

EQUIP South Africa 2012

Session 7

Defining Success

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Once I was invited to a soccer match by the coach of Maritzburg United, which is owned by Muslims. He organised a V.I.P. box for me and when I went there I realised I was the only white boy there. All the rest were dressed in the familiar white Muslim garb with long beards and such. But the thing was we were in a glass cage, separated from the herd, where it was quiet, while all the fun was out there where the vuvuzelas were going ballistic.

See, we do that – we separate from the herd. And that kind of thinking comes into the Church.

You find that if you're a leader of some sort you're asking this question: how am I doing? How's my church doing? What we find filtering into the Church are mechanisms for people to judge. It's the world in which we live.

Two grids; two lenses

I think that in Christian circles we oscillate between two grids; two lenses. The first, which I think was popularised in the 1970's and 1980's by Peter Wagner and those involved in the church growth movement, says that a church is a good church if it's growing. And there were a myriad of self-help books put out at the time with titles revolving around steps to grow your church and so forth. It changed the landscape of Christendom, actually.

Now I'm not saying it's all bad. We can't say a growing church is bad, because God makes things grow. But it put an enormous amount of pressure on pastors where many felt a sense of failure because they weren't measuring up. And you'll see it in many church circles that pastors are fired when they can't gather and hold people and pastors are hired when they can make the thing grow.

In the 90's we had a kickback against that, led by writers like Eugene Peterson, who focused on faithfulness. Peterson's writings were like a breath of fresh air after the 80's and he was saying things like contemplate, pray, wait on God, be faithful. But it became popular to crucify the big churches.

So you have these two lenses and I'm not saying either is right or wrong, I'm just saying we tend to oscillate between them. While I was searching through some of these views I came across one of Charles Spurgeon's letters to his students. For those that don't know him, he was one of the great preachers of about 150 years ago. That's some time ago and you can see that this thing around church size is not a new thing when you read this letter. Some look at success through size, growth and influence, while others look at success qualitatively around faithfulness and gifting. Listen to Spurgeon, talking about allowing certain men into the ministry:

“Certain good men appeal to me who are distinguished by enormous vehemence and zeal, and a conspicuous absence of brains; brethren who would talk for ever and ever upon nothing — who would stamp and thump the Bible, and get nothing out of it all; earnest, awfully earnest, mountains in labour of the most painful kind; but nothing comes of it all.”

He is saying that at first glance these men are appealing, but they put a lot of work in yet nothing comes of it at all. He ends with, "Therefore, I have usually declined their applications."

On one side, you can see he is applauding their faithfulness and loyalty. But he is also looking for fruit.

These are murky waters and so I've given you two lenses without giving you an answer. What we're going to do is call up some people and we're going to throw these questions around and see what sense we can make of it. But let's pray first:

Father, we thank you for the beautiful Church of Jesus all over the world. In some forms she is big and unrecognisable to some of us; in other forms, local churches are very different to us, in their focus and flavour, but they belong to you Jesus. I pray as we open your Word that you will give wisdom for these men and women, and beyond that, that you would speak to us by your Spirit.

Grant introduces the interviewees

Ashley leads a church and we trust there will be some wisdom from that grey head of his.

Rob is a chemist with three businesses and 200 employees. He's from Nelspruit and became an elder three weeks ago. He's a godly man, a businessman, and he's got some

perspectives from the market place.

Nosi you've seen on the stage. She's smart – she's a graduate – she has a degree and she's a muso and she'll tell you she hasn't got her life figured out, but she's going to give us a young perspective.

Greg. Well, you hear Greg before you see Greg. He's got a comment on everything, that's why he's here. He also leads a church.

Mli hails from Harare. He leads a church and has been doing so for a number of years. He's on our apostolic team and has a great work going on in Zim. They've also waited a number of years to have a child and so we've celebrated with them. Lastly, he's also a great theologian.

