

SEDUCED BY SUCCESS

The Secret to Serving God for a Long Time

PASTOR VLAD • HUNGRY GENERATION CHURCH
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THE FRAMEWORK

Bob Biehl — observation of 5,000 individuals across a 40-year period

Childhood (0–9): Security. Teens (10–19): Self. 20s: Survival. 30s: Success. 40s: Significance. 50s: Stride. 60s: Strategic. 70s: Succession. 80s: Slippery. 90s and Beyond: Sleep.

Pastor Vlad is turning 40 this year. When COVID hit, he launched VSM (Vladimir Subject Ministries), and it grew rapidly online. Opportunities opened that had never opened before, even as things at the church grew more demanding — new building, old building, four services. In that season he developed an appetite to travel, to reach the world, to be "the next guy." He began to see Tri Cities and Hungry Generation as a hindrance to a bigger calling, and a few voices around him agreed.

1

Don't Be Seduced by the Culture's Definition of Success; by Its Standards, Jesus Was a Failure.

A. Chasing Success vs. Defining It

Chasing success is important, but defining it is more important — what is the win? The world's pursuits aren't inherently bad, but they aren't our chase.

Matthew 6:32 (NIV)

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

It's entirely possible to follow Christ and still be seduced by the world's definition of success: constant striving, comparing, chasing potential, a mental treadmill that succeeds at what doesn't ultimately matter.

B. The Sauna and the Mountain

In that season, Pastor Vlad went to a sauna with his best friend Pastor Ilia and half-jokingly tried to hand him the church, reasoning that Ilia, as the founding pastor's son, was the rightful heir. Ilia's response was blunt: "Are you high? Is everything okay with your head?" That door closed immediately.

Still unsettled, Pastor Vlad spent three days at Mount Hood seeking God. The first two days he complained — Tri Cities was too small a pool for what he believed was a bigger calling. On the third day, the Holy Spirit answered: by his definition of success — optimize your potential, maximize your influence, avoid discomfort — Jesus Christ was a failure. That framework, applied to Jesus, doesn't hold.

C. Glorified, Not Famous

John 17:4

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.

At 33, Jesus had no home of His own, no bestselling book, no building, and at His death, few remained. By the world's measure His ministry wasn't a success — but He did what God called Him to do. At age 30, before a single miracle, God had already said of Him, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Jesus's goal was never fame, power, or greatness — it was to please the Father.

Romans 12:2 (NKJV)

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

2

Make It Your Aim to Please God by Being Faithful With What He Has Entrusted to You.

A. Faithfulness Over Recognition

Maximizing potential doesn't guarantee pleasing God — but pleasing God ensures a person fulfills their calling, by the help of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:9

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

Faithfulness in the present shouldn't be traded for the chase of what's next; serving becomes a stepping stone instead of an act that pleases God.

Luke 16:10

Whoever is faithful with very little will also be faithful with much.

Faithfulness is not fast — it's slow, and it feels especially slow when life and other people are moving faster. When faithfulness aims at pleasing God, recognition is no longer required to stay motivated.

B. When Motive Shifts

Isaiah 53:10

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief... and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

When the motive shifts from pleasing God to pleasing people, recognition becomes the fuel — and the moment it runs out, so does the faithfulness. Motivation flows from motive: pleasing God sustains a person when pleasing people cannot.

3 Make It Your Ambition to Lead a Quiet Life.

A. Led, Not Driven

Matthew 3:17

And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

A person doesn't have to do something big to be fully pleasing to God. God isn't waiting for greatness — He's waiting for faithfulness.

1 Thessalonians 4:11

And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you.

God doesn't want anyone driven by success — He wants them led by His Spirit. Passive people are driven by laziness; ambitious people are driven by success. Neither is pleasing to God. When driven, a person stops being led by the Spirit, follows someone else's pace, ignores the limits God has placed on their life, and can kill what God has entrusted to them.

B. The Balloon Life

A quiet life is not a small life — it's the only life that bears fruit that lasts, and it must be pursued intentionally, not drifted into. A loud life is usually built on pretense: impressive on the outside, empty within, like a balloon. A loud life is usually a noisy life, attracting attention but rarely building anything lasting. And a loud life is usually a nosy life — a sign that a person has lost sight of their own assignment. Those fully engaged in what God has called them to do rarely have time to be consumed with everyone else's business.

C. Jacob's Pace

Genesis 33:13–14

My lord knows that the children are weak, and the flocks and herds which are nursing are with me. And if the men should drive them hard one day, all the flock will die... I will lead on slowly at a pace which the livestock that go before me, and the children, are able to endure, until I come to my lord in Seir.

Jacob didn't try to match Esau's pace; he led his family at the pace they could endure. Pastor Vlad shared about interviewing one of the most respected preachers of his generation, then 90 years old. Asked how he had led his family through decades of ministry success, the man dodged the question twice. On a later question about self-forgiveness, he broke down: an early promise of "just six months" at a prestigious church turned into 25 years, and the relationship with his son eroded the entire time. "I drove my family," he admitted. "I didn't lead them." A driven life pushes people past what they can sustain; a led life moves at the pace God has set.

4 Stay Busy Enjoying Your Lot in Life Instead of Chasing Someone Else's.

A. The Gift of Enjoying Your Labor

Ecclesiastes 5:18–19 (NLT)

It is good for people to eat, drink, and enjoy their work under the sun during the short life God has given them, and to accept their lot in life... To enjoy your work and accept your lot in life — this is indeed a gift from God.

Ecclesiastes 5:20 (NLT)

God keeps such people so busy enjoying life that they take no time to brood over the past.

Embracing the gift God gives is what allows a person to receive the gift of enjoying their life.

B. Joy, Not Happiness

Deuteronomy 28:47–48 (NLT)

If you do not serve the Lord your God with joy and enthusiasm for the abundant benefits you have received, you will serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you.

There are seasons, but serving God requires endurance — it is spiritual maturity to serve God and enjoy it. The world keeps people busy chasing things they will likely never catch. God wants them busy enjoying the life they already have — not happiness built on income or circumstance, but joy built on Him.