

Criteria for Success

✖ What does success look like? How do you measure success for your life? Are there different criteria for every person's success? Who or what finally determines whether or not we have succeeded in life?

Responses to these questions will be as varied as the people who answer them. Most people desire to be successful, and have defined—consciously or unconsciously—what success means for them personally. But for Christians there are objective criteria for evaluating success. The most important of these is obedience.

The Scriptures teach that if we want to enjoy true success as God defines it, we must learn to be obedient to His Word. It is impossible to find our personal destiny in God without submitting our lives to the will of God as revealed in the Word of God. That doesn't mean we have to perfectly understand every verse before we can expect to become successful people. But obedience to what we understand to be God's will is necessary in order to live successfully.

Success will look different for every believer who is fulfilling his personal destiny, but it will have some common denominators, which the Scriptures teach are an integral part of God's criteria for a successful life. The first of these is obedience to the revealed will of God and a desire to cultivate that obedience even to the denying of personal desires and ambitions. Without the motivating force of obedience to God, true success is impossible, even if we realize our personal goals in life and receive the applause of people who credit us with success.

A few years ago I was crying over my failure to find fulfillment in a classical ministry lifestyle for which I had been educated and trained and in which I had walked for a

number of years. Raised in a minister's home, I had developed my criteria for success in large part from the values esteemed in my home. Being "used of God" meant serving on a church staff, preaching and teaching the Word, praying for the sick, and bringing souls into the kingdom of God. These were high priorities in the "success paradigm" that was formed in my childhood.

Besides this learned criteria for success, my own pursuit of God and consecration to obey His Word created a desire in my heart to serve Him in such a way that I would know I was pleasing Him and helping to build His church.

When it seemed that doors of ministry were closing and I was "forced" to make a living in a "secular" vocation, I felt defeated. The enemy of our souls took advantage of my situation, making me feel like a failure because I was not in full-time ministry. The ache in my heart was unbearable at times as I continued to seek God for His purposes to be fulfilled in my life.

As I lay in bed crying that night, I asked God to take away any desires for success that were not of Him and to cleanse my heart of ambition for ministry which was not part of His plan for me. In that moment, He came to me as a mother would come to tuck in a crying child.

I felt Him sit down on the side of my bed, lean over me and tenderly begin to reason with me through my tears. There was no condemnation in His voice. He said simply: "Carol, you value ministry. I value obedience."

That inexplicable thing that happens when we hear God speak a word to us brought instant peace to my heart and erased the emotional pain as if it had never existed. I felt secure in His love, recognizing that I was walking in the next step of obedience to His will that He had ordained for me. And my understanding was opened to His divine perspective of success.

I was set free from my limited concept of success, which had motivated me for years and caused me to experience both pain and a sense of failure when it was not evident in my life. I knew that I had yielded to Him to obey Him and that He considered my life to be successful because of my obedience. In that quiet visitation of God to my heart, the Holy Spirit redefined success for me for the rest of my life. Now I am convinced that whatever my task, if done in obedience to His will, it will bring me the satisfaction of knowing true success.