

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

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What Does It Mean To Be Successful?

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Comments

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What Does It Mean To Be Successful?

February 15, 2018

February has never been my favorite month. Not because winter seems like it will never end; not because the dreary overcast skies match my mood; no, February is the month where I fall back into my “imposter” thinking. February is most often the month where the busyness and challenge of my work butts up against my own insecurities and my own ego.

Even twenty-plus years later, I can vividly recall a February early in my teaching career when I was feeling so overwhelmed and anxious. As my school’s only high school Language Arts teacher, I taught several sections of high school literature, high school writing and AP English. In addition, I sponsored the yearbook committee, guided the journalism class and directed the fall play or spring musical. Even thinking about it now makes me tired! I loved my kids, I loved my work, I loved my school – but I was drowning in lesson planning, grading and all the other responsibilities of good teaching. I felt like an imposter – not really qualified or equipped to meet the expectations of my administrator, of my parents or, most importantly, of my students. I was so concerned with what others thought about me and my work, that I lost sight of my true purpose.

“God doesn’t call you to be successful; he calls you to be faithful.” Reading Mother Teresa’s words should have provided me with a sense of relief or refocus. But instead I felt irritated. Really? God doesn’t care if I’m successful? God doesn’t care if my students ACT scores are high enough to qualify for scholarships? God doesn’t care if I sully the academic reputation of my school? God doesn’t care....

Paul reminds me in Philippians 3 of how to think about success: He writes, “The very credentials these people are waving around as something special, I’m tearing up and throwing out with the trash—along with everything else I used to take credit for. And why? Because of Christ. Yes, all the things I once thought were so important are gone from my life. Compared to the high privilege of knowing Christ Jesus as my Master, firsthand, everything I once thought I had going for me is insignificant”

What if my definition of success was all wrong? What if success wasn’t measured by me but by God? Power, prestige, and position are the measures of success that our world values. But God calls us to another measure – the measure of faithfulness to him and his transformational work in his kingdom. What if instead of measuring my success as a teacher by the test scores of my students, I nurtured every student to flourish as an image bearer of Christ? What if instead of a tightly managed classroom, I invited

students to a community of restorative justice? What if instead of teaching students what to think, I empowered them to have the heart to do? What if success meant that I walked alongside my students to see our role in God's redemptive story and to live within that Story as workers in his Kingdom? Focusing on being faithful to God rather than what we would like to see as the outcome of our work means that we are recognizing that it's not all about us. Being faithful means that we shift our focus from ourselves to the work of God within us. Our God is a faithful God and he has called us all to be faithful.