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WHAT'S GOD'S DEFINITION OF SUCCESS?

Learn how to love deeply, go out and do it, then teach others how to do it.

How do we define success? In the world, it's what appears on our CV – but we never learn anything from worldly successes except how quickly you can learn to be proud.

What would be the heading of your job application for the job of a disciple? Would it be very different from your actual CV? Yes - it won't be your degree, the languages you speak, your work experience. What's Jesus interested in?

There were no CVs for the role of a disciple- Jesus loves us too deeply for that. Parable of the pearl- kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls- sold everything and bought it. The man is Jesus, we are the pearl of great prize- **He is seeking us.**

Is everything that looks as if it's good, good? Can we be just *just* doing what appears to be good? Is it always holy and pleasing to God?

Is it always good to help someone, to give money away when people need it, to carry the burden of others, to help the poor when they present themselves to us? Was it good, was it just, that the world food programme feed up to 50% of the population of Zimbabwe, keeping Mugabe in power and causing greater problems in the long term? Is it good to sponsor a child in a village when that's the only child being sponsored? Is Fairtrade ethical? Is it good to give agricultural aid to a country when it prevents farmers in that country from making money? Paying off debt off a country without ensuring leaders do something to tackle spending? Giving foreign aid to countries in need when there are so many people in need in this country? **Is it good to give money ever to large relief agencies?**

When is love just? When is good, bad? What constitutes a living sacrifice?

Start in the garden of Eden – forbidden to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, had the freedom to disobey. Why was the fruit forbidden – they could, if eaten, establish their own moral standards, make decisions as if they were God. They would not only think we know as well as God does, but reckon that Jesus isn't needed to bring about change in people's lives. Only the tree of life bears fruit that Jesus is pleased with. Fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil **never** brings fruit pleasing to Jesus.

First wrong choice in the garden was to **hide** - which introduced shame.

Biblical position– corruption of Man and guilt that we are born with.

Wesley- "I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin did my mother conceive me;"

Lutheran – bear shattered shards of God. Even the good of humans is faulty, weak – even altruism is egotistical.

All good is derived from God alone, not through humanity.

Any person can do good works, but it comes from a heart that hates God.

If man is not totally depraved, then he is totally corrupt.

All these good works – John Stott ‘Good works are indispensable for salvation – not as its grounds or means, but its consequence and evidence’

What are the good works in God’s eyes?

Good Samaritan – what would have happened if he’d seen another man lying? Does it make a difference if one is young/old, good/evil, both evil? If one was Christian, one Muslim, one British, one African- one donkey, how would he choose? HOW DARE he choose- who are we to play God. How often do we play God in the choices we make? Parable of the Good Samaritan was followed by Jesus in the house of Mary and Martha – only one thing is needed, to sit at my feet and hear from me.

There can never be anything lasting, holy and pleasing to God, except through the tree of life.

Without faith, it is **impossible** to please God – Hebrews 11.6.

To please in the sense to render good service to a holy God- without good faith we cannot please God. All our righteous acts are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64).

Parable of the true vine- John 15 – man remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit – apart from me, you can do nothing.

How many good and just causes are proposed in the world – churches, charities, in the media – are actually doing anything other than drawing resources away from our true calling?

Make poverty history – God said this would be impossible, Jesus confirmed it. Why does he say this? He saw the hardness of our hearts.

IF the fruit **isn’t an increase in Christ**– if we’re not called to something, we shouldn’t be doing it- it’s not love and it’s not just.

How do we bear fruit? We obey his commands. We are Jesus’s friends if we obey his commands, therefore we are not if we don’t.

1 John 3.17 – how can the love of God be in people if we don’t help those in need? **It can’t be in them.** The only good can come from clear obedience to God.

We are given both general and specific orders:

General orders— things to do all the time- feeding the hungry, praying for the sick, inviting strangers into our house, visiting prisoners.

Specific orders— to do good works which he has prepared in advance for us to do. Which good works? Should we just do the type of good work that Jesus did?

