

Success-- Temporal or Eternal?
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

“Real success is having the courage to face failure without being defeated.”

All of us want to succeed in life. But, what do we mean by success and who is qualified to be the judge? The world's temporal measure of success is quite different from God's eternal standard.

One of the classic definitions of success is by Ralph W. Emerson. He wrote: “To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty, to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better . This is to have succeeded.”

The thing that impressed me most about this list is what is not mentioned here. There is not one reference to wealth, rank or fame. He says nothing about power over others or possessions. There is no emphasis on size, numbers, statistics and other visible non-essentials in the light of eternity.

So, what is the formula for success? I'm not sure there is one because success is so elusive. It comes as a by-product or overflow from other values such as faithfulness, discipline, integrity and love. It's the result of commitment to a cause worth living and dying for. The person who is a true success never has to prove it.

Life is filled with what I call compensations. You might be having a hard time in one aspect of your life and yet experience great blessings in a different area. Your success today may more than compensate for yesterday's shortcomings. Life is made up of both blessings and battles.

There was a big league baseball player who struck out a record 1,330 times. A failure? No, Babe Ruth also hit a record 714 home runs.

Abraham Lincoln faced at least 10 heartbreaking failures before becoming president of the United States. Yet now he is honoured as one of his nation's greatest successes.

The earthly life of Christ was marked by utter failure. He faced rejection, betrayal, privation, utter loneliness and crucifixion. But now because of his cross and empty tomb, the door to salvation and eternal life has been opened to all who will come in repentance and faith. Christ's way of selfless, suffering love seems like madness in today's evil world, but it is the only way to find true fulfilment.

I recall an acquaintance from Lunenburg saying, “If mistakes were haystacks, every man would have a cow.” I would have a whole herd. But I have learned that failure

need not be final. I can learn from my mistakes and, by the grace of God, find forgiveness and avoid repeating them.

God is calling me to be faithful, not necessarily successful but faithful. The outcome is in His hands.

“The things that are seen are temporal and pass away. The things that are unseen are eternal and abide forever,” (2nd Corinthians 4:18).