



## **Running Rabid**

Balancing the passion to pursue with the pressure to produce.

# **The Pressure from Society to Conform**

*Understanding metrics – the real versus perceived*

There is one common trait among most men – *we are competitive!* Although some men are more driven to win than others to win, most men will admit they like to win. Growing up I enjoyed sports and I was a decent athlete in football and baseball. The problem for me was I “peaked” somewhere between ages 10 and 12. By the time I got to my teenage years I pretty much gave up competitive sports and poured myself into other pursuits – mainly the classroom. In school I found my “groove” and felt completely at ease studying a wide range of subjects, but I especially loved math and science. What I could not do on the football field, I learned I could do in the classroom. I was no less driven than the star quarterback or middle linebacker, I just did not have to take anyone’s head off to achieve what I perceived to be successful.

As I have gotten older and look back on my days in school, I realize that much of what I did was driven by pride. I hate to admit it, but much of my drive was *to be better* than other people. I became a follower of Jesus when I was 8, so throughout my formative years I developed a pretty good rationalization that what I was doing honored Jesus. There was a certain element of truth in that statement, but more often than not it was *all about me*.

The reason I am going through this explanation is that somewhere in our past we defined for ourselves what constitutes success. If you are like me and willing to admit, somewhere in your past you created a world for yourself where you could compete and win. If you are really willing to be honest, you often participated in activities where you knew you could win. You “stacked the cards” in your favor so that when you did participate in various events you would be recognized for your success and prowess.

As in everything in the Christian life, it all boils down to our heart condition. If the desires of our heart are driven more by our desire to be successful than bringing honor to God, something is out of order. While we might be able to function on this manner for a while, over time we will become miserable as we are competing for honor that is reserved only for God. Just like an engine without oil will seize up, we cannot function as intended when our motives are driven by desire for honor and glory. The ultimate picture of a being who sought glory and honor for himself was Lucifer. He had everything for which any created being could hope: the love of God, position, power, authority, and access to God Himself. Yet he was willing to give all of that up because of his insatiable appetite for power driven by pride.

The purpose of this lesson is to develop a Biblical framework for success. To determine success we must first establish metrics, or some basis of “keeping score”. A life without metrics is aimless, like a ship without a rudder. There is probably no better story in the Bible than the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-31 to help us understand God’s metrics. We all know the story where a ruler leaves for an extended period of time after giving three of his servants 1, 2, and 5 talents. For demonstration purposes, consider a talent as \$1 million. What would you do if you were given \$1, \$2, or \$5 million from your boss.

There are countless sermons and lessons we could derive from the Parable of the Talents, but listed below are a few key thoughts.

1. God dispenses “talents” based on His good pleasure. God does what He wants and we have to be OK with that. It is not clear if God distributes gifts based on His foreknowledge of how we will respond, but regardless the decision lies with Him.
2. God always expects a return on His investment. He is not the great “watchmaker in the sky” who set the wheels of time into motion and set back to watch His creation turn. If God gives you and me anything (i.e., health, intelligence, athletic ability, money, talents, oratory skills, ability to repair things, creativity, etc.), He expects us to use them to build His Kingdom, and not our kingdom (notice the emphasis on capitalization!).
3. God rewards us based on His definition of success. This is often rooted in hard work. If you want to be successful in God’s eyes, be willing to work extremely hard and give your all for Him.
4. It is not wrong to make money; on occasions God chooses to bless people financially. Just like poverty is not a virtue, neither is wealth necessarily an evil. This is not always the case, but there are times when people are living in abject poverty because they made very poor decisions. It is very rare to meet an extremely poor person who seeks counsel from those who are good money managers. I recently read a billboard that seems to embody this concept (words slightly modified), “Everything in life happens for a reason. Yours could be that you are a fool and make bad decisions.” Let’s be careful to not justify poverty as God’s will, when it sometimes involves people having made very poor decisions.

What if God’s metric for your success actually involves failure? Think of the great men of the Bible – Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David, Daniel, Peter, and Paul (to name a few). All of these men accomplished unbelievable things for God, but all were marked with horrible failures from a human perspective at some point in their lives. However, on the other side of “failure” they knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that God was the one who had brought them through the trials. Through the challenges they faced, He deepened their trust and confidence in His ability to make things right. The end result was a deepened faith that catapulted them to become the men God had planned. Absent the challenges and failures, they would have been ordinary men.

Do not allow the pressure of the world to impose on you its definition of success. Rather, learn to develop a God-centered focus and reliance on how you view the world and the events that take place in your life. The bottom line is this: **God wants you to be successful in what he has called you to do.** Build your metric on that!

### Questions for the Week

1. List at least five (5) things you believe the world defines as “success” for a man.
2. Of the items listed above, how do they compare when considering a Biblical perspective? In other words, does the world’s definition of success contradict what we read in the Bible?
3. Name a time in your life when you faced disappointment because in your eyes you failed relative to what you defined as success? In looking back do you think God has some lessons for you?
4. If you were to counsel a young man starting out his career and family, what advice would you give him? Think of at least three (3) specific pieces of advice.