

# Is a Relationship With Christ Necessary to Succeed?

Does a person have to be a follower of Christ in order to guarantee success in this life?

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## Summary

Question: Does a person have to be a die-hard follower of Christ in order to guarantee success in this life?

Answer: Yes.

Why:

- Nothing happens on this planet that isn't either blessed or allowed by God, hence no one can ever take credit for the success that they've achieved.
- Success, as in the pursuit of happiness, can't be achieved by the mere acquisition of material goods or any kind of credentials. Reason being is that the more you have, the more you want. Any accomplishment, once completed, inevitably leads to yet another project that must be done. The more you know, the more you realize you have yet to know. The goal posts never stop moving, it is a "chasing after the wind." Consequently, any lasting sense of contentment and happiness is impossible.
- It is through your relationship with Christ that you're able to base your sense of fulfillment and joy on Something that doesn't change. While there is a place for ambition, business savvy and the pursuit of success in the life of a believer, in order to avoid the pointlessness of the typical human pursuit of happiness, your target must always be the Purpose and Plan of your Heavenly Father.

## Introduction

Does a person have to be a die-hard follower of Christ in order to guarantee success in this life?

Yes.

"How can you say that?" says the voice of the person needing to be convinced. "When you consider some of the most successful people on the planet, you've got several shining examples of wealth, influence and charity.

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Yet, they don't all confess Christ as their Savior. What makes you insist that a relationship with Christ is necessary to succeed? They've done just fine without Him."

## Nothing is Done Apart from God

Well, fact is, they've done nothing without Christ. God is Sovereign and He's the One that either blesses or allows anything and everything that occurs on this planet. Whether a person acknowledges Him or not is speculative, but nothing is ever accomplished without God either blessing it or allowing it.

Consider this:

We're all created by God:

**<sup>6</sup> Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, <sup>[a]</sup> who made you and formed you? (Dt 32:6)**

**"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." (Rev 4:11)**

The power and opportunity to do anything comes from God:

**<sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (Jn 15:5)**

**'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' (Acts 17:28)**

All authority comes from God:

**<sup>11</sup> Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." (Jn 19:11 [Jesus' response to Pilate when Pilate implied that he had the power to pardon and release Jesus])**

God is intimately aware of everything that happens, right down to the most seemingly trivial and inconsequential occurrence:

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**<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny<sup>[a]</sup>?  
Yet not one of them will fall to the ground  
apart from the will of your Father. <sup>30</sup> And even  
the very hairs of your head are all numbered.  
<sup>31</sup> So don't be afraid; you are worth more than  
many sparrows. (Matt 10:29-31)**

And it's not just a matter of "being aware."  
Everything that occurs must first be filtered through  
the will of God. Again, He either blesses it or allows  
it, but nothing ever happens without God's  
permission.

So from that standpoint, there are no "self-made"  
men or women. Whatever we accomplish, whatever  
we have, comes from God - whether we give Him  
the credit for it or not (see Jas 1:17).

## The Big Picture

As human beings we tend to evaluate ourselves and  
others according to the amount of power they wield  
and the things they possess. Power and riches top  
the scales in terms of what we use to determine  
whether or not we're "successful."

Neither one of those two criteria are wrong or  
unhealthy by themselves. God applauds hard work  
and ingenuity:

**Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he  
will not serve before obscure men. (Prov 22:29)**

**<sup>6</sup> Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! <sup>7</sup> It has  
no commander, no overseer or ruler, <sup>8</sup> yet it stores its provisions in  
summer and gathers its food at harvest. <sup>9</sup> How long will you lie  
there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? <sup>10</sup> A little  
sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest— <sup>11</sup> and  
poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed  
man.<sup>[a]</sup> (Prov 6:6-11)**

Ecclesiastes – when the Bible was translated from Hebrew to Greek, the scholars responsible were faced with a bit of a quandary in that the Hebrew word for Solomon's book was "qoheleth," which means "one who addresses an assembly." Since there wasn't a Greek word that represented an exact duplicate of "qoheleth," they went with the word, "ekkesiastes," which means, "member of the ecclesia, or group." The Greeks used that word the way we would use the word, "citizen."

The bottom line is that it's referring to a Preacher, someone who is addressing a group of people for the sake of communicating an important message.

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**The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more... <sup>21</sup> "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' (Matt 25:16, 21)**

**For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." (2 Thess 3:10)**

But here's the problem: If a man or woman determines that the whole of their life needs to be spent in the pursuit of an impressive business card and a hefty bank account, they wind up accumulating things that are ultimately revealed as being, as Solomon put it in Ecclesiastes, "a chasing after the wind." By "a chasing after the wind," Solomon is referring to the transient nature of all things that we tend to admire.

Ecclesiastes is a profound essay on the subject of "having" yet not "enjoying." It's an exceptional piece of wisdom in that it comes from the perspective of a man who's lived in the context of being able to do, and to have, anything he wanted.

## **The Pursuit of Happiness Versus Being Happy**

The dictionary definition of "succeed" is to have attained a desired object or result. While there is a wealth of academic forces that have sought to answer the question, "What do human beings want?" the bottom line is that we want to be happy. That is the man behind the curtain, if you will: We want to be happy.

In our culture, "being happy" is processed as something that is either purchased or earned, hence the fascination with the pursuit of wealth and power.