Faith is from Pietermaritzburg and is married to Ant Naidoo. They've been in ministry for a couple of decades and Faith represents the moms here. She's got some grown sons and when they were in their 20's, flying the coup, she decided to have another one. So she's got children across the generations.

I'm hoping there will be some collective wisdom between the lot of us and we'll be able to wrestle this thing through.

Question and answer session

Grant: Ashley, I want you to think back before you were in ministry. You used to wonder around in a speedo. What many probably don't know is that this guy was a pretty good surfer, and I think he got to the top actually. So I'd like to ask: in those days, the beach days, what did it take to get to the top? What's success for the surfer?

Ashley: You've got to be an early riser and clearly there's no place for any form of distraction at all in any professional sport. So no girlfriends, no drugs, no parties – it was literally just about being incredibly dedicated to winning.

Grant: So if you had to ask the pro surfers today what success is, what would they tell you?

Ashley: I think they would say Kelly Slater, first of all. He is by far the best surfer ever, and what they will do is make sure they read his biography and watch everything he does. If at all possible they'll try and eavesdrop on a conversation he has with other surfers. They'll

try and get as close to him as possible just to get his signature either on their surfboard or on their baggies.

But if you're a surfer you definitely want to make sure you're looking at those who are perceived to be at the top and you're going to glean from them. You'll copy their every move, watch videos about them, read about them and it's all to emulate what it is they are.

Grant: Rob, what do you think defines a successful boss to an employee?

Rob: I think when guys look to a company, they look for stability, they look for a place where they can grow that would give them a home and a future, where they can live out their dream, where they can aspire to some kind of goal. It's really by grace that we became an employer of choice and prior to that it's really a nightmare because you train guys and they get stolen from you. So when they look to a company they're looking for stability in their lives, and they're looking for a place in which they can grow.

Grant: Let's flip the coin – how would they define an unsuccessful boss? A business man might say that they've got their Mercedes and are listed on the JSE, but what would the employee say? What would their criteria be? Would they be judging him by his or her bank balance?

Rob: They may ask questions around whether the boss actually cares about them. Whether he actually worries about who they are and how they're doing. They may just feel that all he does is check performance, facts and figures, and they'll feel the pressure that if they don't measure up they're gone.

Grant: Greg, there's success for churches and there are churches that fail. What's a failed church?

Greg: A church that stagnates. The people lose the reason why they're there. The leaders don't have a clue what's going on, the lead guy doesn't know what to do tomorrow, and there's no life and presence of God there. I think they can carry on acting as if church is fine, and perhaps – like from the book of Revelation – their lamp stand has been taken away from them but they just don't know it. They carry on doing what they do but no one even knows if they're there or not.

Grant: Mli, in Zim leading a church, would your understanding of a successful or failed church be similar to that or is it different?

Mli: I'd say pretty much the same. I think what keeps the church going is the leader himself, receiving a revelation of what God is doing, able to hear and getting direction as to where God is taking his people.

Grant: Faith, what would you say is a successful mom?

Faith: I learned from my mom. She was the first one in the family who gave her heart to the Lord and she was quite a stalwart in my family. That made a difference to us – to the point that when she passed on a lot of people wanted to know what she left behind, and I sat one day in my room and I thanked God that she gave us salvation.

I think, learning from that, that when you're younger you don't want to hear what your parents have to say but learn from wisdom, learn from them, because they do know what they're talking about. It established us. It's made us stronger in God.

Grant: I'm going to throw a general question out and ask Ashley to kick it off as I was speaking to him about a study he had done prior to this.

In God's view, we want him to say, "Well done my good and faithful servant." When God sees his church, what's successful in His eyes? Kick us off with a definition of success and then chip in. After this we'll take a couple of scriptures and we're going to plough through some texts.

Ashley: I think that as a visionary elder, one of the responsibilities you live with is the well-being of the people that God has given you oversight over. You want to be responsible with that and you're always before the throne asking God to keep you true and make sure there's a place of integrity out of which you can minister.

