

# 1. TRUE SUCCESS

& THE 4 ARENAS OF LIFE (Ecc 3:1 - 8).

## CHAOTIC LIVES WITH THE ILLUSION OF SUCCESS.

Case Study 1 - Clinton - A successful president but a moral failure.

Case Study 2 - Karen Youth & their wish for time with their fathers.

Case Study 3 - The loneliness of reaching the top, and finding you have no friends.

What do each of these 3 have in common ?

Ill. - The apple with a rotten core.

We tend to define success in terms of wealth power and prestige. Here in Kenya the public figures we consider to be successful are those who are always in the media because of the power they wield, the wealth they have amassed and the privileges they can afford. But no-one stops to ask - how was that wealth acquired? Were compromises in their personal integrity made along the way? Are their personal and private lives in order or are they in a mess - broken homes, estranged children, etc. And this is not to say that every rich person has compromised.

Sadly if you were to look at the personal lives of many of our successful public figures, by and large you would find that in fact their lives are a mess. Their success is like that rotten apple - pretty on the outside but rotten inside.

Why is this so? It is because our definition of success is not wholesome enough - our definitions are too narrow - they encompass only one dimension whereas real success must be evidenced in what I call the 4 arenas of life. What are these arenas? They are the 4

spheres where we live out our lives - the Private Arena, the Personal Arena, the Public Arena and the Professional Arena.

Let's elaborate on each in turn, beginning with the :-

### 1. PRIVATE ARENA :

This is the most significant of the 4 arenas, for it is here that your values and convictions about life are formed. The private arena is about the inner you, that which is in the heart, what the bible calls your soul. It is here that wisdom is gathered, where your philosophy of life is shaped, where convictions and integrity are set and where your character is moulded.

My values and drive for life emanates from here. If you were to ask me "What makes you tick?" - my answer would be a reflection of what goes on in the private arena. I have 3 basic core values :

1. Nothing in life matters more to me than that I know, honour and glorify my Lord Jesus Christ. This is my deepest core value and hopefully, everything I do is first sifted thru that core value.
2. My 2<sup>nd</sup> core value is that all my life long I wish to be a man of character who displays personal integrity, humility, self control, compassion, loyalty and faithfulness. A man who stands by his word and is dependable.
3. My 3<sup>rd</sup> core value is that the most precious gift I have in this life are the relationships that God has given me - with himself, with my wife, my children and my bosom friends. And I will do anything I can to protect, safeguard and nurture these relationships.

What are your core values? What makes you tick?

For many people - their core values are unspecific and undefined - they are like the weather vane - pointing in whichever direction the wind blows. For others, their single, deepest core value is . . . "get rich at any cost!" and they pursue it with a passion. They will do anything, betray anyone and compromise on their every value to get

rich. Their morals follow the path of least resistance, but it has been said "Following the path of least resistance is what makes people and rivers crooked!"

For the majority of us however, the problem is not a lack of values - indeed we have wonderfully scripted core values - but we don't live them out - or our priorities and lives tell a different story.

Now it's not good enough to have core values. For you to find the resolve to live them out, you have to tend the inner man, to tend to your core values, to reaffirm your commitment to them frequently, otherwise they are quickly forgotten and you too start following the path of least resistance. How do you strengthen your core values? By meditating on the Word of God - as the bible says in Ps 19:7, 8

7 The law of the LORD is perfect,  
reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,  
making wise the simple.

8 The precepts of the LORD are right,  
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,  
giving light to the eyes.

My core values are convictions based on the Bible and if I do not tend to them regularly, then the onslaught of the worlds values will eventually erode them, so each morning I set aside time to meditate on them, to recommit myself to them, to evaluate my life's experiences through their lens, and to sieve every major decision I face through them.

## 2. THE PERSONAL ARENA

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Arena is the Personal Arena, characterised primarily by one's relationships with his /her parents, siblings, wife and children. This is the arena where we nurture especially the task of being a spouse and

companion and parent for those who are married. Often when we get really busy, this is the place we usually steal time from. But to eventually be successful in the eyes of the world, too many people end up sacrificing their family; only to find they made it but the high price they paid was that they alienated their spouse on the way up, their children resent their success and their marriage is falling apart or dead. This is not success. If on your way to success you have to sacrifice your family, then all you will be holding at the top is just a beautiful but rotten apple.

When I married my wife, I married my best friend. The challenge of life will be for us to remain best friends until we die. Added to that friendship were 3 daughters. It's my prayer that my **children will also always be my friends**. But to grow a relationship, then you need to invest time - lot's and lot's of time!

## 3. PUBLIC ARENA

The 3<sup>rd</sup> arena is the public arena. This is where we nurture our social circle of friends and give them time. This is also where we give back to society as members of a community and as responsible citizens, or where I pour out my life into others.

The danger we have to watch out for in this area is 2 fold - one that when we get busy, it is easy to steal time from our friends and social circle. Our jobs can so consume us that we give our friends less and less time, and so little by little we begin to lose them and soon we find we have no-one to turn to when calamities strike; there is no one holding us accountable to live by our core values, and there is no-one close enough to confront us when we fall into error.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> danger however is the exact opposite - that we give this arena too much time. Activities outside the home are easy to get caught up in . . . because you meet interesting people, have interesting conversations and this often accompanied with interesting entertainment. The home cannot compete with this and some people

quickly fall into the error of stealing time from the 2<sup>nd</sup> arena to give more to the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Further, activities in the public arena often come with a lot of appreciation. There is much applause for community service - we get stroked this way and we go back for more; but to get more strokes we have to sacrifice even more time. Home is different - at home there are less opportunities for strokes and we are taken for granted, or even criticised, and so we play up to the public with it's cheering. But if this is success, we may eventually find we are holding that rotten apple again.

