

## How to Wreck Your Life – Make it all about Success – OUTLINE FORM

January 21, 2012

Mark Statler, Pastor of Discipleship and Missions

Watch this message on [www.spwired.com](http://www.spwired.com)

### T INTRODUCTION

- Series – How to Wreck Your Life - avoiding pitfalls
- Last week's topic – MONEY. Money talks to us. This week it's success and what does success say to us that we often believe?
- Success is not bad...like other things that can become idols
- I believe God puts a desire to achieve, God desires for our lives to be successful in a variety of ways.
- I want to be successful. I want to succeed. I want to do well. I want to achieve and accomplish great things with my life. Equally important, I want you to think that I'm successful. I'm not satisfied going home today thinking to myself, *Wow, Mark, that was a fine sermon. Well done.* I want you to go home thinking to yourself, *Wow, Mark, that was a fine sermon. Well done.* I think we should just practice really quickly, just say with me, "Well done, Mark." You guys are great! Thanks for placating me!
  - 
  - Deep inside every human heart, there is this longing, this desire to succeed, to do well, to make something of our life, to make a difference in the world. It's a God-given part of what it means to be a human being. This is God's idea. Listen to what God said when He created the first human beings. ***"Then God said, 'Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness.'" We are to be God-like. "God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves along the ground.'" (Gen 1:26, 28 TNIV)***
  - In other words, you are here not to be irrelevant, not to be on the sidelines, not to sit back and watch life happen and someone else live it, you are here to participate in God's

creative rule over the earth, to be fruitful, to raise families, to make communities, to build cities, to lead societies, to shape cultures. Jesus told us to be salt and light...influencers in our world. You are here to steward your unique gifts and your passions in a way that makes a God-shaped difference in our world. That's success. Each one of us is made for it.

- But just like lots of very good, God-given things, when success gains a place in our life that dominates; when it is a value that is elevated too high, it can become an idol, something we worship in the place of worshiping God.
- 
- I find it difficult to identify the line where the desire for success moves beyond a healthy attribute into a danger zone. I believe that there are very highly successful people who are driven to succeed and yet they keep enough balance and perspective in life to keep success from becoming an idol. Please be sure that you are hearing me say that just because someone is successful in their business or profession that does not mean that success is something they worship.
- 
- AND it is not just highly successful people who worship this idol! Just because success may be elusive to some of us doesn't mean that it isn't desired and pursued to an unhealthy degree.
- 

#### **WAYS TO TELL IF SUCCESS IS AN IDOL**

- **Success may be an idol if your identity is overwhelmingly connected with what you have accomplished.**
  - Identity is always connected to what we do, what we achieve, and that's not a bad thing. But if you are hearing this voice in your head that says you are nothing unless you accomplish certain things, then you may be in the danger zone of making success an idol.
    - Ambition and achievement are good things, but if you can only value your worth by what you have produced,

created, earned, or accomplished then success may be an idol.

- There's a blindness involved here. If you are not able to identify yourself in other ways; as a child or parent, a follower of Jesus who received a gift of grace, an artist or musician or volunteer or coach or any number of other aspects of life, then your sense of who you are is out of balance. Success may be an idol.
  
  - Tim Keller describes a friend who had reached the top of his profession, but an addiction to prescription drugs forced him to resign his position and enter a period of rehabilitation for substance abuse. He said, "My life was built on two premises," he said. "The first was that I could control your opinion and approval of me through my performance. The second was—that was all that mattered in life." (Keller, Timothy (2011-10-04). Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters (p. 77). Penguin Group. Kindle Edition.)
    - His identity was totally wrapped up in his performance and he was blind to the fact that he had value or worth in ways other than people's perception of his success.
    - If you see some of yourself in this story, then you may be in the danger zone.
- **Success may be your idol if you only measure it by the externals.**
    - If life is about **comparing your position and possessions to others.**
      - Success talks to us and says, "Let's just see how successful you really are." It makes you compare yourself to others on the career track, the appearances track, the social track. It's about where you are on the ladder, or what you can make others think about you by where you are in life and what you have.

- I catch myself doing this... Greg Jones (former Dean of Duke Divinity) or Adam Hamilton (Pastor at Church of the Resurrection) are both about my age and in comparison I feel like a failure. The only way to feel better about yourself is to compare yourself with the way underachievers! The comparing game can go on and on – trap. God’s desire is not for you to experience life in a trap.
- Voice of success tells you that you are nothing if you are not out-performing your peers. Or it can tell you that you are the bomb! There is no one like you. You don’t need anyone else (or God) because whatever it is, you’ve proven that you can handle it. Either way, those messages are lies and we are making success an idol when we listen to them.
- **If you covet the success of others –**
  - Aaron this summer – After the tornado, my very good friend and co-worker, Aaron, was in constant demand. He had what he called his 15 minutes of fame...you know, the whole bro-hugging the President, etc. And I was really proud of him. He did a great job speaking for our church and for our community. But there was this part of me, this ugly part of me, that was jealous.
  - There was a voice in my head saying, “That could be you. Why isn’t that you?” That is the voice of success talking, telling me not to celebrate Aaron’s work, but to covet it. I recognized this in me and decided that the only way for me to get it out of my head was to talk to him and confess it. Which I did, and from that point I was able to leave it behind.
  - I was coveting his success...
  - I was visiting with my wife, Jennifer, about this message because I needed to get some feed back. I told her about this point and that I was planning to tell the story of coveting Aaron’s success. And that’s when

she said that she had just read an article in her Fitness magazine and maybe it related.