I guess some people would say that such a prayer is only a prayer for success but it's not really quite like that. When you stand before God one day you are going to have to give an account of how you led, and I think it's a natural thing at some point in ministry for you to sit down and do a study on success. And when you do that you find it very interesting.

You want to have a biblical basis from which you're going to launch from and when you sit with all the clever people, the theologians and those who love apologetics and hermeneutics, they'll tell you about the law of first mention. What's that? That is simply suggesting that wherever a subject or word is first mentioned in Scripture, go back and have a look at it and see its context; check out its meaning and see how it then reflects through scripture as a strand. It's very helpful.

When it comes to the word “success”, of all the English translations you're not going to find that word in the New Testament at all. The only place you do find that word is when God is speaking to Joshua (Joshua 1: 5 - 9) where he is told to meditate on the Scriptures and not allow the Word to depart from his mouth.

That's a great text to study and if you look at the meanings and unravel the grammar you find that there is a responsibility of being obedient to whatever it is you are meditating on. So there is a hearing and a doing. Once you've combined those two dynamics - the hearing and the doing - then there is a promise that you will make your way prosperous and will have success.

That's the only time you read the word 'success' in the Bible. Now in any English dictionary the word 'success' will make references to superstar, V.I.P. and so forth. But when it comes to a biblical reference the only one you'll find is in Joshua 1:8. What's interesting is that when you look at that word 'success' and look at the Hebrew rendering of the word it means two things - to be circumspect and to be intelligent. Which I suppose you would attach to the general definition of success but let's keep it within the biblical frame and let's perhaps even take that verse and pop it into Tyrone's preach about the furtherance of extending the Kingdom.

Jesus said that if we seek first the Kingdom then all this will be added. If you look at that word “prosperous” - your way will be prosperous and you'll have good success - that word means to push forward. That's what we're doing as a pioneering people. So when you combine it all, it's in our advancing, it's in our meditation and obedience that we will then discover this dynamic of pushing forward with what it is we're doing.

And then there's this dynamic, and I love it, about making intelligent decisions. When I make an intelligent decision it's going to be described of me that it was quite circumspect. Circumspect means to be discreet, to have discernment, and for me those are biblical strands that you will find in the Bible right from beginning to end.

Do we have leaders who are circumspect? Do we have leaders who are intelligent? Absolutely. Do we have leaders pushing forward? Absolutely. That would be the little cornerstone from which I would launch my study from on the subject of success.

Rob: I want to say that it's not entirely different in the business world. When I started out as a young father and businessman, I was not successful. And it had nothing to do with the turnover we were doing or our business, it had to do with the fact that I hadn't understood

about God as the provider, and when that dawned on me, when I was able to invite God into all of my life, I stepped into his grace and I began to understand what it is to be a son.

I used to stress terribly as a young father. I didn't stress about doing business but about going out of business, and about not being able to keep up with this ever-changing field that we're in. It was actually someone's testimony that prompted me to go and pray and invite Christ into all of my life. Once I stepped into the grace of God, suddenly I began to understand a little bit more, and so the stress was gone.

He is the fount of all creativity, the fountain of all wisdom, and he's the greatest provider. Somebody mentioned Joshua and Jericho this morning. He is the provider of strategies, plans and ways forward in business. He's the best partner you could ever have. For me, it's like success in business is a lifestyle, a journey. It's not a goal, it's something you've got to walk and live in every day, as you have to filter all your decisions through the Word of God - how you treat your staff, what you're dealing in, all that stuff you've got to filter through his Word.

When Angus Buchan spoke to farmers at the beginning of his ministry he told them that he had a new textbook for them and he held up his Bible. It's the same for guys in business. You've got to learn to filter everything through the Word of God, otherwise you start wearing different hats.

