



Week of March 8, 2010

## Survival, Success or Significance?



### Survival

Some people focus on *survival* and just hope to get through each day. Their lives become a vicious circle of monotony followed by moments of sheer terror. They get up in the morning and head off to work. After racing to meetings, returning urgent phone calls and plowing through paperwork, they drive home in rush hour traffic to grab a quick bite to eat. Then they dash out the door to soccer games, school events or church meetings. After tucking in the kids, they fall exhausted into their own beds knowing that tomorrow they get to do it all over again.

When our first child was born, my wife left her teaching job to become a “stay-at-home mom.” It was a decision we both supported, but it resulted in some unpleasant consequences. We immediately lost half of our income, I became the sole breadwinner, and my wife assumed the role of childcare provider.

As a new father I felt an enormous sense of responsibility to provide for my growing family. But as a young teacher on a meager salary, I wasn’t sure how our family would survive. I decided to continue my teaching career, but I started working a part-time job in the evenings.

Later, after our second child was born, I took on a second part-time job on the weekends. I was working three jobs! Furthermore, during this entire time period I took at least one course per semester toward a graduate degree. Frankly, most days I was so tired I didn’t know if I was coming or going. My wife, left virtually alone to care for our toddlers, also was exhausted most of the time.

Our goal was simple: **survival!** Fortunately, things improved financially when I completed my graduate degree. I was hired as a school principal, quit the part-time positions and started to help out around the house. But the survival mode almost did us in! People cannot live in survival mode for long or they will either burn out or flame out.



### Success

Others pursue *success* through power, prestige and possessions. There is an unspoken ritual that occurs whenever two people meet for the first time. “*So what do you do for a living?*” The answer reveals a great deal about the person’s social status. Without probing directly the questioner can generally determine the person’s educational background, socio-economic level and prestige in the community. Typically the question is asked for a quick comparison to the success level of the inquirer. However, the true measure of success is not what we have or what we do; success ultimately is who we are.

A man poured himself into hard work by day and pleasure by night. “*Anything I wanted, I took, and I didn’t restrain myself from any joy,*” he explained. But hard work and pleasure failed to satisfy him. He concluded, “*But as I looked at everything I had tried, it was all so useless...and there was nothing worthwhile anywhere.*”

This true story sounds like something you might read in a celebrity magazine, but a man named Solomon wrote it almost 3,000 years ago. He was the son of King David who later succeeded his father as king of Israel.

Although Solomon tried everything imaginable, he discovered that life was more than money, possessions, wisdom, knowledge, hard work or pleasure. He wrote, "*Here is my final conclusion: fear God and obey His commandments, for this is the final duty of man*" (verses from Ecclesiastes 12:10-13 TLB).

Too many believers seek the world's idea of success rather than God's purpose for their lives. They look to wealth, education, achievement, or pleasure for fulfillment in life. Seeking success may seem to be a better way to live than survival, but neither approach ultimately leads to a life well lived. People end up empty and disillusioned.



## **Significance**

The wisest people make **significance** their life goal by investing their lives in people, not things. They find fulfillment in pursuing activities that are personally rewarding and beneficial to others. By moving from survival to success, and beyond success to significance, they finish well and leave a lasting legacy.

Some time ago the CEO of a large multinational corporation made a startling announcement. At the annual shareholders meeting he revealed to a shocked audience that he was resigning his position. This executive's annual salary was well into 7 figures with stock options, country club memberships and a corporate jet for his personal use. By the world's standards he was an individual who had reached the very pinnacle of success. He had power, fame, wealth and prestige. And his future looked brighter than his past. So why in the world would he give it all up? A corporate takeover? Too much stress? Health issues? Dissension among the Board of Directors? This highly successful executive revealed that he was leaving to spend more time with his family. His wife hardly saw him. His children were growing up without really knowing their father. This man chose significance over success, and his family – and future generations of his family - will benefit as a result.

Now not everyone can retire to focus on his or her family. But everyone can make significance their top priority and avoid getting caught up in the trap of success.

Bill and Mary recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary by renewing their vows before family and friends. After the ceremony, the guests were invited to say a few words about the couple's impact on their lives. A few people mentioned how Bill and Mary had faithfully served the Lord for many years. Some were marked by their love and devotion for one another. Family members and close friends remembered fondly the good times they had shared together. Others thanked the couple for helping them build better marriages by walking with them through difficult times. People laughed, people cried, and the Lord was honored by two lives so well lived.

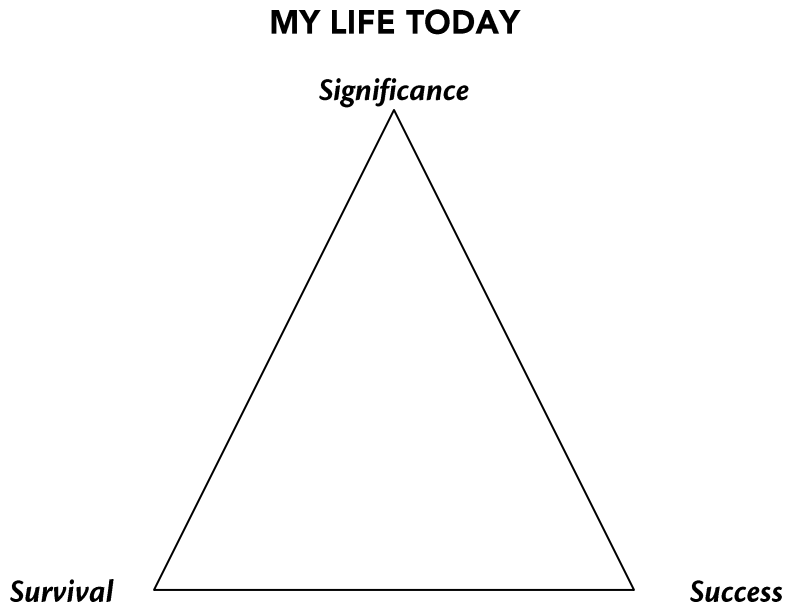
Bill and Mary are building their lives around their relationship with Jesus Christ and with those closest to them. They are investing their time, talents and treasure in teaching others what God has taught them through their own marriage. Bill admits that he wasted the first 30 years of marriage by living only for himself. "No one should waste so many years of marriage. I'd give anything to have those years back again."

During the last 20 years, Bill has learned to love Mary unselfishly and unconditionally. It hasn't been easy, but with the Lord's help, he is starting to put Mary's needs above his own and to experience greater intimacy. Together they share a common purpose born out of the scars of their own marriage. They teach young couples how to love one another unconditionally and experience marital fulfillment.

The Bible reveals that there are only two things that will last through eternity – the Word of God and people. Perhaps the most eternally rewarding approach to life is to live out the Word of God by investing ourselves in the lives of others.

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you conduct this evaluation. Psalm 139:23-24 offers a simple prayer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Now take a moment to assess which goal you are focusing on at the present time. Reflect on your life right now and mark on the diagram where you think you are right now. Use an arrow to indicate the direction you’re moving. Then write out a short explanation of your diagram followed by a summary of what you think needs to take place to move back to *significance*.



I marked myself on the diagram where I did because ...

---

---

---

The changes I need to make to move toward significance are ...

---

---

---