

What Matters to God: What it looks like to have a successful life in God's eyes

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Today we are going to be talking about what it looks like to have a successful life in God's eyes. What matters to Him when He looks at the way we live. So let's open in a prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Lord God, I ask that you just be with us during this time. That you let us know that you are present here with us. There are so many times in our life where we feel like what we're doing just doesn't matter. It's hidden, it's unseen, and it feels like we're going nowhere.

And I pray that you would just blow up those thoughts in that narrative in our head during this session, that you would show us what you care about, and that you would give us confidence that the lives that we are living right now, no matter how small they seem, no matter how fruitless they seem, that we would have confidence that they matter to you, that you can do something with them and they matter in eternity.

Pray this all in your Holy Name. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The Only House

So I often think about the lives of my grandparents and how much has changed between the time that they were born and now. And a ton has changed. So much has changed. They actually lived through probably most of the change that we've ever seen in human history. But when they were born, they were born in about 1920. They were born into a depression. They were born into a world where most of our modern comforts did not even exist. The car was just becoming something common, let alone the computer or the iPhone.

They fought World War II. They came home with those mental and physical scars, they got married. They raised big families in small houses, and many of them worked multiple jobs just to make ends meet for their family. In a lot of ways, they built the economy that we have enjoyed for so many years.

And it has always struck me that my grandfather died in the only house he lived in as an adult. When him and my grandmother got married, and they got married young, so it was a long time ago, they got a small house and my grandfather added onto the house as they had more children. And so it ended up going from a place that could hold two adults, to a place that could hold them and their 10 children. And here's the thing.

My grandparents were not famous. They didn't have a lot of money. They didn't live a lavish lifestyle. They didn't travel a lot. They actually lived most of their life within the square miles of Homer, Louisiana, which is a small town on the coast of Louisiana. Most people have never even heard of it. And yet they loved God. They had a prayer life. They loved each other, they loved their children, and they were never alone. I actually used to joke that I bet they wish they had some alone time, because even in their old age, their house was always filled with their visiting children, their visiting grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren.

No, their life wasn't perfect. They had many struggles and many trials. And I'm sure at time they felt like they were going to be buried in the chaos. And yet, as I look at their life, I can see that it was a good life. That they, in their hiddenness, in the smallness, in the ordinariness of their life had what so many people want. Happiness, joy, love, and contentment. I often think of their pantry filled with Peter Pan peanut butter and the smell of gumbo that just filled their small house as more bodies than could fit in the kitchen, got in line to fill their bowls during Thanksgiving. It truly was a happy place.

On Wanting To Be An Influencer

And yet I wonder how it would measure up to our modern standards of success, because they had nothing that we count as success today. They didn't have the money, they didn't have the fame, they didn't have the lavish lifestyle, they did not have the benefit of travel. And those are the things that we seem to value today, right?

About 100 years later, the number one job people want is influencer, right? Someone who gets paid to show their lives online, to sell things online, to show how beautiful their home is online, how great their life is, how well they travel, what their kids look like. To show their entire life to the world. The number one thing young people want as they get older is not a family, right? It's not even necessarily a steady job that just allows you to have a decent life. It's fame and it's riches. Millions and billions.

Because we can see people with that and it looks like success. And so when I think about my grandparents' life compared to the life that most of us want, theirs just doesn't measure up. And I can say even for myself that I fall into this. And yet when I think about what really matters, I think about them. I think about my dad's parents and I think about my mom's parents, and the small glory that was their life, and the legacy they left through their big families.

So when every facet of society screams that for our lives to matter, it has to look good, right? A lot of people have to see we all have to have a lot of followers. It can make it feel even more like what we're doing in our homes doesn't matter. That there's bigger things, that there's more success that we should be doing more and more. And if we were doing those things and achieving them, if we were hustling just a little more, then our lives would matter and that we would be happier. And yet the statistics do not bear that out, right?