Greg: For a long time I battled with who is defining what success is. Before we were relating to this team we were part of another group of people. When we planted a church, the first place we went to was a gathering of these people. I'm not exaggerating when I say that at that gathering the first seven pastors that came up to me stuck their hand out and after introducing themselves asked me how big our church was.

They were wearing suits, ties, and we were the only ones without a car that had a certain symbol at the front of it. Within minutes the pecking order had been set as to who is successful. Today some of those guys who I sat with are out of ministry, because the definition of success was being set by the group themselves.

We tried our best, starting with four people in our lounge, and as it's grown I've always been haunted by this thing of who is defining how well our church is doing. I think if it's God and if it's His church, I have to find my definition in what He is happy with, because I know he always loves me but he can be displeased with me. My heart is always asking Him if He is happy and what the unwritten letter to my church is.

Grant: Can you define that for us? What makes what you're doing successful?

Greg: The Lord has given us two great commandments. Firstly, with everything we have we've got to love Him; He must come first. Secondly, if that's true, it has to be demonstrated that the world knows we love God, each other and we love them. Practically they have to feel that our church is here; they feel the weight of us and God through us. Then there is a measure of success.

It's not so much how many churches you're planting or how many people are in the church. It's more about whether those that are there are obeying the two greatest commandments.

Grant: Loving God, loving people – that's what he looks at when he looks at us. He looks through those lenses.

Greg: Because everything we do has to find a place in that. If we're dropping the ball on those two, what's the point of the other stuff.

Ashley: Several years ago we were doing some work up in Kenya and I had one of my elders with me. It was very much in the season when numbers were a big deal. There was a kind of pecking order.

There was this young individual who I perceived as being a little upstart and he was hanging out with everyone who had a fairly big church. This was his identity. I was a featured speaker in this particular instance and someone made reference to me during their preach in terms of NCCB and the influence we've had around the world. So he put two and two together and thought that here's a dude with a big church he must speak to and hang out with.

I had watched him the two or three days I was there. He introduced himself to me and asked how big my church was. I hate that question so I thought, "What can I do to throw this guy?" I told him that our church was 200 people – because that was the size of our prayer meeting – but I didn't tell him I was only counting our prayer meeting. He said, "Oh so it's not so big." I was standing with an elder of my church who questioned me on my answer and I explained that I was just referring to the prayer meeting.

Because my thinking is that if Paul was to visit NCCB and come to one of our prayer times it would be embarrassing, quite frankly. If anything that's where the core of the church is. If prayer is in the heart of God then it should be in the heart of the Church and so it should

be a core time when the saints come together and pray. And so I thought I'd throw that out. And he was quite thrown by that.

Faith: Tomorrow I'm married for 28 years and that's success. When I married my husband he was already leading a church. I've had a Dutch Reformed background where you don't sing much and I came straight into a Pentecostal church where they sing for everything and there's tongues and noise and all of that. And I struggled.

Then I found that my husband didn't just love me, he loved God and the people as well, and I had to find myself in God. I found that my closet became my safety and God became my everything there. And in the first two years of my marriage I found God there for myself and he set things in place for me as to help in leading the church.

You get to that place when everything is thrown at you but you realise, go back, because God is building his church and not you, and I think it was a good place. You get to a place where you let God fight your fights for you.

Saul and David in the Bible come to mind. One was successful and one wasn't. And when God places a mandate on your heart, it's to live that mandate out. Saul had his own agenda while David knew how to get up, even when he fell, and fulfil God's plan.

The other two people that come to mind are Jesus, my hero, and Paul. Paul says, "I've fought the good fight," so all the fights we do fight we must see as good. As hard as it becomes it brings you into this place that you are in absolute freedom; and it doesn't have to be a negative thing, these fights, because God has a better plan.

