

February 2014, *Equipping* #143

What to do with Success



Willard Metzger
Executive Director
Mennonite Church Canada

It is a common sentiment to wish someone a Happy New Year.

Happiness is often measured by the prosperity that comes from success and achievement. But people in the church who are deemed successful in the eyes of secular society should be warned. Such success is not always applauded by church communities.

As a teen I was a fan of Amy Grant, a new budding Christian folk singer. I first saw her perform at a Jesus Festival in Pennsylvania. Sitting on a high stool with only her acoustic guitar and soothing voice, I was captivated. Her honesty and simple love for God drew me in.

Her obvious talent soon made her a successful Christian artist. But then something happened. Her success with ever widening audiences opened doors of new opportunity for her and she started recording with a secular label. Her Christian character and message now had the potential of having an even broader impact.

However, many in the church were not impressed. In fact, her success was interpreted as compromise and abandonment of the faith. The church distanced itself from her. It was a difficult period in her career. As a young adult, I was disappointed by the treatment she received, and remained a quiet fan.

Since then I have come to realize that Grant's experience is not unique. It seems that when people in the church become successful they become suspect. Successful business leaders are presumed to be greedy; artists are assumed proud; and politicians understood as dishonest. It isn't easy to be successful, especially in the context of the church.

Success does bring an additional strain on faithfulness. Fame will bring temptations of pride. Wealth will bring temptations of luxury and greed. Power will bring temptations of disregard.

Because of these elevated temptations, the church is tempted to shun success and shame those who experience success. I don't think that is an adequate response for the Church.

Rather than discarding success, the church can be helpful in directing success to its intended purpose. From the call of Abram (Gen. 12) to the recognition of Christ (Jn. 12:32), the intended purpose of success and obedient achievement has been for the blessing of others and the worship of God. For the Church to abandon successful Christians is to abdicate to destructive consequences. It is precisely the church that should help to bridge the gap between power and disregard; wealth and need; fame and the forgotten. The church needs to continue mentoring those whose success has been crowned by secular society.

The church should always stand in solidarity with the forgotten, the disadvantaged, and the powerless. But it serves neither those in need, nor those in abundance by rejecting the resource of success.

I wish everyone success. For in God's economy it will be a blessing for others.

This article originally appeared on Willard's blog. For more articles by Willard, visit: willardmetzger.blogspot.ca