

# “SideLines”

Pastor Tracy Gorman – Southside Church of the Nazarene – April 3, 2008

***Good morning friends of Southside! Please take the time to read this entire note from me this week. It's long, but it's very, very important. Thanks!!!***

I was thinking this morning of what it actually means to be successful. For some, success is hitting the most home runs. For some, success is making a lot of money. For some, success is winning a race of some kind. Of course, that is only a VERY SMALL sampling of a much larger list. For instance, for some pastors, their idea of success is to build a very large church, have lots and lots of people following them, and spend their life intertwined in matters of the church. In every example I just gave, both of pastors and of others, there is nothing wrong with those goals, and with those definitions. Nothing at all!!! In fact, our world would be a lot better off if more people had a desire to be successful, rather than to go through life just barely eking by.

So, as I continued to think, what would I define success as for my own life. I thought about it all the way from Yorktown Middle School (where I dropped Seth off) to my office. Wouldn't you know that God had my answer for me, and it was right on the screen of my computer (where it is everyday). See, I have a screen saver that is called, "Measure of Success," which is actually copied from a card that I have in the front of my Church Board book. I move it, each and every year, from one Board book to the next, so I am reminded throughout the year, every time I open up my Board book to work on church business, what I consider to be the "measure of success" for my own life and ministry. Here's what that card says: *"You can use most any measure when speaking of success. Some measure by the size of their house or the net worth of their portfolio. However, the measure of real success is one you cannot spend...It's the way your child describes you when talking to a friend!"*

To me, it's all so very clear. My real success in life will never be wrapped up in the tale which is to be written or known of my ministry accolades. My real success in life will never be adequately represented by the amount of money I have, the types of vehicles I drive, or the victories that I personally win for myself. My greatest success in life is, and always will be, bundled up in the lives of my children and my wife. If I build the biggest church, or achieve the highest office in the church world, and lose my family in the process, I would be a tremendous failure. If I have a lot of zeroes at the end of my bank balance, and in the process sacrifice my family, what have I achieved? Failure! But, if you must have something related to "church" in this whole scenario in order to be able to ever picture your pastor in a positive manner again, the thing I think that would mark some level of success in my life as a pastor (which truly is already outlined by the way I treat my family, and the prominence they have in my life), but the thing that I could also add to this, would be the number of people I actually reach for Christ, and influence for His Kingdom. I definitely would consider that to be a part of the collection in a major way.

Let me talk about that concept for a minute: On Easter Sunday, my family brought 13 people to church with us. In the past 6 months, we've brought over 40 visitors to church with us. Now, I do not say this to pat ourselves on the back, but to make a point: "Church" to me is not about who does this, and who does that. It's not about whose saying this, or making that ridiculous comment. To me, it's always been about making a difference in people's lives. It's about bringing people along with you. It's about having some type of influence on people who are in the world, lost, and heading to Hell. It's not about pushing people around in a baby stroller their whole life as they continue to act like spiritual babies, when they truly need to grow up. "Success" could include seeing people move from the pacifier to at least the baby fork and baby food. For Heaven's sake, it should include seeing people move from baby food to real food, but there are times that I'd truly settle for seeing a little bit of Gerber Big Kids' food. That's at least better than sucking a pacifier and drinking from a bottle our whole lives, isn't it?

Let me go back for a second to "bringing people to church," and having something to show for your actions, rather than just a bunch of talk and blather (and I continue to talk about what "success" really means). See ladies and gentlemen, God did not save us to sit. He did not come into our lives just to help us become "holy spectators." A spectator is someone who watches the action, comments on the action, and takes up space in the stands. When I go to a baseball game, I am a spectator (always). I sit there, commenting on what a terrible job the ump is doing; yell at the players and the coaches to do better at executing their duties; and generally just take the whole thing in. It's easy being a spectator, because once my job is finished, I leave. There's no conditioning, no training, no hard work. I

just eat the peanuts and hot dogs, drink the pop, and run my mouth off. Then I go home, and leave the real work to someone else. You know what folks, that's exactly what a lot of people do with their "church experience." They go through those same (or very similar) motions, day in and day out that spectators at ballgames go through. They talk about what everyone else should be doing, but they haven't brought a soul to church in years (or decades). They make disparaging comments about what others do, but you would never catch them doing anything, anytime, anywhere. Period! Then, they have the audacity to call themselves a true follower of Christ, but in all reality, they're a spectator. They're sitting on the sidelines, watching the game, eating their popcorn, yelling at the players, coaches, and officials, while all the while, the clock is running down, and time is running out.