Jesus said it was finished on the cross - for what he came to accomplish he did well and ended it well. That's success. "That which I gave you," I want to hear him say, despite all the in-betweens and everything else, "you were able to stay focused and accomplish that." And I find when that is in place the numbers come, the church grows, and you start getting into a place where God provides. Your quiet times and having to push through are the things that bring you into this place.

Nosi: For me, so often we see people that have public success, but they have private failures, and it's important for me to see people that have public success also have private success and see fruit from their private lives.

Grant: I want to take you to a well-worn text, 1 Corinthians 3: 6 (ESV):

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.”

So we're not crucifying growth here. In fact, Neither he who plants or waters is anything. But only God who gives the growth. Then the scripture moves to verse 11:

“For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Paul is talking to Christians here. We're not talking about how the world builds, we're saying believers are building on Jesus.

12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— 13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. 14 If the work that anyone has built on the foundation [of Jesus Christ] survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

In other words, there will be Christians who skid into heaven, smelling like a chimney, like they've just escaped hell, and they arrive there almost naked - not quite naked, but almost, in their resurrected bodies.

So here's a question: it's possible for a Christian to build rubbish onto Jesus – straw and hay and stubble. So Greg, out of your personal world, tell us about a flop, stuff that Newday has built that you don't think will make it through the judgement seat of Christ. Or if it's too painful to talk about Newday then generically for churches. So, what I'm asking is: What do we get up to that you have a sneaky suspicion is not going to make it through the refining work of Jesus at the judgement seat of Christ?

Greg: There's a lot of activity that you can't measure. The other day someone was very kind to us and said we have done well but I said that actually I'm embarrassed. We've been leading a church for 17 years and we haven't done nearly what I feel God has put on our hearts. We haven't gotten near to where we need to be. But I can't work any harder than we are now, there's only so many days in the week. So the work ethic is not producing the results.

I think that to hit the brakes every now and then and start saying, “Why on earth are we doing that?” is good, as I think we're putting people and effort and money into stuff because it's good and works and it gets people involved, but it's not necessarily producing

results.

I think, rather than a one-off, there's a slow culture of that that develops in the life of the church: a culture that says we're busy so we're doing all right. Jesus ministered for three and a half years and John says of him that there isn't space enough for all the books that would have to be written on what He did. I'm thinking: how does that work because at times he didn't do anything. At times Jesus also did a whole lot of things. I think for so much work he achieved a lot, so sometimes our work is our biggest mistake.

Grant: I'm going to tell a little story in my own personal world but it'll be cool to hear one or two things you guys think that Jesus is going to say was a bit of a waste of breath.

I was doing some marriage counselling and a couple came into our home who wanted to get married but were living together. I didn't know them, they were friends of someone else that we had married. I was squaring up in my chair and thought that I was going to give these guys a bazooka and a half. So I basically told them they're dirty rotten sinners and need to move out before they're going to get God's blessing on their life. And it must have been a bad week, but that's all I said.

Then they said that they're not moving out but they want the religious thing. So I told them that I knew a Methodist minister close by who might marry them and they agreed. I phoned the minister right then and he said, "Sure, I'll marry them, send them over."

I walked them down my driveway and I gave them something of an understanding of where they stood. After that I walked inside feeling that it wasn't a nice way to end the day but it was still a day well done.

My gentle wife pulled me aside and said, "Grant, that was despicable." I said I did it nicely and with a smile, and I wasn't ugly and didn't point my finger in their nose! Then she said, "This couple walks into our lounge and all you do is judge them. You don't give them Jesus, you don't give them the Gospel."

Hopefully the Methodist got them saved! I can't even say I was planting or watering, I was just doing squat. And for days I thought about this – I was just discharging a party line. I don't think that's going anywhere near heaven.

So, give us one or two things that you think that, when Jesus looks at it, he will reward.

Mli: I'd say it's very important how we build and what we build with. Coming from a

background of the African context of church, there's a lot of things we do that are not helpful. It's very legalistic and judgemental and we're all concentrating on things that are not important. I believe the things that will make it to eternity are the things that are done according to the Word of God; things that are measured by what God says about His Church. Not what our culture or tradition says about Church.

