

A collection of travel items is arranged on a wooden surface. In the upper left, a portion of a light-colored straw hat with a dark blue band is visible. Below it, a pair of black sunglasses with dark lenses rests on a map. To the left of the sunglasses is a black camera. The map shows parts of Ethiopia, Sudan, and Kenya, with the word 'ETHIOPIA' clearly visible. In the bottom left corner, a dark brown passport is partially open, with the word 'PASSPORT' printed in gold. In the top right corner, a yellow pencil lies on a white lined notebook. The background is a dark, textured wooden surface.

**3 PITFALLS FAITHFUL
MINISTRY MUST AVOID**
Mark 1:35-45

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35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, He got up, went out, and made His way to a deserted place. And He was praying there. 36 Simon and his companions went searching for Him. 37 They found Him and said, "Everyone's looking for You!" 38 And He said to them, "Let's go on to the neighboring villages so that I may preach there too. This is why I have come." 39 So He went into all of Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

40 Then a man with a serious skin disease came to Him and, on his knees, begged Him: "If You are willing, You can make me clean." 41 Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched him. "I am willing," He told him. "Be made clean." 42 Immediately the disease left him, and he was healed. 43 Then He sternly warned him and sent him away at once, 44 telling him, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go and show yourself to the priest, and offer what Moses prescribed for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." 45 Yet he went out and began to proclaim it widely and to spread the news, with the result that Jesus could no longer enter a town openly. But He was out in deserted places, and they would come to Him from everywhere

Mark 1:35-45 HCSB

Introduction

Defining success is often like nailing Jell-O to the wall. Do we evaluate success by baptism, budgets, ministry activity, spiritual discipline engagement, or any other standard? How do we gauge whether what we are doing is the right thing, and if we are doing the right thing, how do we know that we are doing the right thing, right?

Previously, we have focused on the need to engage in daily ministry, and we have provided a practical reality to experience ministry daily. When we look at Mark 1:35-45, we have a prism to view success through, and as a consequence, we have a lens to consider potential problems with achieving success. Today, as we examine this passage, you are invited to discover with me 3 Pitfalls Faithful Ministry Must Avoid as we determine where success is to be measured and how to experience that in our daily ministry.

Textual Overview

When we look at these verses, the text reveals that success cannot be anything other than faithfulness to the divine purpose. Jesus spends time in prayer while involved in robust and busy ministry work in Capernaum and decides that he must go to the other towns in Galilee to preach the Gospel because that is why he has come.

The size and scope of Capernaum's work could not replace the reality of why the Lord Jesus had come. His faithfulness to that purpose determined his priorities and his activities. Jesus declares this purpose again in Luke 19:10 when he states that he has come to "seek and to save that which was lost." In Matthew 20:28, Jesus reveals his purpose again when he says that he "...did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

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The success of Jesus' ministry then hinges on His eternal purpose. What he does, and whether or not he is successful is rooted in that purpose.

As believers, we must understand our purpose to experience authentic and genuine success in our lives. Several verses can reflect the purpose of the believer's life, but the best verse we can embrace towards our eternal goal is John 15:5. Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit because you can do nothing without me."

Success for the believer is remaining in Jesus, and Jesus remaining in us. Keeping that as the central purpose of who we are and what we do is critical to producing the spiritual fruit the Lord Jesus has prepared us to bring forth. Whether that fruit is spiritual growth in our own lives, evangelistic fruit through sharing the Gospel, or congregational fruit through the local church, all of it springs forth from remaining in Jesus and Jesus remaining in us.

To be truly successful, then we must set our course for abiding in the Lord Jesus. As we do that, we can further identify three pitfalls faithful ministry must avoid as we pursue this.

Pitfall #1: Popularity Can Distort Our Priorities So Pull Away from the Crowds and Pray

Popularity feeds our ego and often makes us think we are more than we are. While we may know this, and we affirm it in these instances, the reality is that we often struggle under the weight of popularity in the moment. Those things that bring us acclaim can then begin to distort our priorities.