Brothers and sisters, time is running out on this world. As a pastor who wants to be successful in the ways that I described already, I do not want to spin my wheels, argue, complain, gripe, and sit around singing "Kum By Ya" with a group of people who need to be out, making a difference in their world, and actually having some fruits to show from their current, daily walk with Christ, rather than be sitting around watching for the sky to come falling down. To me, we will be successful when we are all involved, all engaged in the process of seeing lives changed, and when we have our eyes on Christ, and not on what each other is / is not; should / should not be doing. We're successful when we're daily growing in our relationship with Christ, and with each other...when it's current, and up to date!

Now, I didn't mean to "preach a sermon" on Thursday morning to you, but all of these things are running through my mind a million miles per hour. "SideLines" was originally developed as a way for me to communicate with you during the week...to challenge you, and to let you know what I was thinking, and hopefully what the Lord was telling me to tell you. Brothers and sisters, we're in the fourth quarter (or ninth inning), and time is running out. The more we spend on "blather" and junk (call it what you want), the less time we are spending on helping people, and making a difference in their lives.

I did not give my life to the ministry to constantly be having to burp babies! I gave my life to Christ's ministry to make a difference in peoples' lives; to bring them to church with me so they can hear about Jesus; to go to the baseball fields, and the basketball courts, and love those people that I encounter into the Kingdom of God. I have done what God has told me to do. (Imperfectly at times, of course.) But, at the end of the day, I know that there are people that my family and I are impacting for Christ's Kingdom, and that's what lights my fire. That's what helps me feel successful, even when there are storms, floods, fires, etc., raging all around. The ministries that each of us involve ourselves in, whether those are inside or outside of this church, are NEVER in vain...not if ONE person is reached and changed for God's Kingdom.

So, here's the deal: Over the next 30 days, I would like to see us refocus our efforts, our hearts, and Christ's church on the things that really matter for the Kingdom. What are those things? Well, they are summed up in our mission statement, which says, "We exist to connect people to Jesus Christ, and to each other!" I will instruct the Board and staff to assist me in creating an atmosphere where that is able to happen successfully, and where as many hindrances to the fulfillment of our mission, as possible, are removed or realigned. You can easily create a list of the things that are acceptable, and the things that are not, just by asking yourself, "What would matter to Jesus?"

I am, with the writing of this letter to you, asking each person who reads it to make a commitment (even if you've done so already...even many times) to get your eyes off of what someone is doing (or is not doing), and focus on what you're doing. What are you doing for Jesus? What are you doing for His church? Who are you bringing along with you? What are you willing to give up or sacrifice for Christ? How much time are you spending in prayer? See, this thing called "church" is not a game, and we're not some stinkin' social club. You are not called to be a spectator, dear friend (go back to the earlier paragraph where that word is defined). You are called to be a DO-ER! You are called to make a difference in people's lives. You are called to lead others to Christ, and then to love them, teach them, and disciple them. Yep, YOU! If you're a Christ follower, I am talking to YOU! Don't tell someone else what they're doing wrong until you look at you and make sure that person is who he / she needs to be.

30 days! I am asking God to show me and His church, over these next 30 days, what is actually possible for His kingdom through what the people of Southside will do. I will learn a lot during this time, and so will you. Just what will Southside do? What will we focus on? Who will we be? What are we to become? Will you accept this challenge? How will you accept it? What will it look like to you? DREAM THE POSSIBILITIES of what God can do. What kinds of things will you attempt for His kingdom through the ministries of this church?

I want this challenge to be discussed in every class, group, etc., of Southside Church this next week, at some point in your discussion. I want this to be taken as personal, because it is meant to be very personal.

OK, that's all I am going to write. It's quite enough, I know. I just hope to see you this Sunday morning for Sunday School at 9:30, and church at 10:30 and 6:00. I am speaking in both Sunday services. Hope to see you then, and I hope you'll bring someone along with you! I love you very much, and I truly believe that when God's people pray, seek His face, turn from their wicked ways, that He is able, MORE THAN ABLE, to do fabulously amazing things in our presence.

I hope your Thursday, Friday, and Saturday are great days in your life! Be successful in ALL you do!

*With much love,  
Pastor Tracy*

***Dream the Possibilities!  
30 days of challenge!***