My parents' generation and my grandparents' generation were happier than my generation and the generations below me, even though they had less and they endured more hardships. And yet we have more at our fingertips than we have ever had before, and we are less happy, more cynical, and our mental health instead of going up is going down. So it seems like we are

missing something. And so the question that I want to pose today is this, what matters to God? And what does He count as a successful life? Because if we can answer those questions that can actually help us inform the way we choose to live and make us feel maybe a lot better about the life we're already living.

Maybe we're already doing really, really well, and it's only up to us to open our eyes to see it, right? So how does God see us? What matters to Him when it comes to the way we live? The scriptures actually tell us over and over again.

1 Samuel

So let's just look at a few examples of those. All right? The first one comes from 1 Samuel 6. Now, what was happening in 1 Samuel? All right, Samuel, who was the last judge of Israel and also a prophet. So he heard the voice of God and was able to speak God's voice to the Israelites, had anointed the first king of Israel, King Saul. Saul was handsome, he was successful. He had everything in the eyes of the world going for him. And yet in his heart, God could see that Saul was not about God, but Saul was about Saul. And when Saul disobeyed God, going against some of His orders, whenever he was at battle, God removed His anointing from Samuel because He saw that he did not love God the way he should. And He chose to anoint someone who would be after his own heart.

And so Samuel goes out into Israel to find the person that He would, that God would anoint to become the next king of Israel. And he goes to the house of Jesse and Jesse calls all of his sons who were warriors and impressive to the world. And as Samuel goes to each one of them, God says, "No, it is not him. I have not chosen him. I have not chosen him." And so Samuel looks at Jesse and says, "Do you have another son? Am I missing someone?" And Jesse says, "Yes, I have another son, but he's just a shepherd. He's just the shepherd boy in the hills." And Samuel says, "Go and get him." And so Jesse brings his son David down. And in the line of his brothers who seemed much more impressive than he, the Lord says, "It is him, anoint him."

And it says in 1 Samuel 16, that man looks at the outward appearance, but that the Lord looks at the heart. And so that is the first thing. The Lord does not care what our lives look like if our hearts are not for Him. Saul seemed to have a great life. He could have been an influencer on social media. David's life was hidden in the fields. And yet in those fields, David fell in love with God and he set his heart after God. And so God set His heart after David because that is what matters to Him. And so that is the first thing. When we are looking at our own lives, are they successful? Do they matter? Will they bear fruit? The question is, where does our heart lie? What has captured our hearts? Is it the world? When we think about ourselves are we about us first and foremost, our own happiness, our own success, making our lives appear good? Or are inwardly, are we developing a heart that is deeply in love with God regardless of what the world says? Because that is first and foremost what matters to God.

The Book of Micah

Right, the second thing that we see, if we were to go to the Book of Micah. This is one of my favorite verses, right? The Lord speaks about a place. Not about a person, but about a place. And this is what He says. He talks about Bethlehem, right, where David is from. But

Bethlehem was nothing in the kingdom of Israel. A small Podunk town, similar probably, or maybe even smaller than a place like Homer, Louisiana. And this is what God had to say about Bethlehem. Said, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you were small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come from me, one who will be the ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times." All right, so God did not choose the biggest flashiest place from which to bring forth His son. He chose a small, forgotten, hidden place because the Lord likes to use things that seem hidden and forgotten to bring about His glory. And so now, where do people want to go when they travel to Israel? They want to go to Bethlehem. They want to go to the place where Jesus was born because God uses what is small and unseen to bring glory to Him. So whatever you think is small and unseen in your life, if you are doing it with a heart after Him. If you are doing it out of obedience to Him, you can bet that He is going to use it in a way you cannot even imagine for your glory. And you might not even see it on this side of heaven, but He will eventually give you sight into it because that is how God works, right?