- She tells me it's in an article about how to shape and tone your rear end, and I think "What?" Anyway, she read it and I agreed...it fits. So here you go, from the Gospel according to fitness magazine...hear the word of the Lord for us today!

- Fitness Magazine: Butt article – final paragraph.  
*This mix of diet, cardio and toning will give you the best butt you can have. And that should be the goal – not J.Lo's or the one belonging to that woman putting her head behind her ankles in yoga class. "People say, 'I want her butt', but you can't have it and you shouldn't want it", says Dr. Marango. "Instead, within your own structure, maximize what you have". And that's something any of us, who is willing to get off her butt and move it can do.*

Moral – Don't be someone else's butt. Be the best butt you can be!!!

- Don't covet the success of others.  
Celebrate it. Then take this wonderful, amazing mixture of skills, talents, and gifts that you uniquely are and maximize it...do something fun and amazing with who and what you are.
- One more way to check on the idol of success...**What do you sacrifice for it?**
  - The voice of success will sometimes say to you that in order to be successful, you must pay the price....not just in the short term, but you will need to lay a hefty, long term sacrifice on the altar of success. Otherwise, you will never make it.
  - Willing to sacrifice your integrity? Want to be Christ like on Sunday, but will do whatever to get ahead in the office on Monday? Willing to deceive a customer or supplier to gain a

little more margin? Willing to fudge some hours or take credit you didn't deserve? Lay blame on someone else for your mistake? What about your family, your marriage, devotional time? You have to lay that ten minute devotional time with God on the altar of success because you will never be success without that ten extra minutes!

- Example from Jesus and Pharisees... the Pharisees were very high achievers. Worked hard to gain good reputation and gain position and standing. It would be unfair to put all the Pharisees in one boat, many were probably humble with great servant's hearts. Some, however, really ticked Jesus off because he thought they were sacrificing the integrity of God's purposes for their own personal gain.
  - **1 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 2 "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.**
  - **5 "Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries[a] wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have people call them 'Rabbi.'** 27 **"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything**

**unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. Matthew 23:1-7,27-28 TNIV,**

- Jesus is ticked because they have lost sight of their mission and purpose and success, power, notoriety, personal gain have become their god.
- Priorities you choose. God – Family – Work. Are you sacrificing your family on the altar of success? Jesus gives us pretty good guides on keeping our priorities in the correct order...**But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33 TNIV**
- He put it another way...**“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”[a] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Matthew 22:27-29 TNIV** Keeping these priorities will ensure that we don't make success or many other things an idol.

## CLOSING

- What Jesus is really telling us is that it's **ALL ABOUT THE TARGET. WHAT KIND OF SUCCESS ARE WE AIMING FOR?**
- OT Successes – Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Prophets
- NT Successes – Jesus, Paul, Peter
- Why are they successful in God's eyes...Faithful
  - Not faith as in “believe in”. Faith as in “TRUST”
  - They obeyed God's direction for life.
  - Not about what they did FOR GOD
  - What God was doing through them that they could not have done on their own.

We have a choice about the story of success. Which story of success will we trust?

- Culture's story. Success = prestige, power and possession
- Hollywood's story. Success = notoriety and fame
- Your own story. Success = what you want most to acquire

- God's story. Success = trusting and following God – not about earning anything.
- In almost every other aspect of life we are graded on our performance. Job review, P&L statements, sales quotas...
  - Success will say to you that you are a failure unless you measure up. And if you do measure up, success will tell you that you are all you need – it's ok to ignore your kids or spouse to get where you want to go.
- Good news -
  - Neither our successes nor our failures define what we are worth to God. God frees us from all of that. From the conceit of success and the shame of failure.
  - 
  - This is not difficult to see. We get this right? I think you do if you have children. You are excited for them when they succeed, but does that increase your love for them. (If it does, then you have a love problem). You may get disappointed when they fail, but do you stop loving them?
    - God has already determined that we are of extreme value just because we are his children. God loves us because God loves us. Yes, God hopes we will be faithful and obedient and as Jesus says, "Do even greater things". God wants us to bear fruit for his kingdom. But God's love is not greater or less than because of our performance. To God, we are all significant, important, worth it.
    - Movie – The Help. Movie set in the segregated south of the early 60's. One of the black nannies looks after a little girl who is neglected by her mother, who is striving to be socially successful. The nanny in the ways that count, has become this little girl's mother. Everyday the nanny says three things to the little girl and she tells her to always remember these three things so the child knows something of unconditional love and her own intrinsic value because that is not something the child's mother provides.

- In one of the scenes late in the movie, the nanny has just been fired. **Insert clip from “The Help”.**  
**2:15:21-2:16:34**
- She whispers words of love, “You is kind, you is smart, you is important”. Remembering that to God we are worth it, important, regardless of our performance is the antidote to asking the god of success to help us define our value.
- In the world the voices of success say “you are nothing” Unless you have everything, you are a failure. The world tells us we cannot fail because nobody likes a failure.
- You can believe that voice – or you can Listen to God’s voice.
  - Successes or failures....God does not determine our worth on our accomplishments. He calls us to follow so God can accomplish amazing things through us, but our value to God is nothing we can prove or lose. It just is.
    - PS 139 – we are fearfully and wonderfully made
    - RMS 8:37-39 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, **[m]** neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39** neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (add “neither our success nor our failure” to the list)
- God wants us to be successful – allow God to do things through us for others in this world. The idol of success tells us we must achieve to be found worthy, But God

does not pour out or withhold his love for us based on our performance/achievements.

- God says over and over in a wide variety of ways.... You is kind, you is smart, you is important....you are mine, you are loved, you are significant.
- That is your good news....