SUCCESS AND THE CHRISTIAN
By: John Yuen

1. Introduction

What are some common descriptions of success today? Let me use two illustrations.

1.1 One time, three men were talking about the subject of success. One said, "Success is being asked to the White House to consult with President George Bush."

The second commented, "Success is being asked to the White House to consult with President George Bush, and when the phone rings, the president refuses to answer it because he is with you."

The third man added, "Success is being asked to consult with President George Bush, and when the phone rings, the president picks it up, listens, then says, 'Sir, it's for you.'"

Indeed, success today is often described in terms of position, power and influence.

1.2 Another story portrays a more modest description of success. A young man had been appointed president of a bank. Feeling grossly inadequate for the task, he approached the veteran Chairman of the Board. The young man said, "You know, I've just been appointed President. I wonder if you could give me some advice."

The old man uttered, "Right decisions!"

The young upstart had hoped for a more elaborate answer. So, he asked again, "That's really helpful and I appreciate it. But could you be more specific? How do I make right decisions?"

The wise old man simply responded, "Experience."

The young man asked yet again, "Well, that's the reason why I am here. I am not experienced enough. How do I get the right kind of experience?"

The old man replied tersely, "Wrong decisions!"

Indeed, a modest description of success is to say that "success is the child of lessons learnt from a multitude of failures".

Generally, the secular world views success this way: success is the attainment of some measures of money, fame, power and self-fulfilment. In Singapore, we embody all these aspirations in the quest for the 5 C's – cash, credit card, car, condo and country-club membership.

On the other hand, how have Christians been responding to these measures and definitions of success in the world? Let's consider some of them.

2. Some Christian Views of Success

2.1 Three broad views. One school of Christian thinking stresses that God wants all His children to succeed, especially in material terms. Many parts of the Bible have been cited to support this. For example in Josh 1:7-8, it says that "you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success".

In 3 Jn 2, the Apostle John says to the believers, "I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers."

Again in Psa 1:1-3, the psalmist affirms the blessed man that "whatever he does shall prosper".

So, the gist of it all is that it is God's will for His children to prosper. If we are not prospering and successful, the fault lies with us. We are either unbelieving toward God's promises or harbouring unconfessed sins in our lives. This kind of teaching is also known as Prosperity Theology. I have given you an article titled "Does God Want You Wealthy?" I trust that it has given you some ideas about this teaching, together with its weaknesses and strengths. Thus, I will not speak too much about it here, but move on to another Christian view of success.

A second school of thinking emphasizes the virtue of simple living.[1] Scriptural references include Lk 6:20 ("Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God"), Lk 12:33-34 ("Sell what you have and give alms … For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"), and 2 Tim 3:12 ("Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution").

A third broad Christian view of success bears the heavy mark of Calvin. It believes that all believers are to be upright, hardworking and spiritual. And the material success that follows is just God's blessing for their faithfulness in such conduct of living.

In understanding Psa 27:1 ("Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain"), Calvin (1958:340-42) has this to say:

> The Lord does not want us to be like logs of wood, or to sit idle. He expects us to put to use whatever abilities we may have … he warns them that hard work wins success only so far as God blesses our labour … whatever they attempt will quickly come to nothing, unless the grace of God alone sustains it and makes it to prosper.

The Puritans later subscribed to Calvin's idea of work as calling from God and service to God.[2] Hard work done was not merely to earn money, but to serve God in their midst. Sociologist M. Weber (1958:114-15) suggested that such Calvinist and Puritan emphases had unwittingly created a psychological pressure on believers to work zealously so that success at work could be proof to themselves and others that God was indeed present in and with them.

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[1] A strong advocate of this is Richard Foster.

[2] The Puritans were English Protestants in the mid 16th to late 17th centuries who subscribed to Calvin's emphases. They made a determined effort to inculcate true religion into the whole population.

Indeed, the desire to be successful in work is not so much to be earthly rich, but to give evidence that one is truly regenerated and belonging to God.

I'll now highlight the insights of some contemporary Christian thinkers.

2.2 Jon Johnston.[3] According to Johnston (1985:30), success is often perceived as the state of "attaining cultural goals that are sure to elevate one's perceived importance within that culture". This perception is unfortunate as it ties success solely to an elevation of power, privilege and wealth.

