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Gleanings

A Theology of Success



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According to one source, the average inner-city poverty rate in the USA is 32 percent and unemployment rate is 14 percent. In my hometown of Dallas, these numbers are, respectively, 44 percent and 24 percent (<http://goodworkscountry.com/>).

This reality is one of the driving reasons for the Dallas-based Good-Works Company, which exists for the purpose of “alleviating poverty, restoring human dignity, and creating flourishing communities through good work” (goodworkscountry.com).

The formation of the Good-Works Company by H.I.S. Bridgebuilders is a response to nearly two decades of work seeking to address the problem of poverty and unemployment. A recent article about the Good-Works Company stated: “After nineteen years of efforts focused on the spiritual development of individuals and families, health and wellness programs, and educational development, including job training, we discovered that the poor were still often left with little or no economic opportunities capable of inducing them to abandon government dependence or criminal enterprise” (<http://us7.campaign-archive2.com/?u=8c0f874277fff30e30abed624&id=b15dce87d2&e=3f93569551>).

H.I.S. Bridgebuilders concluded that spiritual development and job training are not enough to achieve success (defined in this scenario as the alleviation of poverty and unemployment); hence, the formation of the Good-Works Company.

Consider the apostle Peter’s perspective on what is needed to enable people to live successfully in God’s universe:

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life [i.e., a successful life] through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2Peter 1:3–8 NIV)

According to Peter, the knowledge of God is the key to success in life. Knowing a person is both cognitive and relational. The cognitive aspect is to know the traits of a person, both tangible traits, such as his or her physical appearance, and intangible traits, such as his or her philosophy, values, and principles. The relational aspect is the ability to connect with a person heart-to-heart—to be able to communicate at the deepest level. Therefore, it is through the cognitive and relational knowledge of our Creator that we gain wisdom and discernment about how to successfully live in God’s universe.

Peter said that the power to live a successful life comes from participating in the divine nature. The Greek word translated “participate” means to be a partner or associate. To participate in the divine nature intimates that we are to be so connected with God that our only agenda is to do his will according to his ways. That is empowerment to live a supernatural life—a life beyond the natural.

This empowerment flows from the “great and precious promises”—most likely a reference to the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1–3), which was fulfilled in Christ (Galatians 3:1–13). A person

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who is empowered and displays the progression of character traits noted by Peter will overcome the corruption in the world caused by sin. The result will be a fruitful, successful life.

If you concur with the above analysis of 2 Peter 1, then the key to a successful life is growth and maturity in Christ.

H.I.S. Bridgebuilders claimed that spiritual development in people is not enough. Furthermore, that adding job training is not enough. They concluded that in addition to character development and job training, job opportunities must be added. But is this correct? Could H.I.S. Bridgebuilders have an incomplete or inaccurate view of spiritual development and job training? What may be blocking their view is a lack of understanding of individual personal destiny.

Many professing Christians today limit their definition of personal destiny to "spiritual" work, such as, being a pastor, a missionary, Bible teacher, etc. They do not believe that God calls people to work assignments outside of "spiritual" work. If this is the view of H.I.S. Bridgebuilders, then their job training will reflect the idea that work in the physical world is not important because it is not "spiritual" work. Such a philosophy does not empower people to work with excellence in the physical realm. Therefore it is not surprising that employers would not want to hire people who lack a commitment to excellence. As a result, efforts of H.I.S. Bridgebuilders to train workers and help them find employment have not been successful.

But consider an alternative view of work in the physical world. God created the universe and declared it to be very good (Genesis 1:31), which means that God values the physical world. Furthermore, he made man to rule his physical universe through the process of dominion (Genesis 1:26–28). This is known as the creation or cultural mandate. Business is a tool of dominion and therefore a way that we obey the creation mandate. This means that work in the physical realm is important to God. And if it is important to God, could he call people to various work assignments in the physical world (Ephesians 2:8–10)?

The missing aspect of H.I.S. Bridgebuilders' work may be a robust understanding of personal destiny that values the call of God to all licit vocations. If so, this incomplete perspective about how God works may have led H.I.S. Bridgebuilders to an erroneous conclusion, which led them to start the Good-Works Company based on a flawed view of reality. This is hardly the foundation for success.

A sound view of reality encompasses not only spiritual development and job training, but also the discernment of God's specific purpose for each person. Success would then be to help each person prepare and fulfill his or her work assignment by uncovering the person's passion (*calling*), discipling the person into maturity in Christ (*character*), developing the ability sovereignly placed in the person (*capability*), and directing the person to the specific work that God has ordained for the person to accomplish (*commissioning*).

People who mature in Christ and find their specific work assignments will be outstanding workers because they know their work is important to God and therefore their work has eternal significance. They will be passionate, selfless, trustworthy, committed, and skilled workers. They will be in high demand; employers will seek them. There will be no need to create jobs for them because they will be so highly regarded.

The transition from poverty and unemployment to world-class workers, however, is not instantaneous; it takes time for people to develop. Perhaps the Good-Works Company's vision should be a vehicle to employ people who are in transition from a life of poverty and unemployment to a life of obedience to the will and ways of Christ. If so, then the Good-Works Company must include in its mission robust training in how to "participate in the divine nature" that includes a sound view of personal calling.

According to Scripture, the end product of helping people participate in the divine nature will be personal success in life (2 Peter 1:8) and a powerful witness for Christ (Titus 2:9–10).

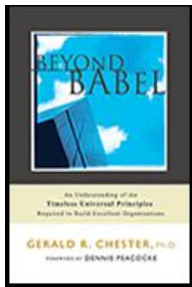
My theology of success in life, therefore, is to help people participate in the divine nature, that is, to help them find and fulfill God's purpose for their lives by helping them discover their *calling*, grow godly *character*, develop their *capability*, and *commission* them to the work that God has called them to. This is the biblical principle that I call C4: *calling*, *character*, *capability*, and *commissioning*.

May the Lord grant us the grace to find the work that we have C4 to do and to help others accordingly. This will lead to a fruitful life of obedience to God, which, in the end, is the most profound definition of success.



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