



II. Measuring Success

What measures success? What is the measure of success for ministry? It is the same in your personal ministry as it is in any part of today's corporate church. Success must not be measured by the worldly standards of popularity, headcount, budgets, attendance records, membership roles, buildings, circulation, Web site hits, or downloaded gigabytes of Bible teaching. Conformity to the Word, rather than to the world, gives us the standard. The standard is, *"Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ ... we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ"*, Ephesians 4:11-16. Success is achieved as the Body grows up ... not just grows out. Numbers are important as seen in the early church, Acts 2:41 and 4:4. We must not ignore numbers. However, quantity alone generates neither enduring quality nor enduring growth. True success is measured by quality before quantity. It is interesting to note that none of the seven churches of the first chapters of Revelation were criticized quantitatively ... not for low attendance, not for meager budgets, and not for inadequate square footage. All the criticisms directed toward them were qualitative. Quality produces the meaningful numbers associated with enduring growth. Success is achieved as the Body grows up to match the Head.

His blueprint for growth. Jesus initiated His plan to reach the world through quality rather than, or at least before, quantity. He equipped eleven men to be His disciples ... equipped them for the work of service. Large numbers were attracted to Jesus. However, multitudes were not His methodology. Thousands followed Jesus when He performed miracles as in John 6. They even followed Him across the Sea of Galilee after a free meal. However, when He taught of the deeper things, many of that multitude withdrew from following Him. Jesus was not taken off His plan when they left. He did not call them back in desperation. Instead, He turned to the twelve and asked if they too wanted to leave, John 6:66-67. It was not the quantity of followers that was most important to Him ... it was the quality. A small number of dedicated followers were better than a multitude of the uncommitted. Numbers did come later ... but only on the firm foundation of committed and equipped disciples. That was His blueprint for growth.

Building the house of God. In a large stone structure, the foundation's cornerstone should be the strongest. The rest of the foundation needs to be strong as well. Strong granite is much better than mudstone shale. The next courses of wall stones, layered one upon another, can stand securely for generations on such a strong foundation. Layer after layer, granite continues to be a wiser choice than shale. We, as believers, are the house of God. *"Christ was faithful as a Son over His house - whose house we are,"* Hebrews 3:6. We are His house. Jesus is the cornerstone ... and the apostles and prophets are the rest of the foundation, Ephesians 2:19-20. Believers are the

living wall-stones, I Peter 2:4-5, laid course after course upon the foundation. As the building project continues, the stones of each layer must be solid and strong for continued and enduring growth. Numerical growth in the Body has increased in many parts of the world. However, it has slowed and faltered in quality in the past decades. There is an appearance of growth and success. However, in reality even quantitative growth has flattened out. Creative efforts to bring more to the Savior have fallen short. Quality control has faltered as well. The stones are weaker today than they were before. Those claiming to be born again are less knowledgeable of the Bible, have weaker beliefs in Christianity's core truths, and are less committed to the Savior than those of a few decades ago. Too many are more shale-like than granite-like. Beautiful new edifices, large auditoriums, and sprawling church campuses accommodate the multitudes of believers relocating to bigger assemblies. However, true construction on the house of God is suffering. What blueprint for Body growth should be followed throughout the world? It is time to prioritize the quality of the building materials over the quantity of them. It is time to refocus on His blueprint for growth. Large organizations, packed stadium rallies, and sprawling structures can be wonderful and effective tools. Nevertheless, His true building project falters when the focus shifts from living stones to either organizational or physical structures.

The history of success. The crowds marveled as Peter and John spoke with confidence, Acts 4:13. These two were uneducated men by the world's measure. However, Jesus said, *"Everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher,"* Luke 6:40. They were His disciples. He had been their teacher. Many other great disciples stand out in the early Church. Paul is certainly one of those ... as are Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Silas, Luke, Tabitha, Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos. Others from Romans 16 include Phoebe, Mary, Andronicus, Junius, Urbanus, Julia, Nerijs, Gaius, and Quartus. Others stand out through the centuries ... Ignatius, Justin Martyr, and Augustine ... Wycliffe, Hus, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and Tyndale ... Bunyan, the Wesleys, Edwards, Brainerd, and Carey ... Tozer, Carmichael, Moody, Lewis, Elliot, Chafer, Chambers, ten Boom, Stott, and the Schaeffers. These men and women were strong living stones built into the walls of the house of God. The measuring rod of Church success is etched with their names. Most Christians recognize many of their names as significant successes in Church history. However, few could name the specific ministries, churches, or organizations through which they served. That is because the history of the success of the Body is composed of the stories of real people rather than the stories of edifices, programs, and organizations. The history of the Church is the story of strong living stones being built into a dwelling place for God.

Disciples or believers? Disciples are not just believers with their intensity and volume cranked up. Believers come to Jesus for salvation. Disciples are those who also pay the high price to follow Him. The New Testament gives these four important distinctions of a disciple: (1) disciples know, are rooted in and set free by the Word, John 8:30-32 ... and (2) disciples love one another with the unconditional co-liability of agape love rather than just the phileo love of friendship, John 13:35 ... and (3) disciples bear fruit, i.e. proving themselves to be (i.e. "becoming") disciples by bringing others to the Savior, John 15:8 ... and (4) disciples pay the high price of putting Jesus first above all relationships, above themselves, above all that they might hold dear, Luke 14:25-33. They have unconditionally presented themselves to God as living, holy, and acceptable sacrifices,

as commanded in Romans 12:1 ... wholly submitted and holy sacrificed. All disciples are believers. However, not all believers are disciples. The Body and the lost world need more disciples.

Working in the quarry. How is success measured? Success is measured in disciples ... in those adequately prepared and presented to God in an open hand for His use. It is time to produce more stones for the Master Builder. Success throughout today's Body, is measured by strength rather than size ... by depth rather than breadth ... by obedience rather than attendance ... by commitment rather than membership ... in granite rather than shale ... in disciples rather than believers. Jesus has given us our Great Commission. He said, "*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age*", Matthew 28:18 -20. It is time to make disciples ... to add more strong living stones to the house of God.

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