

A Man's Life Does Not Consist Of His Possessions

By Paul Jetter, Pastor, Upper Valley Community Church, Piqua, Ohio
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The sad story of Lisa Nowak that became a national news story last week should remind us all that happiness and purpose in life is found in more than just realizing our dreams. As a child Nowak dreamed of becoming an astronaut. She graduated valedictorian of her high school class and eventually graduated from the Naval Academy. She rose to become a captain and a test pilot and then an astronaut, and realized her dream of flying in space as a mission specialist in July of last year. She had been married for 19 years and was the mother of three children. She had seemingly arrived at the top. From outward appearances, she was living her dream.

But it all came crashing down last week. Nowak, 43, who had separated from her husband in recent weeks, became part of an alleged love triangle in which she and Air Force Captain Colleen Shipman, 30, were competing for the affections of astronaut Bill Oefelein.

According to reports, Nowak drove from Houston to Orlando after discovering Shipman's travel plans. She was in such a hurry that she wore diapers to avoid rest stops. Once in Orlando, she sprayed Shipman with pepper spray. Shipman was able to get away and call police, who found enough evidence to charge Nowak with attempted kidnapping and attempted murder.

How could anyone who had worked so hard to achieve her goals fall so low? When is enough enough? Why could she not be happy with her star rising in NASA and her life's goals in her reach?

We may never understand what caused Nowak to risk her dreams so foolishly. But perhaps Nowak's case is not as unusual as it might first seem. I imagine that Nowak had discovered that simply achieving one's dreams does not assure happiness and purpose. It is the same reason why other persons rise to the top of their professions only to find loneliness and despair, or why others eventually obtain their dream houses only to find them empty and unfulfilling.

The Bible makes the bold statement that *"Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income"* (Ecclesiastes 5:10). Those who seek happiness and purpose in achievements can rarely be happy because as soon as they reach one goal another pops out in front of them.

If Nowak had heeded the warning in James 4:1-3 she might have avoided her destructive actions: *"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."*

The Biblical writer goes on to add, *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* The proud are those who think they got to where they are on their own, and that they can have anything they want. The humble may also be very successful in the world's eyes, but they realize that everything they have is a gift from God.

St. Paul wrote, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances"* (Philippians 4:11). A person with an attitude like that can be happy even without achieving or obtaining all their earthly goals. Or as Jesus Himself said, *"A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions"* (Luke 12:15).