The Story of Eleazar

And the last thing I wanted to draw out from the Old Testament is the story of Eleazar. Now, Eleazar was an old man who lived during the time of the Maccabean Revolt. He was well respected among the Israelites. He had had a good life. He had taught in the temple. They knew him. They respected him. And yet, whenever another king tries to tamp down on Jewish practice, the government tries to force him to go against God's laws and eat pork. And he absolutely refuses. He says, "No way." And he goes up to get tortured.

'Cause he refuses to compromise his values instead of obey God. And so the guards come to him and they say, "Hey, if you just pretend. Like get some different meat. Don't eat the pork, get something else, and we'll let you go because we like you." And he said, "No, absolutely not. I will not die in this defilement." And this is what I thought was so interesting. The guards started to treat him poorly because they thought he was crazy to turn down such an offer. Because in the eyes of the world, obedience to God does not matter. Saving our skins, saving ourselves, and serving ourselves does. And yet, if you look at the history of Christendom, if you look at the history of the Israelite faith, Eleazar is held up as someone who was to be respected and honored because he died a brilliant martyr's death.

God used what the world thought was crazy to glorify Himself and eventually hold Eleazar up as honor. None of these things seem to matter in the eyes of the world. And yet God sees what is hidden. And in those hidden moments through our obedience, He uses it to honor Him and to elevate us as well. Those are the things that matter to God. And what kind of life matters to God? Right, yes, one with a heart that obeys Him. But also He tells us in Jeremiah 6, He says, "Stand by the roads and look. Ask for the ancient paths where the good way lies, and walk in it, and find rest for your souls."

The Lord Sees Us

See, the Lord has already given us His wisdom. And yes, His wisdom can be found in modernity, but modernity cannot give us His wisdom. They're not going to give us something new. And so if we are willing to dive into His word, to dive into His life and learn from Him, we will find the way the good way lies, and we will walk in it, and we will find rest for our

souls. We see this in the life of St. Joseph who seems in a lot of ways to have had a fruitless life, right? He was Jesus' foster father and then he died. Like that's pretty much what we know about him from the scriptures. And yet the church upholds his life as a beautiful example of quiet, small faithfulness. We see this in the lives of the saints. St. Thérèse died at 24. No one knew who she was. The sisters even said like, "What an unremarkable life." And yet God used the heart of a daughter who was for Him in the hidden corridors of a convent to become most one of the most beloved saints in the world, bringing so many people to know Him. That is how He works. And so as you are listening on the other side of the screen, I just ask you, what do you think matters?

When you go about your day and you're doing things that might seem hidden, or small, or fruitless, and you jump online and you see other people whose lives seem so much bigger, grander, successful, effective, what are you tempted to tell yourself? Because the Lord wants you to know that He sees the heart. That He recognizes obedience. That He sees what is small and weak, and then He uses that to give Him glory.

So rest assured the small things you were doing, they matter. They're preparing you possibly for something bigger. Possibly for looking at your life on the other side and seeing just how much it mattered. So grab hold of that today. Take the monotony, take the repeated sacrifice, take the things that you think no one sees to God and offer it to Him as a sweet scented sacrifice of worship, because that's what He cares about. And if you build your life on those small steps, you will get to the end of it and you will look back and say, "Yes, that was success. That was good, that was love because that is what mattered to God." Let us close in prayer.

Closing Prayer

The name of the Father and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen. Blessed Mother, the Lord gifted you with years of hiddenness where you got to experience St. Joseph, and Jesus, and those treasures you get to hold in your heart that we'll never see because they mattered so much. 30 years of Jesus' hidden life that were just as important in eternity as the ones that we know about. That built Him up. That built you up. That built St. Joseph up to become the Holy Family that can offer us the model and example of what it is, what a good life is.

And so I ask you in a special way, and St. Joseph, you in a special way, as the parents of our savior who have these hidden moments that you know about, that matter, to teach us what matters to God. That you would pray for us. That we would have the graces to follow that example, and that we could just take joy in our lives in the small things. Because God, you are faithful. I pray this all in your Holy Name. Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.