Just because Jesus did it doesn't mean we are called to do it.

Sometimes **we think we know** what to do so we don't bother to ask Jesus.

Bartimeus- Jesus asked him 'what do you want me to do'? Asks to heal his eyes – but had he thought through the consequences?

The invalid at the pool of Bethesda. Crippled by victim mentality. Jesus asks him if he want to get well. What he's really asking him- do you realise how much your life will change? Jesus doesn't offer him kind words or a gentle awakening- he says **GET UP**.

So rip up your WWJD wristbands. It's not about what Jesus would do – what is Jesus doing **RIGHT NOW**. What would Jesus have us do **RIGHT NOW**?

Instead, WJRSTOT – **would Jesus really spend time on that?**

Just doing what Jesus did isn't a good basis for justice-

Matthew 7:21 – not everyone who says Lord will enter heaven, but only those who *did the will of my Father* will enter heaven.

Have you asked Jesus the **specific things that he's asked you to do – or are we just bumbling along doing the things you think he'd want you to do? Has he spoken to you?** Why aren't you hearing from God if you're not?

How can we obey him if we don't hear him? This isn't about obeying out of duty, but because *we can't imagine doing anything else for the God who showed us so much love.*

'If God was to cut into any 24hr period of my life, he'd find sufficient evil to send it to hell forever'.

We obey because we love him so much that our whole life is given over to pleasing him. Every second, minute, hour, week – **Lord, what next, who next, where next?**

But we give something far less than this full on love- not the living sacrifice that God longs for.

We want a bit of God on our terms and then get on with our lives- nothing too inconvenient, nothing that changes things too much or makes us stick out. We want others to accept us just as we are.

Being *anything else* but all out for Jesus is radically *dangerous*. What we want is a bit of Jesus and then the material stuff as well – career, enough money to feel secure, some significance in the eyes of others.

Either **all in or not in at all** – all or nothing. WORSE than nothing – he'll spit us out if we offer half love, half service, half sacrifice.

Reconciliation – in the parable of the prodigal son, the father runs to his son, who's standing there in rags, having prepared little speech with no apology just to get a job. The father throws his arms around him and **kisses him and kisses him and kisses him** - and his son never wants to leave his arms again.

In Eden – after Adam and Eve had eaten the apple, God calls for them. God **knew** where they were, but was calling *WHERE ARE YOU*- passion of that broken relationship. Where have we gone from the God who loves us unconditionally?

'But now, the Lord himself comes forth to Adam, and note how he comes. He comes walking. He was in no haste to smite the offender, not flying upon wings of win.... But walking in the garden. In the cool of the day- not in the dead of night when the natural glooms of the darkness might have increased the terrors of the criminal, not in the heat of the day lest he should imagine that God come in the heat of passion ...but at the close of the day, for God is longsuffering, slow to anger and of great mercy; but in the cool of the evening, when the sun was setting up Eden's last day of glory.' Spurgeon

Where have we gone when we offer him *less than everything*? Are we really going to give him less than everything? Are we prepared to sacrifice everything, or are we in danger of being spat out in some area of our lives?

Will we be all fire and passion now, and then start settling for less and less? We must take the kingdom of heaven **by force**– it has been forcefully advancing, to be taken forcefully – not for the compliant, the dead man in the pulpit or sitting in the pew. Do you think God will ever bless people like this- these dead people? We need the very fire of life, to have souls of life, see with eyes of life – to see the kingdom of heaven taken by storm.

What is God's definition of failure?

God's definition of failure is having seen the light, having tasted of his goodness, understood the cross, we then turn away onto our own path, settling for less than love, less and less, even in one area of our lives- **that's failure**. Only a few find the narrow way that leads to light and stay on it until the end of life. Are any of us on that road? When the son of Man comes, will he find faith on this earth? We are wretched, poor, pitiful, blind and naked- we have seen we are lukewarm. We long to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. We cannot settle for anything less than everything.