Greg: I've only once ever put a leader into a senior place of leadership on someone else's recommendation. And it was among the very first I put on and that thing bit us badly. It could have had the potential to split our church. It nearly did. And that was because I didn't get a revelation for myself but I went with a trusted word from a trusted person. But much good came out of it. All parties are good, all is great, but that was a mistake I did. I put him in without having the time to look at him myself.

Grant: We do that a lot. We see something that works in another church and we just copy it. Take a guy's message off the Internet, do home groups their way and so on. It's probably going to be a bit of wood and hay and stubble when we stand before Jesus.

Ashley: When I took over the leadership at Bryanston I inherited an orphanage. And you would ask, "What's so bad about that?" But you need to understand that the orphanage was started during the apartheid years with the greatest of intentions but when you start something like this you have all the theories out there that you're going to partner with business and there will be meaningful corporates that are going to come alongside you in this wonderful charitable initiative.

However, my discovery of it was that this thing was draining the church of huge amounts of finances and so one would naturally ask questions around how it started and where we're going with it. It had several kids and if you were to look at the conditions of what they were living in, it was typical northern suburbs – they had everything.

As I began to ask questions, together with the eldership we eventually made the decision that we need to be going to someone who is way better at doing this than us, and so we were very happy in doing that. We were going to give them everything we had. So there was a transition and so on. But the people who began it had done so more out of white guilt than anything that God had said to do. They were unhappy. And their unhappiness spilt over to where we were eventually taken to Court.

You all know in 1 Corinthians 6 that Christians should not take Christians to Court. But in the blindness, fury, emotion and anger and the whole black and white thing in this country, it all got absolutely ugly. I sat in meetings where there were screaming matches, threats on

my life. It got hectic.

In fact, I called in a United Nations (UN) official and asked him to come look at this and tell us what we've got. He said that we had a fantastic facility but the only problem is the way in which it was administrated. After we heard that, we asked questions around how we could dismantle it. The people in the church didn't want it either and they're not the ones who are contributing to it. It was just an ugly thing.

Things got worse and the Courts took it out of our hands. It cost us millions. And all because it wasn't a God thing it was a thing that was out of a good idea and white guilt – out of an emotional response.

How many people have come to you and said we need to start a soup kitchen? And there's lots of frenzy and excitement and three weeks later you look for them and they're not there while you're stuck with the problem of feeding the people. Well it was a typical thing but it was compounded by twelve. For us it was very painful, it simply came in and literally was this abscess in the life of the church that lingered not for months but years, and as a result we had to step back and watch the Courts handle everything

We never fought it by our conviction and they took everything, and we look at that knowing now that if we ever do that again we would have to do it very differently. Subsequently, the very same UN official who came to speak to me has included himself in our local church in more recent times and he has come up with a particular effort which as a church we can back.

More recently, there's a couple who were on Carte Blanche (a South African magazine show) and there's a huge partnering between all the churches that relate together with those that aren't and we are now right in the middle of Hillbrow. There's a partnering that's going on and a fruit and it's not draining our church of finances. Whatever we've given we've done generously because the individual we're giving to carries integrity. It's been thought-out, prayed out and we've communicated around the challenges.

There's a relief in our heart that maybe we're onto something which is way better than we've had before. Be aware of those emotional decisions that have anything to do with race, discrimination or any emotion. They are going to hurt you big time.

Grant: So, it's possible to surrender your body to the flames and feed the poor and do these things and it's a waste of time. It's not what it is, it's how we're doing it. Is Jesus in it or is it in response to Him?

