

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



August 14, 2016

The Measure of Our Success

If we want to be successful in life, it is important that we measure our progress.

But the metrics won't be worth much if our definition of success targets the wrong outcome.

“Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun” (Eccl. 2:11).

“One's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Lk. 12:15).



Our modern scientific age is dominated by metrics. Every detail of human life is governed by the mantra, “if you can measure it, you can control it.” Most of us carry that same mentality into evaluating success in our personal lives.

In prosperous Western societies, the most common metric for measuring success is *money*. People knock themselves out earning, saving, investing, and managing money. They closely monitor the stock market, and their moods track the swings in the market.

Some are more interested in *what money can buy*. Financially, they are not rich because whatever money they earn is quickly spent on houses, cars, clothes, gadgets, tools, toys, and other hot con-

sumer fads. Their success is measured by their inventory of stuff.

Others define their success by the degree of *power they have over others*. Climbing the ladder of prestige and position gives their lives purpose.

Some people find purpose in their *life experiences*. They explore exotic locales and pursue adventures that other mere mortals only read about in travel magazines. Their success is measured by the stories they tell and the photographs they share.

Finally, there are those whose success is measured by *what their ingenuity can create*: art, music, craftsmanship, scholarship. Their goal is to leave behind a legacy of work that will be remembered by future generations.

The problem with all these approaches to measuring success, however, is that they are so shallow and temporary. Our money can be lost in an economic collapse. Our possessions can be stolen or destroyed. Our authority will be eclipsed by younger and sharper people moving up the ladder. Old age will diminish our ability to pursue the adven-

tures or create the works that once gave our lives purpose. What then?

The author of Ecclesiastes learned that lesson the hard way. He had the privilege of chasing success in all these areas of life. After spending a lifetime building, accumulating, and learning, he arrived at the conclusion that none of it really mattered. It was all “vanity and grasping for the wind.” The things that he once thought would define his success were only illusions. He reached the end drained and empty.

Jesus knew that these approaches to measuring our life's worth were a dead end: “One's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.” Or as the NLT renders it, “Life is not measured by how much you own.” Yet most of us never get that memo, and go on chasing success using faulty metrics.

By the standards of the world, Jesus' life was a dismal failure. But He was not measuring his life by those standards. Instead, He used His time and talents to serve humanity, sacrificing everything to that end. If we define success as He did, we must do likewise.

– David King