Solomon was a king like no other before or after him (Ecc 2:9). As far as abundance, accomplishments and authority, he personifies the material standard we as humans pine for. He was not distracted by the day-to-day distractions of being in debt or longing for a better job. He wasn't driven by the need to pay bills or to ascend to the next level of accomplishment. At one point, he determined to deploy the formidable amount of wisdom that God had given him in an effort to better understand the aspirations of man

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(1 Kings 4:29-34; Ecc 1:12-13). What he discovered was that the goal posts never stop moving. Take a look:

## Intelligence / Academics

**Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. (Ecc 12:11)**

**<sup>12</sup> Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done? <sup>13</sup> I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. <sup>14</sup> The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. <sup>15</sup> Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless." <sup>16</sup> For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die! (Ecc 2:12-16 [see also Ecc 12:12])**

He says that wisdom is better than folly. A college degree is a noble pursuit and necessary in order to secure a marketable skill. But there will always be more to learn - you never truly arrive. So if you desire a staying kind of happiness, you're inevitably confronted with a perpetually restlessness because you can never know all that there is to learn.

On top of that, you have the fact that all men die. A knowledgeable man will one day cease to breathe just like his ignorant counterpart. Solomon isn't being overly morbid here; he's simply posing the question, "What difference does it make?" Being happy necessitates being conscious - a.k.a. being alive. Death will come and regardless of your SAT scores, your heart will one day stop beating and no amount of knowledge can prevent you from one day succumbing to old age and dying.

## Pleasure / Accomplishment

**<sup>10</sup> I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. <sup>11</sup> Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was**

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**meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. (Ecc 2:10-11)**

In these two verses, Solomon considers both entertainment and noteworthy accomplishments. Going on vacation, taking a break, buying yourself something that you enjoy – all of that's fine and good. But the "sensation" never lasts. It's that "chasing after wind" dynamic that Solomon repeats throughout his essay. It simply can't be done because the pleasure that you experience is momentary – it doesn't last. And the same thing applies even to the completion of monumental projects. With every finish line comes a brand new starting point. After achieving a particular goal, you are invariably faced with the need to either do it again, or do something else even bigger and better. The goal posts never stop moving.

## Money

**Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. (Ecc 5:12)**

After reading Solomon's observations on using money as a way to achieve "success," you can't help but begin to see a pattern. Up to this point, whether it's pleasure, education or accomplishment, it all amounts to a "chasing after the wind." No matter how much you make, it never is quite enough.

In addition, the rich man is usually preoccupied with how he's going to maintain his standard of living more so than he is with actually enjoying it. Solomon documents that observation in Ecclesiastes 5:12.

He also observes the futility of a hard working man laboring to achieve and prosper only to have to concede the fact that everything he has toiled to produce will inevitably be handed over to someone who, chances are, won't appreciate it because they haven't earned it. You see this also in Psalms:

**<sup>5</sup> You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. <sup>6</sup> Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it. (Ps 39:5-6)**

Once more, a "chasing after the wind."

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Success, as in the pursuit of happiness, if it is pursued believing that the mere acquisition of material goods and temporary sensations can produce a lasting sense of happiness, the result will be exasperating. It's very much like trying to fill a paper cup that has a hole in it. No matter how much water you pour into it, it never stays filled.

Solomon's not advocating that we all resolve to be some sort of disconnected wanderer; aimlessly shuffling through life insisting that anything material is evil. You saw that in some of the previously quoted Proverbs that he wrote as far as a healthy work ethic and the inevitable rewards of being good at what you do (Prov 6:6-11; 22:29 [see also Matt 25:14-30]). The bottom line is this: As long as you're depending on momentary spurts of fulfillment to provide lasting contentment and happiness, you will forever be frustrated and discontent. You have to base your pursuit of success on something permanent and unchanging if you're going to experience real peace and joy. Solomon documents that in the last verse of Ecclesiastes:

**Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. (Ecc 12:13)**

## A Practical Snapshot

Up to his point, the focus of our discussion has been to reveal the typical infatuation with wealth and power as a means to being happy and content as being unfulfilling. The kind of peace and joy we're looking for is available only through our relationship with Christ (see Gal 5:22-23).

Some will process that Truth as their cue to completely turn their back on anything that represents a material commodity. But, as we looked at earlier, hard work and a savvy business sense, as far as being a good steward of what God has given you, have a very present and practical place in a believer's life. We have lessons and commands throughout Scripture that advocate a healthy and holy desire to succeed. But how does all this work together so the end result is truly "successful?"

It all comes down to your target. If you're aiming for wealth and wealth only, should God orchestrate things in a way where you're able to secure the kind of income you're hoping for, the end result will be less than satisfying. However, if you're aiming for excellence in the context of doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, now you have real success on all levels.

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Joshua 1:8 says to study and meditate on the Word of God and through that intentional study and application of His commands you will be successful. Matthew 6:33 says to give first priority to God's Authority and Activity in your life and by doing so, everything else will fall into place and you will be successful. Colossians 3:15-17 says to let the peace of God rule in your heart, let His Word be made manifest in your life and then whatever you do, do it in a way that satisfies God's definition of a good job. And then, you will be successful.

A good way to picture it is to look at something and then hold your hand in front of your face. You can look through the gaps between your fingers and clearly see the object you're focusing on. But focus on your hand and the object you were looking at a moment ago is now blurry.



Your hand represents all those things that Solomon listed as being a "chasing after the wind." As long as you're focusing on those things, you're missing the big picture. But as long as you maintain your focus on the big picture, you can acknowledge and benefit from those things without being distracted by them.

## The Conclusion of the Matter

While Solomon brilliantly summarized things in the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes, we will tack on one more thought and that's found in the sixth chapter of Matthew:

**<sup>19</sup> "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matt 6:19-20)**

Focus on the fact that you were placed on this earth to make a difference and not a profit. While making a profit can be both healthy and holy it is not an eternal accomplishment let alone a lasting sensation, to succeed you

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need Christ's Power and Perspective. Only then is the end result capable of producing real gratification. It's only then that you can be labeled truly successful.