We're going to wrap this up with one word from each of you. Last time we checked we're not the gardener, so the gardener, our God, is looking for fruitfulness and that text in John 15 is not about Christians being chucked into hell but is an issue of fruitfulness in our lives. So God's looking for fruitfulness. How would you sum up fruitfulness in a word or a phrase? Something that God would be pleased with, that as the gardener he looks at and says that that's the fruit He is after? What would that be?

Ashley: I would say there's a wonderful text that says the secrets of God are shared with those who fear him. For me therein lies the secret of success. Press in with him because on his desk is a file that's marked "Top Secret" and when you sit with him and he opens that file he might just give you a paragraph, but when you're running with the secret that God has shared with you, nothing will stop you.

Nosi: There was a stage in my life where I thought I would be the best pianist that the world would ever see. But it's not where I needed to be. I love singing passionately but I got this as a birthday message this morning from Psalm 127: "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labour in vain." And that for me would definitely epitomise it.

Greg: I think that John 15 doesn't tell us to produce fruit, it tells us to *bear* fruit, and I think for me there's a theology of response where if I'm being faithful with what God has said I should do, he'll act and do what needs to be done because he'll look after that word. So I need to respond and give him something and then I will bear the fruit that he produces.

Rob: I think, for being in business, business leaders need to hear from God and they need to lead with confidence and be, as I said earlier, really careful with how they treat people they work with. Because unlike in the Church, we're at war all day, every day, so you need to walk by faith and hear from God.

Mli: To me, fruitfulness is beyond just works. I believe that fruitfulness is living the life God has called you to live and pursuing the things that God has for you. Be faithful with what God has entrusted to you, as the Parable of the Talents says. It's not how much, it's what you do with what God has given you.

Faith: I think, like Greg was saying, being able to do all that God has called you to do and being faithful with it. Success is that whatever context I'm in, I do that well. God has his own scales and so do we and every day we should put ours on God's measure and ask Him how he rates it, knowing that we're doing everything well according to God. We don't always do it well but God sees the heart of wanting to push through that.

Grant: The how

Now I'd like to cover how we live with what we've discussed.

The purpose of this discussion was not to wrap up and give you a neat little answer. It was to expose each of these guys' worlds and help you identify with their struggles and their backgrounds. Hopefully you've been able to see out of their revelation of the texts and their lives how they please God.

What I'd like to do is wrap this up with two thoughts. We'll start with a something I messed up with in the local church recently and I'll use it as a platform for these two thoughts.

Our church, in terms of its application, is a little bit spread out and when that happens you can't really control what's going on. Which is a good thing for a pastor. But if you're a bit of a control freak – which is in all of us – you don't really like that.

So my solution was this. I had a guy on our staff who was amazing at juggling balls and spinning plates and being able to run with a lot of things at the same time. So he was able to launch ministries and projects and everything had been launched and I was concerned that it was becoming a little boring for him. Furthermore, some of the standards were dropping.

This is a confession – it's not supposed to be out the Bible. So I went to this guy and said, "You are the guy who knows how these ministries ought to be functioning. So I want you to go and ensure that things stay at a high standard."

So he did a great job for the first three months but then began to be viewed as a Robocop – a clipboard, white-lab coat wondering in. He didn't literally walk in like that but that's how the elders and the team saw him – that he's coming in like a policeman to check up on things and make sure the standards are right. Because we've all heard that excellence glorifies God and honours people, right? Great phrase from a great man. But when you take that thing too far you've got a whole lot of guys that begin to be seen as if they're cops arriving.

It wasn't working. And our church stagnated for a season. I'm talking numerical stagnation and I think stagnation in growth and intimacy as well.

Then I remembered the discussion that I had with a man four years ago. It was like God arrested me with this thought. I had been in Cape Town in a lecture about the rise and fall

of churches. I didn't agree with much of the lecture and I was doing some studying and noticed that the lecturer – who had written a book on the topic – obviously didn't like big churches. He had drawn a life cycle curve, the kind you use in business to track the life cycle of a product, where a product enters the market, grows in intensity, becomes mature and then should be put to bed, and he was applying this to churches.

