually is so absent most people don't even know what it is. But how I wish we knew this truth about some things in life.

What people know of Kijong-dong is not known about material things and the outward trappings of success. People still think that once you get into material wealth, high political positions and popularity among humans, then you would have achieved happiness and satisfaction. They think that they are inferior persons because they are not rich and do not have a big title attached to their names. They feel inferior when they come into the presence of material 'success.' They look forward and strive towards material success. But it is all deception. It is very much like a South Korean wishing for the day he or she would make it to the North, just because he has been viewing Kijong-dong from a distance.

We are speaking from understanding the mind of God as revealed in the scriptures, so let us see what He said.

Money and Success

"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Luke 12:15 NKJV

No matter how you explain this, many just won't accept it. Your material possessions do not in any way say anything about your value in life. It is absolute foolishness for anyone to follow you because of your material possessions thinking having plenty means you are successful. Wealth and success are not the same things.

Success CANNOT be measured in terms of the amount of money you have or the political office you hold. In the world of finance a man's net worth is measured by adding up the values of the material possession and money he has; but such a calculation is a lie. A man's real net worth cannot be thus calculated; it is mostly invisible and spiritual. Many materially rich people are actually poor in reality. Remember true value is what God says it is, and not what Forbes tells us.

Success also cannot be described by the size of the congregation you have, or the number of the branches of your church. Being regional pastor or a bishop says nothing about whether you are successful or not. Whether it seems secular or spiritual, the title you bear is only the recognition of people concerning you; it says absolutely nothing about whether you are successful or not.

When Solomon tried to find fulfilment in the things people were pursuing and still do pursue today, he concluded they are vanity. He said it is like wind. It is empty. Success is not to be found in those things.

Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun. Eccl 2:11

Many times we observe people from far away (just like looking at Kijong-dong from the south), and we think their lives are so beautiful. C'mon, they have the beautiful trappings of life—the cars, the jewellery, trips abroad and you know, plenty of cash for all purposes, and we think they must be fulfilled. But it is a lie. It is hard to believe but it is true that they are just as miserable and as desiring of something better as the man observing them. Like they say, the rich also cry.

Rich, yet poor

Remember we are looking at the mind of God, and not human estimation. Yes, I recognize that someone will look down on you just because you do not have the right car or the right designer clothes. That is to be expected; after all, most people in the world are spiritually blind. You cannot adjust your life to suit the estimation of someone who cannot see. Make sure you assess yourself using divine measures. Many of the things that humans count as measures of

success are nothing but nonsense in reality. We know this by looking through the eyes of God who knows and sees everything.

Let's see the words of Jesus about a certain rich group of Christians.

'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. Rev 3:17

Those guys had fat gold accounts, houses, and such things; yet the Lord said they were miserably poor. Wow! Listen, if God says someone is poor, you had better believe it. No matter how rich the person feels, and no matter what the bank statements and investment portfolio say, the fellow is poor. You will discover it when the things that really matter come up. It is in the day of real trouble that you will discover who is rich and who is poor. One example I like to give is this: with the perception we had of Michael Jackson in matters of influence and wealth, who would have thought that poverty of sleep would kill him. The man died just trying to do what most humans do on a daily basis without thinking. He was paying some 200,000 US dollars a month to a doctor to help him sleep. If he had remained alive, we would not have known that on a comparative basis, an average person was 2.4 million dollars a year richer in that area. While trying to sleep, something went wrong one day and he died. For 200K dollars a month, he bought death and not the desired sleep.

Life has different kinds of challenges; it is in one of those days that God will prove to you that you are not rich even though the world told you, and you wrongly believed it, that you were rich. How I pray that you will accept divine perspective concerning these things. The things which matter in life are not these things most people are chasing about.

Treat it like wind

Please don't get me wrong; I am not saying wealth is bad, that it makes people miserable. No, no. Rather I am pointing out that having plenty and being materially successful do not add much of true significance to your life. I am saying that if you make those things the goal of your life you will end up miserable. If you marry a man because he is rich and can afford to give you all the 'cool' things of life, one day you will bite your fingers and wish you could reverse the days so as to unmake that decision. I am saying that we must treat wealth and material success like Solomon said we should. He said it is like wind. The thing about wind is this: if breeze blows on you by itself it is sweet, but if you were to say that because the feeling is nice you will start running after it, then you would be judged as insane.

Material and outward success do not constitute true success nor are they even the signs of it. They are the things that God adds to people as they follow Him and do what is right. If indeed God adds those things to your life, then you will enjoy them and be happy without regrets. For this reason pursue after righteousness, walking pleasing to God and God's purpose for your life; let Him those things to you at the appropriate time. The Lord Jesus summarized it thus:

But seek (aim at and strive after) first of all His kingdom and His righteousness (His way of doing and being right), and then all these things taken together will be given you besides. Matt 6:33 AMP

Real Success

If possession of material things is not real success, what then is real success?