Johnston stresses that success in terms of ascendancy (i.e. having more and more; climbing higher and higher; moving up and up) does not necessarily imply that one is also excelling in life. He (Johnston 1985:33) draws up a list of contrasts between success and excellence:

> i. Success bases your worth by comparing with others; excellence bases your value by measuring you against your own potential.
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> ii. Success is the reward of a few though the dream of many; excellence is available to all though rightly understood only by a few.
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> iii. Success focuses on external things; excellence attends to the internal spirit.
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> iv. Success entices you to manipulate others; excellence encourages you to value others as the apex of God's creation.

Johnston (1985:49) is of the opinion that Christians are called more to demonstrate excellence than success in life. He sees an inseparable link between excellence and *agape* love. In fact, excellence is the way of *agape* love (1 Cor 12:31). Such excellence is within the potential of everyone because God Himself is the source and supplier of this excellence (Johnston 1985:51). The motive for excellence in life for the Christian is to grow in *agape* love in order to glorify God, and there are some things to note so as to view such growth in proper perspective (Johnston 1985:63-65):[4]

> i. To grow in *agape* love is not to be enslaved by a "bite-the-bullet" kind of obedience.
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> ii. To grow in *agape* love is not an ego-inflating legalism which you use to praise yourself for doing what is necessary to be on God's side.
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> iii. To grow in *agape* love is not to try and outdo others so that you can glorify yourself.
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> iv. To grow in *agape* love is not to be lopsided in life as a result of focusing on one area while neglecting other important aspects.

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[3] Jon Johnston is professor of sociology, anthropology and social psychology at Pepperdine University, and adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary; both of these schools are in California, USA.

[4] Interestingly, God's glory in Hab 3:3 is described by the Greek word for excellence (*arete)* in the Septuagint.

v. To grow in *agape* love is not to love others just to gain their approval.

The way to grow in Christian excellence and to experience God enabling you is to see life itself as a vocation. You strive to develop your talents and maximise your strengths so that you can serve others more effectively and with a greater capacity for love in the whole of life (Johnston 1985:71-72). To excel is to push oneself to a greater height, but at the same time, to be more gracious toward others when you are there. As Johnston (1985:163) puts it:

> As God increases our responsibility and prosperity, we must do more than say thanks and hoard. Our task is not barn-building and amassing a fortune. Rather, we must forever realise that we are given more in order to give more. Our tight fists must relax as we allow their contents to slip through our fingers and land on areas of severe need. These areas are close to the heart of God.

Thus, Johnston does not equate success with excellence. Rather, he prefers to view Christian excellence as using the success you have to express *agape* love to others to the end that God Himself be glorified. To Johnston, success cannot be on equal standing with excellence because success is very much externally defined while excellence is very much internally defined. Success enriches you with things while excellence enriches you in your relationships using the things you have. Indeed, he places excellence on a higher plane because it is this, not success, that draws one closer to God and others in life's journey.

2.3 Tom Morris.[5] He asserts that success is very much about "using our talents and following our hearts; true to ourselves and good to others" (Morris 1994:32).

In order that success be truly meaningful, one must have goals consistent with one's value system. Morris (1994:51) says this concerning the relationship between one's goals and values:

> One of the worst things that can happen in connection with goal-directed behaviour is for a person to take on goals from other people just to please them, or to benefit from their favour, despite the fact that the values and desires behind those goals are alien to his own value system and destructive for him to embrace ....

However, Morris adds that to have goals does not mean to have all your desires met. He (Morris 1994:53) argues:

> Drawing a clear distinction between desires and goals has a liberating result. We need not be bullied by our own desires. You can have a desire and not set yourself the goal of satisfying it. Desiring is not always up to us. It is not always within our control. But goal setting is. Once we see this distinction we can clearly see that an unsatisfied desire is not the same thing as a failure. You can be happy with many unsatisfied desires as long as you don't embrace them and set their fulfilment as a goal.

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[5] Morris is professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, and holds a joint PhD in philosophy and religious studies from Yale University.

Morris (1994:284) calls on each person to contribute and participate in this life to his/her fullest. And when these become the primary goals in one's life, then things like wealth, power, status, fame and enhanced self-esteem are enjoyed only as secondary consequences of success. Morris (1994:226) contends that success is excellence only if there is a good measure of balance, and he describes his perspective of excellence this way:

> The obligation of excellence ... does not demand *unreasonable* dedication to superior performance in everything we do. It just requires of us that we make the most of our time and talents in a balanced way as we live our lives. We should care about whatever we are doing. We should invest ourselves *wholeheartedly* in anything we choose to do, but that investment should be made *wisely* as well. A healthy human life involves many commitments, many interests, and many values ....

