



MARK ZUCKERBERG AND THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF SUCCESS

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Looking forward to your 28th birthday? Or remember what you did? Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg will never forget his special day. Today, four days after his 28th birthday, Facebook open to public investors and begin trading on the Nasdaq Stock Market. It's expected to be worth \$100 billion.

Twenty-somethings could respond to this in at least two ways. Either they can be inspired by his entrepreneurial spirit and hard work or discouraged that they will never reach the heights of his success.

Most will be discouraged. By age 28, many face what's called a "quarter-life crisis," thanks to the two great lies our culture promotes among children in school, students in college, and professionals in the business world. The first great lie is, "If you work hard enough, you can be anything you want to be." It is often sold as the American Dream, expressed in sayings such as, "In America, anyone can grow up to be President."

The second great lie is like the first one, yet possibly even more damaging: "You can be the best in the world. If you try hard enough, you could be the next Zuckerberg."

These lies are accepted by many Christians as well as non-Christians. They have catastrophically damaged our view of work and vocation, because they have distorted our biblical view of success.

The Idol of Success

Success, defined as *being the master of your own destiny*, has become a cultural idol. In [Counterfeit Gods](#), pastor Tim Keller describes the idol:

More than other idols, personal success and achievement lead to a sense that we ourselves are God, that our security and value rest in our own wisdom, strength, and performance. To be the very best at what you do, to be at the top of the heap, means no one is like you. You are supreme.

If we will rediscover the biblical doctrine of work and correctly understand our vocational calling, we must recognize a more timeless, faithful definition of *success*.

The late John Wooden, the most successful college basketball coach in history and a committed Christian, was once asked how he would define success. He replied:

Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.

The New Testament defines success in a similar way in Jesus' Parable of the Talents ([Matthew 25:14-30](#)). This parable offers profound insight not only into the definition of success, but also into the purpose of our call to work. Jesus teaches that the kingdom of heaven is like a man going on a long journey. Before leaving, he gives three servants different amounts of money, denominated by talents. Whatever its exact value, in the New Testament a talent indicates a large sum of money, maybe even as much as a million dollars in today's currency.

The man gives five talents to the first servant, two talents to the second servant, and one talent to the last servant---each according to his abilities. Upon his return the master asks what his servants did with the money. The first and second servants doubled their investments and received the master's praise. The third servant, who was given one talent, safeguarded the money but did nothing to increase it. The third servant was condemned by the master for his inactivity.

God Provides the Tools We Need

Whatever they represent---natural abilities, spiritual gifts, or other resources---talents in this parable at least represent tools God gives us to carry out his mandate in the Garden to "take dominion" over the earth---to reweave *shalom* into creation---and to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission to make disciples. In this context, we can assume two things from the parable:

1. God always gives us enough in order to do what he has required.
2. Whatever the Lord gives us now, he will ask us about later, expecting us to diligently work with these resources to further his kingdom.

Therefore, we base our definition of success on whether we have cultivated and invested our God-given talents and, by faith, taken advantage of divine opportunities to use them---whether we have been given one, two, or five talents.

This definition should convict. We are called to greater heights of stewardship than we ever before realized. But it's also relieving: we are only called to steward our own talents and opportunities, not those allotted to people like Mark Zuckerberg or Steve Jobs.

It is up to us whether the Master will respond, "Well done, good and faithful servant. . . . Enter into the joy of your master," or, "You wicked, lazy servant!" Love of the Master drives and inspires our work. We're not working to become the next Zuckerberg, though some may be called to such influence. We're simply working to receive the Master's praise.

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