I am addressing my message to Christians, and those who are ready to accept a life of being a true disciple of Jesus Christ. I am describing success to you from divine perspective.

Success, simply put, is a constant walk on the road that God called you to walk in. It is not a destination you arrive at and relax; it is a lifestyle you live. Note that it is a walk, and not a particular material achievement.

Success is the following of God's plan for your life. A successful person is in the centre of God's will for today; it doesn't say much about the person's achievements.

Success is not something you will attain to one day; it is something you make up your mind concerning and a thing you become by making the right and crucial decisions. It is something that you can do in a few moments and then discover the joy over the next period of days, weeks, months and years.

Your life has a purpose, and each season in your life has a purpose. A successful one is the person who is pursuing the purpose of each season and overall pursuing the purpose of life. Success is a journey. Each achievement is just a milestone on the road of success. Notice that I said the road of, and not the road to, success. You are successful if you are travelling on the right road and at the right speed. Success is not primarily about a destination, but about godly motion on the right road.

So you see a student can be successful, even though he or she hasn't yet graduated. A housewife can be successful even though she is not earning money to support the family. In the realm of reality, an employee may actually be more successful than the boss. Success is a spiritual walk and not a material attainment.

The most important place

For the child of God, success is in making progress first spiritually before any other thing. Spiritual success is in progressive improvement in conforming to the image of Christ. No matter what you achieve outwardly, if there is no improvement in your character as you are becoming more like Christ, you haven't succeeded at all. Even if you acquired all the money possible, the Lord would still look at you and say you are poor. He would describe you as wretched and pitiful. How many Christians have you encountered who, though rich or in high positions in life, have such a character that you are ashamed they are called Christians? A Christian who passed an examination through cheating hasn't passed at all in the eyes of God. He passed materially, but failed in reality.

In all our pursuits in life, the first thing that we must desire for ourselves is spiritual gain. I like something I heard someone say, that "the highest reward for a man's toil is not what he gets for it but what he becomes by it. It is that *becoming* that is the first realm of success in the life of the Christian.

Sometimes you see a woman who desires to marry (and sometimes you may see men do this too, though it is less usual), and the concern is how rich the spouse to be is. Can he provide for me the comforts of life? That is often the primary concern; but this is quite pitiful indeed. We are often more concerned about outward success than about true success. Wise women concern themselves first about true inner success. A man is successful as he is being conformed to Christ's image. As a child of God, that is of primary importance. All other things will be added to this.

You are successful if your life is progressively becoming conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ

Following God's plan

As we are making our progress in being conformed to the image of Christ, the next area of success is in living life doing the assignment of God for our lives. God indeed created each and every one of us for a purpose.

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
And before you were born I consecrated you;
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." Jer 1:5*

This verse above was the word of the Lord to Jeremiah, but we know from the scriptures that the same principle applies to every one of God's children. We may not all be prophets, but each one of us has a specific purpose for our lives. Real success can only be found as you walk in the will of God for your life. Not matter what you achieve elsewhere; it will not be considered success in the eyes of the Lord. You are successful only if you are doing what you are supposed to be doing at the time you are supposed to be doing it and at the pace that is pleasing to God. For this reason it is important you follow the leading of God in your life and get into the centre of God's will for you.

Many people ask how they can know where God wants them to be and what He wants them to do. To this I answer that if you really desire to follow His will and you remove worldliness and other gods from your eyes, you will discover the will of God. He will indeed lead you in the path of righteousness by Himself. *(Please let me at this point recommend that you get my book, "How to Work for God," to learn more about this. Also please listen to these series of messages: Man on Assignment, the Pursuit of Holiness, and The Life of Grace. The messages are available for free download from kwm.com.ng).*

God indeed has a specific plan for each person's life, and success is only possible within that plan. One day we will each come to the judgement seat of Christ and He will examine what we did with our lives.

Therefore also we have as our ambition... to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Cor 5:9-10

What you did, which was not in line with His plan for your life will not be presentable before Him. Many of the things that are in line with the plan of God for you may not be glamorous in the eyes of people, but remember that you are not serving them but the Lord. The Lord knows what He is doing with your life; He knows how much He values the thing that you are doing.

To close this I have an illustration to show how valuable little things can be. I learnt the story of Oswald Chambers, a man who even though he died at an early age of 43, left a treasure of teachings of the word of God which is still blessing millions today, almost a century after his death in 1917. It is interesting to note that almost all his available materials are available only because of the labour of his wife. She was an excellent stenographer who took down volumes of notes as he preached; it was those notes that were later published as his books, dozens of them. I am sure that it was not exactly a big thing then to be married to this itinerant preacher, but her life is affecting multitudes today even long after she went home to heaven. God knows how to make things count; and may your life also count in the name of Jesus.



**All scripture references are NASB, unless otherwise indicated*

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