III - The Presidents new stamps.

There is a beautiful passage in scripture about this - Pr 27:21

<sup>21</sup> The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold,  
but man is tested by the praise he receives.

In other words - will it all go to your head when the praise begins to come? Or will you have the integrity to remain humble, to continue to do the menial tasks and to serve people? Praise detects the cracks of pride, and the more praise you receive the more pressure that is exerted on that crack - the question is will it all crack?

#### 4. THE PROFESSIONAL ARENA

The 4<sup>th</sup> arena is the professional arena - our work and the place where we pursue our careers. This is the arena we are most familiar with - our careers.

As with the other arenas, this one too is important and has it's place, and infact rightfully takes up most of our working day. It's good to be able to pour our energies into a fulfilling job, to love your job and to be good at it, and to serve with excellence and commitment for this glorifies God.

The danger is when your job begins to encroach on the other arenas and to consume your life . . . as I dare say has probably happened to

too many people here, especially the men. Many of us draw our sense of self worth from our jobs and the positive strokes we receive as a result of them. It's deeply gratifying to hear it said by your boss - *"We couldn't do without you, I don't know how we ever got along without you"*. But the Professional arena is also deceptive and there are 3 lies that we tend to believe

(i) The first is that this is success - to advance in your career, to climb that ladder to the top and to have the privileges that come with it . . . this is success. You know the rules of the game "The one with the most toys wins". But now-a-days, climbing that ladder beyond a certain rang often means something has to give! You have to be at the job from 6:00 till 10:00. You have to bring work home, you have to work thru the weekends, etc.

III - The Banana Job

(ii) The second lie is that "We work so hard because we're doing it all for our families, so that they can have the toys - the house, the expensive cloths, the perfumes, the private schools, the trips overseas". Once we believe this lie, then we can hold them at ransom if they complain, we can threaten to remove the toys. But who are you fooling? It's not for them, it's to gratify yourself. They would happily sacrifice the toys to spend time with you.

(iii) The third lie we so easily believe is that it's only for a short while, just this week, or this month, or this year - and then everything will change - we'll have our cake and eat it too. . . but it never actually end's.

Now we can all get very defensive about this one - but the truth is we are in bondage to our job's even though we won't admit it. We are driven by our jobs, and they have consumed our life and our family and our friends. We may eventually get the toys and the beautiful apple, but we will also discover too late that it was rotten to the core.

## DRAWING ORDER OUT OF CHAOS

These then are the 4 arenas of life, and REAL SUCCESS comes when we live our lives with these 4 arenas in harmony as opposed to being in conflict with one another. Harmony is when each arena is at peace and gets the due attention and time to nurture it, without robbing the others.

If we were to apply this definition of success to the public figures the press presents us with as successful people, many of them would flunk the test, for their success is only in the 1 or 2 arenas at the expense of the others. This is not success, this is a rotten apple.

But what about you? Are you "successful"? or is your life in chaos? Are your arenas in harmony or in conflict with one another? This is what our sermons this month will focus on - how to bring harmony back into your life and how to tame especially the Professional Arena.

For today I wish to teach you the first basic principle, from Gen 1.

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. <sup>3</sup> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. <sup>4</sup> God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. . . and God . . . separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. . . and God separated the

In the chaos that was the World at the beginning of creation, God brought about order by the act of dividing and separating . . . and that's where we need to begin. We do this in 3 ways . . .

1. **BY SETTING BOUNDARIES** : For each part of creation God set limits and boundaries they could not cross.

Ps 74 <sup>12</sup> But you, O God, are my king from of old;

you bring salvation upon the earth.

<sup>13</sup> It was you who split open the sea by your power;  
you broke the heads of the monster in the waters.

<sup>14</sup> It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan  
and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert.

<sup>15</sup> It was you who opened up springs and streams;  
you dried up the ever flowing rivers.

<sup>16</sup> The day is yours, and yours also the night;  
you established the sun and moon.

<sup>17</sup> It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth;  
you made both summer and winter.

Set boundaries to contain and safeguard each arena . . . eg - sleep

Psalms 16 <sup>5</sup> LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup;  
you have made my lot secure.

<sup>6</sup> The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
surely I have a delightful inheritance.

## 2. RECOGNISE THE TIMES :

Ecc 3 <sup>3</sup> . . . a time to tear down and a time to build,

<sup>4</sup> a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,

<sup>5</sup> a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

<sup>6</sup> a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,

<sup>7</sup> a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,

<sup>8</sup> a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.

. . . <sup>11</sup> He (God) has made everything beautiful in its time.

Establish what is the right time for each priority and demand in your life. When you do things at the right time then they are beautiful . . .

(God) has made everything beautiful in its time. But if you do even the right thing at the wrong time, then it is not beautiful.

Eg - further studies or that promotion. . . you will know the time is right by the fact that your arenas remain in harmony.

Nb - there is a time for sacrifice . . .

### 3. APPRECIATE THE SEASONS :

Ekk 3<sup>1</sup> There is a time for everything,  
*and a season for every activity under heaven:*

Life is a series of seasons. You do not sow corn in the dry season, and you do not harvest wheat in the rainy season. In the same way there is a season to advance your career, and there is a season to focus on parenting. One day the season will pass and it won't matter that you give much more time to your career. Disharmony in our arenas comes because we try and do it all together, we want it all now, and yet it is not possible. What season of life are you in? What does that season of life demand of you and are you willing to live in harmony with its demands?

### **CONCLUSION - HOLDING IT ALL TOGETHER.**

Illustration. - Mr & Mrs Njeru/ Mr & Mrs Paul Robinson.