Put briefly, Tom Morris believes that to achieve success in life is to experience meaning by excelling in goals that are consistent with your value system rather than with your desires. And for the Christian, such excellence also strengthens the inner spirit since his/her value system is to be derived from God Himself.

Tom Morris terms the excellence that stems from competition as competitive excellence, and this is distinct from personal excellence. Competitive excellence is the "quality of rising out from the crowd" while personal excellence is that "quality rising out from one's own potential" (Morris 1994:224). Morris further stresses that "adversarial win is not the real good - it's the personal win". Put in another way, it is not good to try and win competitvely at all costs, even at the price of losing at a personal level (Morris 1994:227).[6]

Morris suggests that each person has the ethical obligation to excel in what he/she is doing. This obligation is not to be better than all others, but to be the best that one personally can be. In this light, he (Morris 1994:226) makes this connection between competitive excellence and personal excellence:

> Any goal of competitive excellence should ultimately be for us just a means to pursue personal excellence. We benchmark against others in competitive situations. We push them to push us to become the best that we're capable of being. But if we're pushing them properly, than they are being pressed to become the best that they're capable of being ....

2.4 Randy Alcorn.[7] He (Alcorn 1989:18) suggests that "there is a powerful relationship between a person's true spiritual condition and his attitude and actions concerning money and possessions". Can success in terms of achieving material prosperity be congruent with godliness then?

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[6] Examples of such personal losses are sportsmen who were penalised after winning a competition for knowingly taking performance-enhancing drugs. They suffered personal loss not only in terms of having their victory nullified, but also in terms of losing their integrity of true sportsmanship.

[7] Alcorn is pastor of Good Shepherd Community Church in Gresham, Oregon. He had also taught part-time at Western Baptist Seminary and Multnomah School of the Bible.

Contrasting Zacchaeus with the rich young ruler in the New Testament, Alcorn points out that the former was willing to let go his wealth while the latter was not. Hence, though Zacchaeus was wealthy, his god was not wealth; this is not so with the rich young ruler (Alcorn 1989:19). Indeed, the Lord accepted Zacchaeus not because he became poor in wealth, but he became poor in spirit, recognising his lack of righteousness in his abundance of wealth. When Jesus says that "you cannot serve both God and Money" in Mt 6:24, He is not implying that it is wrong to do so, but rather, it is difficult to do so. It is not as if God does not love rich people, but rather, rich people often find it difficult to love God since they already have too much to love materially - therein lies the idolatrous and adulterous nature of material wealth (Alcorn 1989:65).

Elaborating on the idolatrous and adulterous nature of material wealth, Alcorn (1989:54) says:

> Materialism begins with what we believe. Not merely what we *say* we believe, not our doctrinal statement, but the philosophy of life we actually live by. Hence, while any true Christian would deny belief in the philosophical underpinnings of materialism ... he may nonetheless be preoccupied with material rather than spiritual things and therefore in fact be a practicing materialist.
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> ... A materialist may be rich or poor, own much or own little, be a miser or a spendthrift. Materialism usually surfaces in one's life-style, but it is first and foremost a matter of the heart.[8]

Responding to the teachings of prosperity theology in some Christian circles, Alcorn asserts that the material blessings of the Mosaic Covenant in the Old Testament must always be interpreted in the light of the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant in the New Testament. He (Alcorn 1989:195) says:

> Notice that faith does not mean insisting that we get what we seek now, but believing we will get it later. Once again, this is in stark contrast to the now-centred nature of prosperity theology, which sees faith as a means of claiming immediate blessings, rather than eventual blessing. Following Christ is to see and welcome from a distance our eternal reward - not to expect to get it now. The great people of faith were looking for a country "of their own", better than anything earth could offer.

But having so spoken against prosperity theology, Alcorn qualifies that he is not against material success per se. Rather, "material things are valuable to the pilgrim, but only as they facilitate his mission" (Alcorn 1989:196).