The desire to be popular can seduce us and lead us away from our purpose. Jesus was surrounded by those who desired his ministry and acclaimed his work. The temptation to stay was strong.

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But Jesus models the antidote for popularity's distortion. When we are popular, we must pull away from the crowds and get alone with God in prayer. As we pull away from the clamoring of others and allow ourselves to rest in God, we reset our focus on remaining in the Lord Jesus. We sometimes find ourselves having to move away from what is popular for what is priority.

Pitfall #2: Circumstances Can Distort Our View of God So Look to The Scriptures for a Clear Revelation of God's Nature, Character, and Will

I often think of the people in Capernaum that day. People who were sick, people who brought their sick spouse, and people who brought their sick children only to find that Jesus had left. I imagine the feelings that they felt. I understand the helplessness that might have crept into their thinking. "Doesn't he know what we went through to get here?" "Doesn't he understand that unless he does something, my child is going to die?" "Does he even care?"

I think of the statement that the leper makes to Jesus as well. "If you are willing..." How many times had he prayed for deliverance? What was the cost of his leprosy? As he comes to Jesus, he seems not to doubt that Jesus has the power to make him clean but does he have the will to do so.

Circumstances have incredible power. Those things we know for sure today can be cast into uncertainty tomorrow by what we see and experience. What we think of God's nature, character, and will can be firm in our minds one moment only to be doubted the next.

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If we are to remain in Christ, we must run from this oscillation of thought brought to bear by circumstances. We must regularly turn to the Scriptures to see how God has revealed himself to us so that we can know him and abide in Him. The reality of circumstance is that there are so many things around them that we trust them as a reliable source for truth. Those people in Capernaum could not know that their greatest need was a savior from sin who had to move forward in that work. There will always be sickness, suffering, and death until the day that redemption is complete, but that day could never come apart from the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus being accomplished.

We cannot know the totality of circumstances surrounding so much of what we see, but we can know the one who is orchestrating the entirety of those circumstances to His appointed end. Do not allow circumstances to distort your view of God, but instead turn towards the Scriptures faithfully and see God as he has revealed himself to be.

Pitfall #3: Prior Faithfulness Can Distort Present Purpose So Return to the Gospel and Remember Where You Started

Jesus heals the leper, and the leper tells everyone. So great is the response that Jesus cannot openly enter into towns any longer because people are flocking to meet him. The purpose of Jesus has not changed, but his prior faithfulness has brought about new challenges to the work.

Similarly, our prior faithfulness can cause us to miss the point of our present purposes. Rather than embrace the crowds and the work they desired, Jesus retreated to the shadows and the secret so that he could finish his more significant work.

We are often faithful, and amid that faithfulness, we experience God producing and harvesting fruit within our lives. As a result, we begin to shift the priority from abiding in Christ to managing the harvest. We forget that apart from the Lord Jesus, we can do nothing.

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The cure for this is a constant reminder of the Gospel. Recognizing the reality of our sinfulness, our need for the savior, and our salvation rests on God's terms continually reminds us of where the power for fruitfulness is. Remembering that the Gospel is not just for others, but that the Gospel is critical for you provides a proper perspective for faithful and fruitful ministry in the middle of our past faithfulness and our present purpose.

We often desire to forget where we have come from, but in the Gospel, we are continuously reminded of where we come from and where we are going. Nothing else will protect us from the distortion of our present purpose.

Conclusion

Our calling is to remain in the Lord Jesus and for him to remain in us because without him, we can do nothing. To stay in him, we must avoid the pitfall of popularity; we must avoid the pitfall of circumstantial distortion, and we must avoid the pitfall of past faithfulness.

Through the retreat of prayer, the revelation of the Bible, and the rehearsing of the Gospel, we can remain in the Lord Jesus and expect a fruitful harvest in the wake of faithful ministry. We must reaffirm this purpose to produce fruit through remaining in the Lord Jesus over and over again. As we do that, we will experience faithfulness in our ministry each day.



Faithful Ministry is Daily Ministry

As you desire to be faithful in ministry, you will find yourself doing ministry each and every day. Avoiding these three pitfalls will help you as you minister to others.

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