

# Is Accumulating Wealth the Point of Life?

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In today's world, how do we measure success? Is it determined by the sum of money we amass, the number of followers we have on social media, or the degree of our popularity and fame?

If those criteria have become the barometers of success, we're in trouble. Judging success solely by those measures has extremely detrimental impacts on our society – and particularly has a negative effect on youth and the next generation.

So, if we're created with the intention that we only accumulate wealth, money, and fame, and if they are really the prerequisite for contentment and happiness in life, what drawbacks does this ideology have? How can we – as individuals, as family, and as a community – change these presumptions?

I am a young adult who has an ambition to contribute to the community I was raised in, and work for the betterment of the world. But because I live in a period where wealth is prized more highly than it formerly was, I have continuously found myself drawn to the glamorous and appealing idea of being immensely wealthy and well-known. Occasionally I've realized that I judged my own works – the poems I post on social media, for example – based on how many people liked them or how much money they brought in.

This material standard highly affected my creativity and the level of satisfaction I have in my life by getting me to concentrate on the outcome rather than the process of rendering service.

We all want success – but it’s a relative term that can mean different things to different people. Unfortunately, these days it is increasingly portrayed as having access to the fanciest material things, getting several honors and recognitions, or simply being well-known. When this becomes a deeply held belief in any community, it compels people to think that unless they achieve this pinnacle of material success, they are failing in life. This can cause us to sacrifice our precious time in pursuing material success in any way we can, and to dedicate our lives to the process of fulfilling the needs of our perishing physical identity whilst neglecting our true selves, our soul – leaving us at the end of the day to forget why we were created.

The Baha’i teachings define the reason for our creation in a completely different way, as in this powerful passage from Abdu’l-Baha’s book *The Secret of Divine Civilization*:

**God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it. Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we are distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labor at all times and along all lines, whether the occasions be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge. We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end. How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfil his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man’s, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if he urges on the steed of high endeavor in the arena of civilization and justice.**

This concept of the real reasons for our creation ought to cause us to pause and consider how we each perceive our purpose for being on this planet.

According to the Baha’i teachings, serving humanity ranks as one of the main reasons we exist; following knowing and worshiping God. Regardless of how much recognition a person receives, or how much cash they have in their wallets, Baha’is believe they will be regarded as successful people if they spend their days fulfilling their purpose by trying to serve human society in any way they can.

As a society, we have been brainwashed to believe that fame or wealth is what makes people successful. Particularly on social media, wealthy and famous appear to be the happiest people on the planet. We try to get what they have, only to discover that material possessions and fame can only make us momentarily happy. The problem with fame, money and other tangible things is that they are neither reliable nor stable. Most people, especially those who believe they have attained the pinnacle, experience sudden loss of fame or wealth, which drives them to descend into sadness, self-loathing, addiction, and other negative consequences because they believe they have failed in life and lost their sole source of joy.

Many individuals, particularly young people, suffer from a lack of satisfaction in life and chase after material things that, whether we succeed in obtaining them or not, inevitably leave us disappointed. The Baha'i teaching say:

**Happiness consists of two kinds; physical and spiritual. The physical happiness is limited; its utmost duration is one day, one month, one year. It hath no result. Spiritual happiness is eternal and unfathomable. This kind of happiness appeareth in one's soul with the love of God ...**

True, lasting happiness is spiritually attained by engaging in spiritual activities, such as prayer, service to one's family, friends, or community, striving to enhance one's spiritual qualities, and loving the work-in-progress while detaching oneself from the outcomes. Since we are spiritual beings, spirituality is not simply a benefit but a must-have to be truly fulfilled in life – and this delight lasts forever. Even beyond this world, it exists. The Baha'i writings say:

**Be not troubled in poverty nor confident in riches, for poverty is followed by riches, and riches are followed by poverty. Yet to be poor in all save God is a wondrous gift, belittle not the value thereof, for in the end it will make thee rich in God ...**

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However, the Baha'i teachings also make it clear that this does not necessarily imply that we should never acquire wealth, or that we should completely shun fame. About this concept, the Baha'i writings say:

**Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if It is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes.**

So yes, it's a good and praiseworthy thing to progress materially, but in so doing, let us not neglect our more important spiritual progress and close our eyes to the divine light shining in our midst.

Reading this, I worry that you might assume I have it all figured out, and that I'm unaffected by the wave of attachment to money, fame, and material outcomes in general. Far from it – I struggle with it, too, just like we all do. I believe no change can come overnight, but that change is a process; it is a journey. Just like many young people who actively work to prioritize service and their spiritual lives above all else, I can say with certainty that this consciousness is what first set me on the road toward change. I hope that after reading this, you'll decide to take that more spiritual road, too, and also invite your friends and family. So far, I think the journey is fantastic!