Can success be measured in terms of material prosperity? Randy Alcorn prefers to rephrase the question this way: "How can we use material prosperity to lead us to real success?" To this, he answers that what is important is to handle material success with a pilgrim's mentality - to own things without being owned by them so that one is always ready to let go

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[8] In 1 Tm 6:17-19, Paul challenges the rich not to take a vow of poverty, but a vow of generosity in their life-style (Alcorn 1989:300).

and move on. A pilgrim in Christ is not one who is ascetic, but one who enjoys the world only as a "foretaste of something better to come" (Alcorn 1989:197). The pilgrim's philosophy is not to empty oneself of money and things, but to employ these in one's life to serve God and others here on earth (Alcorn 1989:304).[9]

Let me now attempt a brief evaluation of what have been said.

2.5 An evaluation. It has been repeatedly stated that success is more than just the attainment of material blessings; it also embraces the responsibility to live for God spiritually and morally in the midst of abundance and opportunities. One expression of this embracement is to regard excellence in terms of growing in *agape* love as asserted by Jon Johnston. His call is worth noting as it challenges one to pursue excellence with an other-centred focus - that is, with the aim of glorifying God and serving others. Indeed, to succeed in excelling, one not only pushes oneself to reach greater heights, but also to be more gracious toward others. However, Johnston needs to be qualified in that this graciousness toward others is not to condescend to them, but to empower them. To condescend to people is really to act in a way that indicates that one considers oneself as superior to them. This is really a subtle way of lording over others in the fashion of the world. On the other hand, to empower others is to share God's *agape* love by giving part of what one has been blessed so that others too can be similarly blessed.

Tom Morris does well to remind that success is only meaningful if it is in terms of attaining goals that are consistent with one's own values and purpose, and not what others have imposed upon him/her. But the big question for the Christian here is: "How do I know my values and purpose are any better than that of others?" Hence, Morris needs to be qualified in that the Christian must choose values and purpose that are in accordance to the teachings of Scripture. In this sense, one is quite assured of a balance - that is, excellence in mind, body and spirit so that "whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). Indeed, it is true that God does not fault one for working hard and putting in one's best efforts, but for having a wrong order of values and priorities. The right order of concerns will allow one to enjoy success in gaining wealth and esteem as by-products, and not embrace them as all-consuming goals.

Morris is also right to suggest that competitive excellence is desirable if it is viewed as a way which people employ to bring the best out of one another. After all, Paul does encourage Christians in Heb 10:24 to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds".

Morris also tries to draw a distinction between goals and desires. He says that while goal setting is within one's personal control, desires are not. This assertion does not seem to be true. In fact, it does seem that goal setting, which is often an external activity, can easily be imposed upon a person by others. On the other hand, desiring, which is very much an internal yearning, is often controlled by the stirring in one's heart. It is important for the Christian to note this lest he/she thinks that it is all right to have all kinds of desires since they are beyond

[9] This implies that one should not merely earn enough just for oneself. This is not being non-materialistic, but really, being selfish. Thus, if one can earn more to care for others, it should be done with one's best effort. Also, a pilgrim in Christ does not view savings and life insurances as acts of faithlessness. Such planning for "rainy days" is good if it is "only enough not to presume upon God, but never enough to avoid trusting in Him" (Alcorn 1989:352).

one's control. Also, Morris argues that since one cannot control his/her desires, it is all right to desire just about anything as long as one is prudent with his/her goal setting. In fact, he says that this will spare a person unnecessary disappointment and pain since he/she will not be hurt by an unfulfilled desire if he/she has not made its fulfilment as his/her goal in the first place. This thinking is certainly against Jesus' radical teachings in Mt 5. For example, Jesus teaches in that chapter that the one who is angry enough to desire the death of someone, has already committed a sin even though he has not made actual murder his goal. Also, in Ja 1:14-15, one is told that man is tempted by "his own evil desire" and this desire "gives birth to sin". The implication here is that desires are within one's control, and he/she indeed must learn to control them because desires cannot remain passive in a person. Desires that are unchecked often seek out their own fulfilment by arousing one to act in response to them. Thus, self-control is embodied in the fruit of the Spirit in Gl 5:22-23, and one exercises it to check the desires in him/her.

