

# SUCCESS

# Leader's Guide

## BIG IDEA

Success is a gift from God. But, we use our work, family, and spiritual achievements to receive praise from God and others. The Gospel confronts the way we try to acquire a sense of worthiness from our successes rather than from God himself.

## RELATIONSHIPS POP QUIZ

**SAY** "To begin this study we are going to take a quick Success Pop Quiz. Let's reflect on these questions individually for one minute and then discuss them in a group."

*The point of the pop quiz is to show us that we don't have to be smart or famous to be successful. Anyone can be successful.*

## CHASING THE AMERICAN DREAM

### READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER

*What is something that you really want to be successful at?*

## THE PROBLEM

### LEADER READS THE SMALL SECTION UNDER "THE PROBLEM"

**SAY** "Now we are going to read a few passages of Scripture that talk about God's path of success for us. Can I have four volunteers with a Bible each read one of these passages? We are going to read through these passages quickly to get a clearer definition of what God-centered success looks like."

**READ** Psalm 1:1-3

*What is the path of success according to the passage? What kinds of activities does it include? Activities don't include walking in the counsel of the wicked, standing in the way of sinners, or sitting in the seat of scoffers - but include delighting in the law of the Lord and meditating on his law day and night.*

*How is this path different than the one the culture has laid out for us? The culture wants us to listen to and follow the counsel of the world rather than the bible.*

**READ** Joshua 1:7-8

*What is the path of success according to the passage? What kinds of activities does it include? Activities include following the Law that Moses gave us and not turning from it to the right hand or to the left.*

*How is this path different than the one the culture has laid out for us? The culture tells us that we can be successful without being obedient to God's commands.*

# SUCCESS leader's guide cont.

**READ** Matthew 16:24-26

*What is the path of success according to the passage? What kinds of activities does it include? Activities include denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus.*

*How is this path different than the one the culture has laid out for us? This path is one of self-sacrifice and suffering while the culture says that we can gain the whole world without following Jesus and denying ourselves.*

**READ** Matthew 20:20-28

*What is the path of success according to the passage? What kinds of activities does it include? Activities include serving others daily - especially those under our authority in the family or workplace.*

*How is this path different than the one the culture has laid out for us? The culture would have us believe that the more successful we become the more we get to be served.*

**SAY** "Hopefully, these passages have helped you to see an alternative path to true success. Now, let's explore the root reasons why we have such a hard time following God's path of success rather than the culture's."

## THE ROOT

**READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER**

*How have you experienced people around you climbing the ladder of success? What reasons for pursuing success (listed above) do you resonate with in your own life?*

## SOLUTION

**READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER**

*What is your initial reaction to the Gospel message above? Potential follow-up questions:*

- *What is the bad and good news for a non-Christian who is seeking to find a sense of worthiness through school or work?*
- *What is the bad and good news for a Christian who is trying to earn praise and respect through church involvement?*
- *What else stood out to you from this section?*

## REDEEMING SUCCESS

**READ THIS SECTION TOGETHER**

*Which of these do you need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out more fully? Potential follow-up question: Which of these areas have you struggled with in the past?*

**SAY** "Thanks for sharing. Let's spend the last few minutes in prayer."

**PRAY**

Success

# Pop Quiz

Reflect on these questions yourself for one minute and then discuss them in a group.

- 1) Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
- 2) