

The Measure of Success

Soon the whole city [of Ephesus] was in an uproar (Acts 19:29).

Scripture: Acts 19:21-31

Song: “Through All of It”

I don't enjoy grading papers. That's because grades often don't reflect progress. Some students enter third grade, writing lifeless stories: “One day I got up. Then I went to bed.” By year's end, they can write riveting introductions: “My stomach felt like snakes somersaulting as I stared into the darkness.” Despite their progress, they still can't earn an A if the rest of the story doesn't measure up.

If the apostle Paul had been graded as a missionary by our human standards, he might have earned a D- for his work among the Jews. When he turned his attention to the Gentiles, many turned to Christ. That's A+ for sure, right? However, this success incited a riot. The city was in an uproar; two of Paul's companions were captured; and an angry mob stormed the theater, shouting praise to a goddess. How would you grade that apparent ministry disaster?

Sometimes, like Paul, we follow God's leading and make plans for ministry. But what if we convert no one? What if we make a friend angry? Have we succeeded? Reading Luke's record of both Paul's “successes” and “failures,” we come to understand that results can't be evaluated by human standards. God has a different grading system. The true measure of success is our willingness to follow Him.

Father, help us follow Your guidance, leaving the measure of success in Your hands. In Jesus' name, amen.

November 7–13. **Cindy Peavy** enjoys exploring the wonders of God's creation—especially hiking and camping while on road trips.

Undeniable Truth

The city clerk . . . said: “. . . You ought to calm down and not do anything rash” (Acts 19:35-36).

Scripture: Acts 19:32–20:1

Song: “Song of Truth”

I “fell in love” with God in microbiology lab. It happened while peering at a cell under a microscope. Packed inside the cell were tiny organelles so complex, so perfectly fit for their function. At that moment I believed beyond a doubt that the world had a designer. And since product reflects producer, I became enthralled with the one who engineered life with such precision and poetry. A worldly situation—a lab and an unbelieving professor—served a divine purpose in my life.

The riot in Ephesus was another worldly situation with a divine purpose. The frenzy that began with some craftsmen had spread to the city, many joining the crowd just to see what was going on. If the theater reached capacity, as many as 24,000 poured in, shouting, “Great is Artemis!” Imagine the thunder of voices that roared for almost two hours! Yet the city clerk was able to quiet the crowd, and his good sense prevailed.

Though the clerk does not appear to be a believer, there is a lesson we can take away from his speech. The truth doesn’t need our fury. In fact, our wrath is likely to detract from our message and cast a shadow on God’s kind character. We can deliver the truth without attacking the beliefs of others or threatening them harm, because *His* truth *is* undeniable.

Father, open our eyes to worldly situations in which we may quietly, lovingly share Your undeniable truth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Paul Effect

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak (Acts 20:35).

Scripture: Acts 20:17-21, 26-35

Song: “Do Something”

In his 40-year career, Coach John Wooden racked up 10 NCAA men’s basketball championships in 12 years (including 7 consecutive years), an 88-game winning streak, and 4 undefeated seasons. These records are so phenomenal, they’ve remained unchallenged for more than 45 years! Yet Coach Wooden never mentioned winning to his players. Instead, he taught them how to succeed in life by developing themselves daily; giving their best in all things; and having integrity, honesty, and faith. So profound was his impact on the success of others that it has a name: the Wooden Effect.

Paul, too, had an effect on the lives of others. By word and example, he encouraged believers to preach faith in Jesus and repentance to all without prejudice; to serve God consistently even through trials; to teach, whether publicly or privately, what is helpful to others; and to be hardworking, humble, and compassionate—not greedy or self-seeking. He gave advice that was simple yet life changing.

But Paul’s guidance wasn’t just for the elders of Ephesus into whose hands he was committing the local church. It’s also for us. Nearly 2,000 years later Paul is still guiding believers to focus not on setting records but on living a life of consistent faith, compassionate care of the church’s flock, and steadfast spread of the gospel.

Father, may the effect of Paul’s life be reflected in mine as I seek to give You and others my best. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Counterbalance

I keep my eyes always on the LORD (Psalm 16:8).

Scripture: Psalm 16

Song: “Joy of the Lord”

The post oak tree stunned me. Like others lining our streets, it had grown up with the neighborhood. More than 100 years old now, its lofty presence towered over the lawn. What separated it from the other oaks, however, was its tragic symmetry. On one half, massive arms reached out with branches covered in leafy green. On the other half, equally huge arms stretched out, bare and lifeless. One side bore the signs of spring, while the other was trapped in the dead of winter.

David often experienced a similar “split” between the threat of death and the delight of life with God. To avoid being overwhelmed with fear, he shifted his focus away from his trials by announcing his wholehearted commitment to God. He maintained this focus on God by recounting the blessings of that choice: refuge, security, pleasure, rest, delight, counsel. He ended with the greatest of these gifts: Heaven. There he will know the fullness of joy in the eternal presence of the Lord.

At times we can feel like David, believing there’s no good thing in our lives. We may struggle with debt, jobs, illness, marriage, doubt, relationships with children, or general frustrations of daily life. But God offers us a refreshing cup, a counterbalance to the lifelessness and grief we experience in this world. By keeping our eyes on Him, we cannot be shaken. Our hearts can be glad.

Father, when the realities of life deplete me, help me focus on You and the life and joy that You offer. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Paralyzed by Fear

The LORD said to Joshua, “. . . Be strong and courageous. . . . For the LORD your God will be with you” (Joshua 1:1, 9).

Scripture: Joshua 1:1-9

Song: “I Will Fear No More”

At first I didn't understand why *National Geographic* named Crypt Lake one of the world's most thrilling hikes. A few miles into my hike, *thrilling* wasn't the word that came to mind. *Terrifying* was! The trail narrowed to 20 inches, hugging a cliff. When my eyes measured the sheer drop, I plastered myself against the rock wall. Desperate to feel a solid presence, I clung to the rock and couldn't move.

After the death of Moses, Joshua may have felt like he was on the edge of a precipice. His first act as the new leader was to lead the Israelites across the flooding Jordan. Next, he'd be leading them into enemy territory. Despite the dangers, God commanded Joshua to be strong and courageous. The Lord also offered the repeated encouragement that He would be with Joshua and would never leave him. God's presence was Joshua's source of courage and strength.

The same God who was with Moses and Joshua is with us. He knows there will be times when we're paralyzed by fear. We'll face things that leave us discouraged or terrified. But overcoming them is possible because God is with us and will never leave us. He is the strength we need.

Father, when we're fearful, help us remember that You are with us. You are our rock, our strength, and our courage. In Jesus' name, amen.

Trust During the Wait

[God's people] will say, “. . . We trusted in him, and he saved us” (Isaiah 25:9).

Scripture: Isaiah 25

Song: “It Is Well with My Soul”

Before age 30, American missionary Darlene Rose endured four years of hard labor in a brutal internment camp during World War II. She suffered through dysentery and malaria, rats and lice, torture and starvation, solitary confinement and merciless interrogations. Then, falsely accused of espionage, she was slated for beheading. When the executioner drew his sword to exact her sentence, she experienced a last-minute rescue. The man in charge of the camp intervened, a man with whom she had boldly shared the gospel. Despite all she suffered, Darlene Rose could say, “I’m still trusting in the Lord.”

Trusting implies waiting. And Isaiah tells us that while we wait for God to carry out His marvelous plans, He will provide for us. God will be our refuge when we experience distress, be our shelter from driving storms, and be our shade from desert heat. He will wipe away our sorrow and shame. He provides all that we need, whether the attacks are from within or from the outside. Darlene Rose described these provisions as tremendous compensations. They made her suffering the sweetest time of her life because she knew God was present.

These glorious compensations will be known fully in Heaven. But before then, God is still our refuge. When we trust in Him, He saves us.

Father, when the storms of life rage, when we feel faint from the heat of attack, help us trust in You and celebrate Your deliverance. In Jesus' name, amen.

Unlimited

I have not stopped giving thanks for you. . . . I keep asking that . . . God . . . may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (Ephesians 1:16-17).

Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-23

Song: “By Faith”

I love the title of the children’s book *Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the Fastest Woman in the World*. Wilma (1940–1994) faced serious challenges while growing up. Being born prematurely could have limited her. Poverty and racism could have limited her. Scarlet fever, polio, and bouts of pneumonia could have limited her. And certainly, a paralyzed leg could have limited her. But Wilma’s mother, Blanche, refused to accept these limitations and instilled determination in Wilma. Believing Wilma could walk again, Blanche, for years, took her daughter for weekly treatment, traveling 100 miles round trip to the closest hospital that admitted Black people. Wilma improved, but walking with a brace wasn’t enough. Wilma kept at it until she could run. And run she did, becoming the first American woman to win three Olympic gold medals!

Paul wasn’t satisfied either. While thankful for the faith and love of the believers in Ephesus, he asked for more. He wanted God’s Spirit to give them more wisdom, more revelation, so they would know God better. But that still wasn’t enough. He also prayed they would know the hope of their calling and the riches of their inheritance. Surely that would be enough! But Paul wanted still more. He prayed for all believers—that includes us!—to know the incomparable power of God toward us.

Father, help us not to settle for a life of limited faith when You offer us unlimited gifts. In Jesus’ name, amen.