

## QUEST FOR SUCCESS

I was in a Bocce ball tournament last night, and I really wanted to win.  
I did my best, and I hated to lose the gold medal to Lloyd and Bruce.

Healthy, respectful competition is fun....

In fact, I think it is noble and admirable to strive to do our best / to fully apply ourselves. The pursuit of excellence is good,..... BUT... sometimes the drive to excel is not so pure. Sometimes the motivation to win can take us down a dark, unhealthy and destructive path. The desire to do our best can be over taken by an impetus / a need for, power, domination and conquest.

*Last Sunday I mentioned that greed and lust are often the seeds for war. An arrogant hunger for domination is another cause of war and other forms of destruction and despair, and that hunger is usually fear based.*

A focussed desire to do well is fine; however.... our goals, the consequences and our motivation should be measured with clear thought. And our self-analysis should be in the context of being followers of Christ / servants for God. When our Quest for success takes us away from God, then we truly are on dangerous ground.

Our hunger must be understood,..... or it could eat us up.

Even in small matter, we should be aware of what we hunger after / what is our motivation.... because if we are not aware, then we can easily become the victim of our own drive.

Speaking of driving.

When I was 14, my father would let me warm up the car after church, and if there was no one left in the parking lot. Then I was allowed to drive the car up to the front door.

I felt like I was becoming pretty good at driving. One time, I noticed my father standing by the front door talking and a bunch of my friends were near by, too, so while the lot was still full of cars, I decided to show off to all.... how accomplished a driver I was.

My motivation was not to be a good driver, but rather to impress my father and my peers. My drive for admiration was greater than my ability to drive. I went too fast and I cut the corner too closely – dragging along another car's bumper.... cutting a deep gouge down the side of my father's car.

My drive proved a lot,..... BUT not what I was wanted.

The opposite of my desire was the outcome.

Our quest for success can blind us to reality, turn people into paving stones.... and take us to arenas that are dangerous, destructive and filled with regret.

This pattern is clearly seen in the sports domain.....where winning is everything.

This past Friday, the military ushered a Stanley Cup bearing Sidney Crosby to Nova Scotia. Thousand cheered as Sid with the Cup went by on parade. They were cheering what the cup represents – success and conquest ..... in the confines of a hyped up entertainment industry called the NHL. It looked like love and adoration for Sid the Kid, but it wasn't. He could have played just as well, for the New York Islanders, and last Friday all would have been quiet in Cole Harbour, NS. Few really care about the 22 year old...as a person. They only care if they can share in his glory..... a fabricated glory they / **we** produced..... All very strange, yet powerful enough to cause excellent and talented athletes to use performance enhancing drugs.... in the pursuit of that allusive goal of being the very best. Of course that never happens in hockey.....

Sports,.... with its straight forward rules, was supposed to be for fun and recreation. For example, Basketball was invented to provide exercise and recreation. Therefore, a successful game or **season** would be when the players “exerted” themselves in good discipline, fairness and fun – correct?

.... I think the NBA has taken it a bit farther than that.....

This criticism would apply to most any major sport.... and ... to our culture as a whole.

Too often, Success has come to mean domination and conquest, and not just doing well in the context of the activity.

In truth, for some people, getting through the day is a brave success story, but those “honest” stories are buried under our culture’s fascination with conquest and social supremacy.

Our culture’s distorted vision of success drives people to overwork themselves, sacrificing their families and their souls,... and.. leaves most with an unnecessary, yet devastating sense of failure and unfulfilled hunger.

The middle class chases after toys and to climb the economic ladder.

The affluent pursue power, security and influence...all in vain.

We are persuaded by our culture to buy into what is Big / what wins / what is number one. We tend to support what is popular.

We are easily influenced. Commercial advertizing works. We will buy what we see others use on TV, even if it hurts us in the long run.

For example, in 1995, Pharmaceutical companies were allowed to advertize on TV, in the US.

Within five years, the cost of prescription drugs increased by over 40%..... TV Commercials are not cheap, and the consumer paid for them..... so that the drug companies could make more money on their patented drugs.

The giant pharmaceutical companies’ drive was NOT to serve the public, but to please their stock holders by making more money.