Randy Alcorn exhorts Christians to handle material success with a pilgrim's mentality - that is, possessing things without being possessed by them. This is good advice as it challenges people to empty themselves materially not in terms of renouncing things, but in terms of releasing things for others' sake. However, Alcorn needs to address those who with a "holier-than-thou" attitude insist that such releasing must always be seen as a privilege, not a sacrifice. In this regard, Paul's words offer good counsel:

> But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish .... (Phlp 3:7-8, NIV).

In turning from a persecutor of the church to an apostle of the church, Paul had to turn his back on many "profitable" things. These would probably include a promising career as a well-respected rabbi and its accompanying material rewards. In Paul's own words, he did indeed suffer loss when he chose to serve Christ. Such a loss could be regarded as a sacrifice in the sense that he had to forego some earthly profit in order to follow his choice. But such a loss or sacrifice is no pain at all for Paul. In fact, he considered it a relief because he likened what he had lost as unwanted rubbish. Thus, what is needed is not to deny the reality of loss or sacrifice, but to affirm that the loss of unnecessary baggages is a relief as it helps one to travel better as a pilgrim in Christ.

In light of all that have been shared, what then is an appropriate response to both the challenges and pressures of success in our world? Let me suggest a recovery of 3 biblical mandates.

3. A Response: Recovering 3 Biblical Mandates

3.1 The mandate to fight idolatry. To turn from God is sin. Often, we turn away from God and toward something else. This "something else" then becomes a substitution of God Himself and all that is due to Him. An idol then is anything that occupies the very centre of our attention and devotion when that place rightly belongs to God. Rather then submitting to God, the person submits to the values and priorities that the idol dictates. This is idolatry, and it is attractive because of two reasons:

> i. Idolatry is attractive because it will not make us stand out like strange people. We have a desire to be accepted and appreciated by others around us. Hence, we are often tempted to adopt the values and priorities of those whom we want to impress. We want to be like them.
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> ii. Idolatry is attractive because it is easier to trust in some visible things than in an invisible God. Faith in God is easy to talk about but hard to live by. It is easier to focus our attention on some visible things.
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> George Muller, the man of great faith who started an orphanage ministry in England many years ago, once shared this experience. He was praying hard to God one time because the money was slow in coming to support his ministry. Some time later, a cheque reached him, and it was almost the same amount as what he had prayed for. On receiving the cheque, Muller said of this struggle now emerging in him: "Once I have received the cheque, I find myself trusting more in the cheque than in God."
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> Indeed, it is often easier to trust in some visible things than in an invisible God. Hence, we push ourselves in the workplace, thinking that we are pursuing Christian excellence. But in reality, we are unconsciously adoring and desiring the visible rewards of material success.

But it seems to me that behind the idolatry of things that are external is the idolatry of something that is very insidious – i.e. the idolatry of self. The desire and need to prop up oneself with every appearance of success is more than an idolatry of things. We want all these things so that we can look good and feel good. It is an idolatry of self. That's why there is so much emphasis on having a high self esteem these days. I am not saying that a healthy self esteem is wrong. But I believe what is more needful is a healthy self acceptance that is rooted not in what we can or cannot do, but in God's grace unto us.

An idolatry of self is very intolerant toward personal failure. Hence, the person is always pushing himself to be successful or to look successful. This is good for self esteem. And failure becomes a sinful word in one's vocabulary. However, a healthy self acceptance rooted in God's grace will help us to understand that failure need not be something taboo in our lives. Denis Haack (1989:148) has said it well:

> All sin is failure, but not all that we call failure is sin. We're both fallen and finite … God is never pleased with our fallenness and is never displeased with our finiteness … When our failure is rooted in our fallenness, it is sin. But often we say we've failed when no rebellion against God is present: we have simply come up against our finiteness.

3.2 The mandate to rest. We are all very hardworking people - we work hard but enjoy frugally because we are storing up for the future. The Chinese call it the Confucian work ethics; the Christians call it the Protestant work ethics. Not a bad principle really, except that when it is taken to the extreme, you end up working all for the future that you fail to live the present.

Let me ask this: “Why did God take 6 days to create when He could easily create everything in one day?” In His work of creation, God is teaching us how to live well for the present yet with an eye on better things in the future. After each day of creation, God made it a point to pause and enjoy what He had created, saying, “It is good ... It is good ... It is good ....” After the creation of man, He finally exclaimed, “It is very good!”

