

The Link Between Success and Self-Worth

The pastor at my ordination, Keith Evans of Greater Gresham Baptist Church in Gresham, Oregon, gave me clear instructions about how to go about my ministry. He read Paul's charge to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:1-8 and then he summarized it into my marching orders: *Say what is true, do what is right, and leave the results to God.*

I have not always been faithful to that charge. I think I have mostly said what is true and done what is right as a ministry leader, but I have not always left the results to God. Here is the pattern I have observed: When the results look pretty good at the moment I find that *pride* enters into my heart. I start thinking of myself as something of a big deal. I feel good about myself. When the results don't look so good or don't compare favorably to others I find that *discouragement* enters into my heart. I start thinking of myself as a failure. I feel bad about myself. Since results are fickle things and dependent on other people, my self-worth takes a roller coaster ride, up one minute and down the next. The desire to feel good is a strong motivator, so in a given situation I am tempted to "take charge" or "please people" in order to get "success" and the good feeling that goes with it. Yet even when this works it doesn't really work. As soon as one "success" passes the pressure returns to generate the next one. My self-worth is once again on the line. The roller coaster is still in motion.

So here is the obvious lesson: *There is a direct link between how I view success and how I feel about myself.* Success and self-worth are two sides of the same coin. I know by talking to other ministry leaders that I am not unique in this. So if we want our self-worth to be secure and not threatened constantly, we need a better model of success.

Do you want off the roller coaster? Do you want to enjoy doing what God called you to do? Do you want out from under the pressure to produce and the stress of living-and-dying by the results of the moment? If so, then I believe Pastor Keith has given us the guidelines for a ministry that is both eternally meaningful and personally fulfilling. This is how we get off the roller coaster.

Say what is true. Proclaim the full counsel of Scripture. Point people to Jesus and what it means to be his follower. Preach it and teach it diligently and accurately. This is the *content* of our calling.

Do what is right. Carry out your ministry with courage, persistence, and love. Show people the way by your example. Keep a clear head when others are losing theirs. Hang in there and go the distance. Be faithful. This is the *character* of our calling.

Leave the results to God. The first two guidelines are a tall order but this one I hope is a great relief. The cross already shows how much God values you. You don't have to earn his favor. He will hold onto you eternally. You could not possibly be more valued or secure than you are in Christ right now. He promises fruitfulness to those who abide in him (Jn 15:5), so abide and let him worry about

what the fruit looks like or when it comes. Just take him at his word and rest in his favor. Let serving him be your definition of success and your relationship with him your source of self-worth.

During my Tenure Project interviews I discovered that pastors who have lasted many years in a church have typically dealt with this issue, usually after a frustrating season of trying to engineer success or please people. One pastor explained it this way: "I realized I had to get over a nickel-and-noses definition of success. I was seeking my self-worth in numbers. The Lord convicted me that my self-worth was determined by and secure in my relationship with Him and not on how the church is doing. He gave me awareness about why I was trying to please people and he delivered me from it."

Here is the bottom line, ministry leader: Your self-worth is in the Lord and your success is in faithful service to him. Beyond that you have nothing to prove and no one to impress. You really can get off the roller coaster and enjoy doing what God has called you to do. I pray that you will.