The advertizing campaign was a success,..... or was it???

Apparently, our culture’s understanding of success is twisted, but this distortion is actually NOT a modern invention – our text reveals this.

From Second Samuel we learn about Absalom and Joab; two men who valued success and glory.

?You remember Joab from last week? He was King David's general of the army – the powerful “Enforcer”.

Absalom was a son of King David. David had a number of children, as was the custom with Kings. Absalom was a very handsome man. It is said that he had long beautiful hair, that he only trimmed once a year.

No doubt, he was a capable, proud and illustrious person. He was very different from his eldest brother, Amnon.

Amnon, was a deprived character. He lusted after his own sister, Tamar, and one day tricked her into being alone with him, .... and he raped her.

Amnon Raped his own sister.

Absalom found out and was furious,.... and became even more enraged because his father, King David, was slow to severely punish Amnon.

\*His sympathy for his sister combined with his intense anger and arrogance moved Absalom to travel down the destructive road of Redemptive violence. He became a righteous crusader.

He generously took his *desolate* sister into his house, to care for her, AND then, ignoring the will of his father, set out for Vengeance.

On his own, he set a trap and killed his brother Amnon.

It was an act of vengeance, NOT justice. Justice is never murder. Justice **never** takes a life to replace a life.

David was very much saddened by what happened, and initially ostracized Absalom, but later, did seek to forgive Absalom.

At that point, It didn't matter. Absalom was travelling down a different plane. Momentum was starting to form. He was on the “righteous High road”, and his goal was to purge immorality from all of Israel, ... including his father the King.

Success became a concept for him, an impersonal concept. His principles were more important than people.

*Strange... how zealous crusaders carry the banner of God's love and righteousness, yet March in the shadows of fear and hate, and not in the light of love. Those who bomb and kill to stop abortions come to mind.*

Absalom was charismatic and he made bold promises! Plus, he was good looking. *It is easier to be successful if you're good looking.*

Absalom persuaded many tribes of Israel to follow him, and the people were awed by his quest for success.

He formed an army, and threatened to remove David from the throne and become King. In Absalom's own eyes, he would be a better and more Just King than David. He would demand empirical / measurable righteousness,..... and to him .... that would be success – forced purity.... ...as he defined it.

*NOWHERE in the Bible does it mention him “seeking” God’s advice.*

Absalom already knew what was righteous, so he thought. So, he prepared for battle – events were unfolding, momentum was happening.

David was a capable and ambitious person, too. He had his own momentum – he wanted to stay in power. He believed He was right, and he was powerful, too.

David had spies, and so he knew Absalom's every move,....AND... David had an experienced army,...which included the very aggressive General Joab!

Joab enjoyed his successful station in life. He had a powerful position, and so he was a strong defender for David. He had to be – it meant retention of his “successful” job.

David called his generals, and told them of his plan to counter Absalom's threat and end the nation's division.

It appears that David was not seeking revenge or destruction, but instead wanted unity, YET his momentum and his tools included brute force.

David's plan was to split his army in 3 parts and force Absalom's inexperienced army into a densely forested area where they would become disoriented, confused,... and then panic and flee. David hoped this would mean minimal casualties.

*Yet, playing with fire can result in an inferno, .... and military peacekeepers only exist under the threat of war.*

David had a wise plan. David wanted to end the threat, and Not the lives of his adversaries,..... but a violent collision was about to happen.

As we know, the focus of the military is to win battles. The military includes combat victories as success, if they are in the battle plan. Ending hostilities is not the only understanding of success. That being the case, soldiers are usually forced into terrible predicaments – the vortex of conflicting momentums that render killing as the only way out. Killing and destruction become the consequences ... and the goal to end the consequences. That is where it gets ugly.

The generals realized they it was a good plan, and could see a Powerful, total victory could be had,.... so they slyly advised King David to stay at home, telling him, “The King should not take a risk.” They were less concerned about his well being, than they were about his presence restraining them from complete battlefield success.

David agreed to stay behind– which was unusual for a king, in those days. *I think it is prudent for Kings and politicians to be in the middle of the battles they design.*

Before they military set out, David explicitly ordered his generals, and I quote, “Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man Absalom.”

