



Two Sides of the Coin of Success: *Notes for a Commencement Address*¹

Ted Ward

Greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and on behalf of your brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. Today marks a significant accomplishment, a worthy prize, an evidence of competency, dedication and perseverance,

At such an occasion I view the tasks of the Commencement speaker as follows:

1. To increase the solemnity of the occasion.
2. To distract you from your light-hearted merry-making just long enough to get a few sober pictures made.
3. Hopefully, to say something significant enough to help you remember this occasion with a bit more substantial spiritual focus.
4. Perhaps most important: **to make it short and get out of the way!**

I'm starting a new career today. I have studied the really great money-making opportunities for a person of my talents. Public-speaker-for-hire. I have observed that the real money is in lectures and seminars about **success**. One has to start somewhere. While this may not be the real money yet, I'll start practicing on you.

The Two Sides of the Coin of Success

I need to tell you a *Grampa Story*.

My grand-daughter, Genna. Even in her earliest years hospital life was familiar—her parents are Dr. Sarah and Dr. Dirk. She felt that somebody ought to invent a better way to do the finger poke for lab tests so that it wouldn't hurt little kids so much. Her mother said, "Why don't you think about that problem and maybe you can invent something." Next day: "You know, Mom, I've decided to make something that will solve that problem about the blood tests—but it's going to be especially hard to do. I make most of my inventions out of paper boxes and toilet paper tubes. For this one, I think I'll need a computer."

Genna is showing the **key attributes** that lead to success:

- I can use my imagination to deal with problems.
- I can dream.
- I can create.
- I have resources.
- I can seek out yet more resources.
- I know that solving problems gives meaning to life.
- I am a problem-solver because that's the way God made me.

¹ Ted Ward. Two Sides of the Coin of Success. Notes for a commencement address. Lancaster Bible College Commencement, May 9, 1997

Many people trap themselves in a **non-success syndrome**:

I don't know how.

I don't have the talent.

It will cost me too much.

It's too much work

I. The Success Culture

Ours is a success-oriented culture. We wear emblems of success proudly: cars, boats, houses, clothes (especially clothes with labels on the outside), beautiful faces, and slim physiques. But the quest for success, the need to appear successful, is by no means just a characteristic of the Western World. It is rapidly becoming a characteristic of Korea, Japan, Latin America, parts of Africa, and many others.

Even college experience is put to the test of success: grades, awards, letters, sweaters, and diplomas. And **jobs**, jobs that pay money. **Real** money. Surely more money than our professors are paid!

Even parents get into the success game: "What jobs can your graduates get?" Even people from down the road toward Virginia ask the question: "Will my daughter be more likely to get a prestigious job with a degree from Lancaster Bible College or Stanford?"

We live within a culture that is obsessed with Money, Entertainment, Status, and Symbols: especially Possessions. How does a college education relate?

II. College Education as a Gateway to Success

Yes, a college education can make a difference.

Good jobs? True

Status? True

The "right credentials" . . . the "right networks"? True

Most important: a **broader and more well-reasoned background** and a developed competency in **perseverance, persistence, and patience**.

--- But these matters deal with only one side of the coin of success---

III. Christian Higher Education as the Maturing of Values:

1. Along with the broadened perspective, discernment and wisdom:

What is true is what is important.

--- Here we look at the second side of the "coin of success."

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Matthew 6:33

2. Refinement of values into true Christian perspective. (*The Upside Down Kingdom*, Kraybill)
The first shall be last and the last, first. Matthew 19:30

3. We learn to reject "the Success that defeats itself". Success that is not truly success:

Success that serves its own self-centered ends.

Success that is so much a matter of self-fulfillment that the concern for God's purpose is simply squeezed out.

Success that steps on others when they get in the way.
Success that accumulates but does not share and help.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Matthew 6:20,21

4. There are many wealthy Christians, but very few are as wealthy as they could be. Christians often make the deliberate choice NOT to value wealth, prestige, and fame.

Jesus, to the rich young ruler: *“If you wish to be complete, go sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property. Matthew 19:21, 22*

IV. Life Brings Many Tests of Our True Worth.

Not all is sweetness and light. There are **hard tests**, and there is **pain**.

Real success is best measured by our **competencies in handling adversity**. Matthew 20: 20-28 records an embarrassing moment created by a very proud and happy mother. (Does that ever happen?) James & John, Zebedee’s boys.

Mom: “My boys deserve some real prestige and honor, don’t you think?”

Jesus: “Maybe so, but I think you are missing the point. In our family, each is successful, but each one has been severely tested by adversity and pain. It is in the strength, integrity, and the exercise of faith when all around are saying, “You are defeated; there is no way out,” that true success shines. *A wise man . . . Built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house and IT DID NOT FALL, for it had been founded on the rock.*” Matthew 7:24

Finally, “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worth of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. The things you have learned a received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.” Philippians 4:8-9