He said that's the destiny of every church – that it gets put to bed – and I couldn't believe this. Then he began to describe it. He said that when a church is planted it's planted by apostles, prophets and evangelists. He called them APEs. So an APE plants a church and has a machete between the teeth, because an APE is characterised by wildness and frontier and danger, and when a church is planted things are exhilarating and growing and it takes off. It's a revival. Then the APE gets tired or goes to another field and he hands over to a pastor or teacher, which the lecturer called PTs. Bit of a wimpy name!

Now I'm sitting at the back and I'm the PT. See, I wasn't the APE, I got the church after the wild days. There had been a revival in our city; thousands of people had come to our church, stayed or visited, and the APE then jumped on his horse and left the PT in charge.

So we had some good days and the thing developed a bit. But while I'm sitting there I'm thinking, "Is he saying I'm going to close this thing down? And that when I hand over, good night, baby?"

So I walked straight after the meeting and told him that I had two problems: One, my church is a bit bigger than he would like, and secondly that I'm a PT not an APE and that he was saying that I'm busy landing my church, making it very civilised and respectable and excellent... and very boring. That I'm going to kill this church.

He said no, that's not what he is saying. He described that you can make the curve climb until Jesus comes back. I first asked him why he never said that earlier and then asked him how. His answer? You've got to rediscover your purpose.

I put that on the back bench and didn't think about it until the beginning of this year. I realised that this PT was busy crash-landing something. I was making it very respectable. I even had a guy with a lab coat and clipboard to check out the details.

I was asking the wrong question. I was trying to keep excellence going and the systems in place and Jesus doesn't want to do your systems and your programmes, he's got different parameters. But I was asking the question of how I keep life in this thing and put a system in place, getting people to keep a weary eye on the young, wild things.

So I came back and apologised to our elders, saying I've been asking the wrong question. The question I've been asking is how we can be excellent, how we can grow, what systems we need in place. But what God is saying to me is that I've got to rediscover the wildness of trusting Him.

See there's a difference. If you trust in your systems you're going to trust in your strategies and your books and all the growth guys you read. If you trust in all that, you can do it without God. It'll become respectable and you will bury it.

So I said that I'm not looking for an excellence man any more. And so I fired him from his post. He's still on staff but he's not doing that job and he's very relieved because he was becoming the most hated guy on our staff. I've replaced him and said this is what I'm looking for - arsonists, someone who can set some fires ablaze, someone who trusts God and is wild. I want wildness on every frontier. It can be wild because that's trusting God.

When you tithe you give one tenth of your profits to God as a starting block. It's not the law, that's the entry point. That is wild – he's saying, “Everything that's mine is yours and I'm trusting you to provide for me.” That's what Rob is saying, that when he took that wild step he saw God on him. When you release a young man to preach, you're trusting in God who is in him and you're trust in God who leading His church. You might have to tell him to change his vocab, only if it's illegal, but trusting God is wild and he is looking for wild faith; wild, wild faith. So if you had to ask me how to be successful, I would say it would need to be this for me: that you trust in God. That's the first thought.

The works of God

The second thought is this. Jesus was asked in John 6, “What must we do to be doing the works of God?” That's the question we're asking. And this is His answer (from John 6:29): “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom he has sent.”

I believe all these answers rest in this thing. When Faith says that to be a successful mom she needs to put her trust fully in Him, to carry her as a mother, to be out there on the water, leading her children like no other mother would lead them, it's about believing in Jesus. In leading my church, you know when you can do a thing without God, and that's not believing in Him.

It wouldn't have been fair, because I think there is a place where God smiles at your pleasure, but I was going to ask Ashley, who loves rising Harleys, about whether that is

going to make it through the judgement seat of Christ. I think that possibly it could. Not the Harley of course!

Because when we trust in God then this is the work of God - to believe in Him.

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