And the Scriptures state, “Everyone heard the king’s orders.”

Even though Absalom was an usurper, he was still David’s son, and David did NOT want to lose another son.

He wanted to be a FATHER First, and a national leader second, yet momentum and destructive choices tell a different story.

David’s strategy worked well. The thick woods confused the inexperienced army. Yet, David’s generals pursued Their goal of victory, in spite of David’s will,... and the strategy became the framework for slaughter. Many, many thousands were killed by Joab and his troops. And, in their eyes, they were successful, but they were in their own domain – Not in David’s will.

They were following their definition of what success meant, not David’s.

During the chaos of the forest battle, Absalom was riding his horse in the dense woods. He tried to avoid a bramble / briar patch, but his hair became entangled in the thicket, pulling him off his horse and leaving him hanging there to be found.

*:) A little Biblical Poetic justice about excessive hair!!!!*

Back to the narrative:

Soldiers of Joab rushed in, recognized that it was Absalom, and they remembered David’s explicit orders to NOT harm Absalom. So, they did not.

They quickly reported their find to Joab, and Joab came to the scene of Absalom dangling by his hair.

*It is very difficult, in battle, to clearly discern / to restrain... when the momentum toward success is total victory. Generals like to, so to speak, remove the head of the opposition,..... before theirs are removed.*

So,..... the brave and mighty Joab looked into Absalom’s eyes with a cold mechanical stare, and he did NOT see David’s son, he did NOT see a fellow human with the potential for love and compassion, but rather, with is clouded vision, he saw an object, a criminal, a “bad guy” who was a threat to Joab’s own security and success.

Joab, defying David’s orders, thrust 3 spears into Absalom, and then commanded 10 of his troops to finish the job.... so that the blood of guilt would be on many, and NO ... “ONE” person could be blamed – sly.

*Think about it, what crimes are done collectively, even by governments, in order to defuse the blame????*

Absalom was killed, and when David found out he wept and cried out for his lost son.

Absalom’s quest sent him down a dangerous path and got him in trouble.

Joab’s drive killed him, and DAVID ...LOST another son.

A son was needless killed..... because of the great quest.....

What is so appealing about winning?  
What is the irresistible lure to be better than others?  
What is so satisfying about being number one?  
What motivates people to sacrifice themselves for the sake of what others call success?  
What drives leaders to send sons and daughter off to kill sons and daughters? ??????????  
What is that hunger? And, what can truly satisfy that hunger?

Michael Jackson was at the top of his world, and he was not content; he was not satisfied. What was he looking for?  
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Could it be they, WE... just want to be loved and accepted?  
Could it be that the great quest for success is simply to be loved?  
???????

Examine the background of the dominant world leaders, and in nearly every case you will find a broken relationship with a parent.  
Consider the past few US presidents: Obama never knew his father. George W. disappointed his father, most of his life. Clinton's father left him at a young age. Reagan was estranged from his father, and so on.

I'm afraid to believe it, but I think that President Bush attacked Iraq, and arranged for Saddam's murder because he was trying to prove something to his father.... in the quest for love and acceptance.  
This is tragic,.....YET how many of us are living out that same quest?

There was another son, the son of God.  
Before he accomplished anything; before he even began his ministry, HIS father said to him, "SON, I love you and with you I am well pleased."  
There is a lesson there: parents..... tell and show your love, and don't stop demonstrating the love, regardless of your or their age.  
Tell your children that you are proud of them, and don't tie it to some achievement.

In addition, let us learn from Jesus' life example.  
Jesus did not appease the rich and powerful. He didn't take their money and he was Not indebted to them.  
Jesus did NOT maneuver into social or political status and success.  
He did NOT have fancy TV commercials to boast his image. In fact, Jesus only had a few frumpy and dishevelled followers.  
He went about helping others and proclaiming justice, peace and grace.  
He was NOT the model of how culture defines success, YET.... He was the bread of life that satisfies our deepest hunger – which is to be loved and filled with love.

Perhaps the answer is NOT in the quest, but in the surrender?