So, God's work ethics is this - take time to pause and enjoy the “good” present while working for a “very good” future because life is a journey, not a race. To respond Christianly to success, we need to realize that faithfulness before God includes trusting Him enough to put aside our work regularly and rest in Him (Haack 1989:129).

3.3 The mandate to be a steward. Stewardship is not merely caretaking by maintaining the status quo. Since God has instructed humankind to “be fruitful and multiply”, stewardship requires that God-given resources be used creatively and productively.

Stewardship is also not merely giving out of our extra. A steward receives simply for the purpose of giving. Such generosity is to bear witness to the love, mercy and grace of God. In this sense, such generosity inherent in stewardship becomes the very antidote against prevalent consumerism today. In fact, our culture of consumerism today is an obstacle in the cultivation of a thankful heart. We are so focused on getting things that life becomes a competition to get more and more. It cultivates in us a desire to have and makes us believe that we will be better if only we have just a little more.

I want to encourage you today to do this one thing - *be a contributor instead of a consumer; share something with those having less.* By less, I don't mean just less materially, but also less in terms of lacking in friendship, companionship and guidance in life. What can we do as a person and as a church in terms of cutting out one non-essential thing/activity so that we can be a contributor instead of a consumer, and share with those having less?

4. Conclusion

4.1 A redefinition of success. The idea of success is often articulated in terms of competing for economic or material well-being. It will be simplistic to try and redefine success in a sentence, or even in a paragraph. A more biblical-theological redefinition of success requires that the following understanding be embodied in it:

> i. *Success has to do with a man pushing himself to do his honest best, but not necessarily ending up as the best.* It is not about winning over others though this can be a valid motivation. More importantly, it is about finishing well with integrity and dignity. Competition is for one to reach his personal best without reducing the worth of others. Competition is desirable if it is a way of bringing the best out of one another; of spurring one another unto love and good works.
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> ii. *The best from fallen man is still short of God’s standard, and hence, he is to depend on divine power to realise his God-given potential.* The stress on the indomitable human spirit is fallacious in that it pushes one to fight stubbornly

rather than to fail gracefully. There are times when the best thing a man can do to himself is to honestly and unashamedly admit to God that he has indeed failed. The gospel truth reassures him that he can fail, and yet be worthy before God because his failure glorifies the truth of God's grace and love.

iii. *The realisation of a man's potential is not only in terms of what he has achieved materially because what he has achieved relationally is just as important.* This emphasis on both the material and relational implies that a man must balance his pursuits in life so that these are in line with God's values and purpose. The relational dimension further implies that a man's potential is not so much about his independence of others, but his interdependence with others.

iv. *Hard work toward a better future is not wrong in itself, but it must not be at the expense of enjoying the good present.* The drive to work hard for economic well-being can result in a man always working restlessly for the future, but not relaxing restfully in the present. When he is always working so hard for the future, contentment becomes elusive because of the constant fear that there is not enough for the future. Hence, the so-called virtue of saving more and spending less may ironically be turned into a subtle form of materialism.

v. *Enjoyment is not only personal as it also embraces the responsibility to love God and others with one's material blessings.* The materially successful man has the spiritual responsibility to be godly before the Almighty and the moral responsibility to be gracious to the less fortunate.

vi. *A pilgrim's mentality toward material blessings enables a man to find his worth not in economic power, but in God's redemptive grace.* This mentality challenges him not to empty himself materially by renouncing things, but by releasing things for others' sake. A pilgrim does not see the need to compare and keep up with others materially. He only wishes to be economically viable, not economically superior, while he is still on this pilgrimage.

4.2 A closing caution. In Num 21, Moses made a bronze serpent at God's command when the camp was stricken by snakes as a result of God's judgment. Those who looked at the bronze snake were healed.

Years later, we read of King Hezekiah destroying the same metal object because the people were offering incense to it (2 Kg 18:4). The metal snake had been deified and worshipped as if it was God Himself – that's idolatry. What was once good had become ungodly. It did not happen overnight, but over time in small innocuous degrees.

Yes, there is validity in saying that success, especially material success, is one way in which God blesses us. But if we are not careful, success can be worshipped like God Himself when the gifts are desired more than the Giver. In our success-oriented culture, let us beware that very often, the greatest enemy of what is godly is not what is bad or ugly. Very often, the

greatest enemy of what is godly is what is good. May the Lord help us as we respond Christianly to the voices of today's success-driven society (**READ** Pro 30:7-9).

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