

Why is it that some people who reject God seem so successful?

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The answer involves our definition of success. Do we have in mind our culture's definition of success or Jesus' definition? Let's look at our culture's definition, then Jesus'.

Here's one way our culture defines success: wealth, health, expertise, and perhaps fame/recognition. Think of the show *American Idol*. The winner is the one who sings great (expertise) and is loved by the greatest amount of voters (fame/recognition). They then receive money which can also help them maintain their health.

Now brace yourself for Jesus' definition of success in **Matthew 5:3-12**:

³ "Blessed are **the poor in spirit**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are **those who mourn**, for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are **the meek**, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are **those who hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are **the merciful**, for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are **the pure in heart**, for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are **the peacemakers**, for they will be called sons of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are **those who are persecuted because of righteousness**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Jesus speaks of blessedness (happiness) that is not fully realized here on earth but is fully realized in the new heaven and earth. God directs His people throughout Scripture to look forward to the restoration of all things and to seek first His kingdom over and above what we can have here because this time is but a brief prologue.

Matthew 6:31-33 ³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Mark 10:28-30 ²⁸ Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" ²⁹ "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields-- and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

John 12:25 ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

2 Corinthians 4:17-5:10

Romans 8:5-28

If there is no resurrection or re-creation, if this short life is all there is, then we are fools to follow Jesus. We should climb and claw to get all the pleasure we can out of this short life now. As Paul put it, "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Corinthians 15:32). But if Jesus has

revealed Himself to you, called you to do life with Him, and poured His Spirit inside you, then the best way to live now is to put Him, His kingdom, and His ways first.

To truly live a successful, blessed life here and for the age to come we must understand what God has revealed to us through Scripture—what He has done, is doing, and will do. Otherwise we risk gaining the whole world but losing our lasting selves. **Luke 9:23-25** ²³ Then [Jesus] said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. ²⁵ What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?

Hebrews 11:1-12:2 gives a list of those who lived successful, faithful lives on earth in the eyes of God. Jesus tops the list. He is the obedient, sinless One now seated as Lord over heaven and earth. He is our lead example of successful living. On earth He was poor, denied and crucified. But in hindsight and with the perspective of eternity, he is King.

Here are some more insights into successful living throughout the Bible. Blessed are those...

1. Who love and honor God

Psalm 89:15 Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD.

cf. Luke 10:25-28 ²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" ²⁷ He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; {27 Deut. 6:5} and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" {27 Lev. 19:18} ²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

2. Who believe Jesus is the One, the Lord to follow

John 20:29 ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

3. Who trust in God and rely on Him

Psalm 2:12 Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Psalm 40:4 Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods.

Psalm 84:12 O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

Psalm 146:5-6 ⁵ Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, ⁶ the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them-- the LORD, who remains faithful forever.

Jeremiah 17:7 "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.

4. Whom the Lord disciplines

Psalm 94:12 Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law

Hebrews 12:5-6 ⁵ And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

5. Who are compassionate

Psalm 41:1 Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble.

Proverbs 14:21 ²¹ He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.

6. Whose sins have been forgiven

Romans 4:7-8 ⁷ "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

Revelation 22:14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

7. Who belong to God and have been chosen by God

Psalm 144:15 Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the LORD.

Psalm 84:4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

Revelation 19:9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

8. Who wait patiently, enduring with trust that He will fulfill His promises

Isaiah 30:18 Blessed are all who wait for him!

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

9. Who seek and obey God

Luke 11:28 [Jesus] replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

Psalm 106:3 Blessed are they who maintain justice, who constantly do what is right.

Psalm 119:2-3 ² Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart. ³ They do nothing wrong; they walk in his ways.

Psalm 128:1 Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways.

Psalm 1:1 Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

Psalm 112:1 Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands.

So back to the original question, "Why is it that some people who reject God seem so successful?" The answer is in the word *seem*. A person who is successful by our society's measure may be failing by God's measure. And in the end they may not be blessed at all.