

# There Is No Such Thing As “Success”

(Reflections From A Recovering Church-Planter)

by Jeffrey Pearson

Hi, my name is Jeff and I’m a successful sinner. My sin de-jour is an unhealthy desire for “success” – a sinful success that does not even exist. Let me explain...

**THE BACKGROUND:** My family and I arrived in Maryland on January 31<sup>st</sup> 2005, for what was creatively described as a “parachute-drop” church plant (meaning you have ministry “partners” behind you, but no people coming with you). Not to worry, we arrived excited and “called,” knowing God was with us and that He had packed our parachute... Logistically, we came directly from Southern Seminary as fully appointed, North American Mission Board, “Nehemiah Project,” Church Planting Missionaries. Sounds impressive, right? Not really, just blessed. In reality, it was God’s grace that was impressive! His Grace was demonstrated and shared through the faithfully obedient and missional commitments of Weems Creek Baptist Church, (our “parent church” family), as well as the Baptist Convention of Maryland Delaware (and all who prayerfully contribute to the Cooperative Program). For it was God’s sovereign and providential grace, extended in part and in partnership through Weems Creek & the BCMD, that the Lord used to “plant” what is now known as THE BRIDGE ([www.HISbridge.com](http://www.HISbridge.com)); the young church that, having constituted on February 14, 2008, today serves as a beacon of Truth in Love on Kent Island.

**THE PROBLEM:** Every aspect of our church planting ministry has been blessed. God has been moving miraculously in our midst from day one. In short, our story (which is really God’s story) is amazing. God is being glorified and lives are being transformed. We are impacting our community for and with Christ. To date, we have baptized over 160 people, touched countless others thru creative outreach, & been recognized as the “Best Corporate Neighbor,” in our county by the Chamber of Commerce. In short, God is doing a mighty work in & through the people of THE BRIDGE, as we *live* our Mission Statement: *Love God, Love People, Serve the World.*

I can hear you asking: “So... *where is the problem?*” The problem is never found in the moves of God, but in the motives of His “movers.” To be more specific, *the problem (and my sin) is an unhealthy desire for “success.”*

Ironically, again, there is no such thing as “success” in healthy, biblical, ministry. More pointedly, there is no such thing as “success” in church planting (or church growth for that matter). None. Period! *Servants serve. Self “succeeds.” I repent.*

In my humble, and recovering opinion, the greatest challenge most church planters face is their all-to-familiar, “survival-mode,” pursuit of “success.” I have been there, I know. The success-seeking, (but Spirit quenching) planting process that must be surrendered to Christ, (in terms of motive & measures), tends to look like this:

1. We need to successfully pray (so as to get in step with God).
2. We need to successfully develop a core-group (so as to prepare for launch).
3. We need to successfully launch (so as to draw a sizable crowd).
4. We need to successfully attract a crowd (so as to transform it into a church).
5. We need to successfully transform the crowd into a church (so as to organize & stabilize the ministry).
6. We need to successfully organize & stabilize the ministry (so as to secure its presence & expand its reach).
7. We need to successfully secure and expand the church's reach (so as to be missional).
8. We need to successfully be missional in ministry (so as to "Find the Lost & Grow the Found" – our church's Vision Statement).
9. We need to successfully "Find the Lost & Grow the Found" (so as to be obedient).
10. We need to be successfully obedient (so as to hear: "Well done, faithful servant" – but remember, the ends never justify the means or the motives).

Herein we find the problem. *God "succeeds." We serve.* To think otherwise is to be puffed up, grace-ignorant, and an advocate of "works" theology. The truth is, we don't "succeed" at anything. God does what He chooses to do, thru us. Consequently, there is no such thing as "success" in Christian ministry, but rather opportunities to serve. Moreover, such is true, whether your "walk" is that of a church planter, a pastor, a plumber, or any other persuasion. So, take heed, one of the most recurring planter/believer-problems is the unhealthy pursuit of "success," (as measured by the world's statistics), rather than seeking *the* Solution.

**THE SOLUTION:** *His name is Jesus!* The only true solution, in any ministry endeavor, is an unbridled pursuit and commitment to Christ – no matter what! Again, be you in vocational ministry, mothering, manufacturing, marketing, or the like, ALL Christians need to abandon their pursuit of success, (as typically measured in "spiritual trophies"). Instead, let us serve an Audience of One... seeking only to exemplify a life-defining, grace-guiding, "All-In" relationship with Jesus, the Christ.

Sound obvious? Yet, what we verbally endorse and "Who" we pursue are often incongruent. We must remember: there is no such thing as success in the Christian's life. We are not called to succeed, but to serve. Service is completed not succeeded.

Thankfully, when we take our eyes off "success" and put our hearts into service, God continues to do, in and through His people/planters, what only God can do... By grace, He saves souls, builds churches, and expands His kingdom of Truth in Love.

In closing, assuming we might have some things in common, I encourage you to *give up on "success."* For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) With that said, I respectfully remind you... Serving and glorifying the Lord is not our *means to an end*... Thank God, by grace, *it is our end.* **Amen!**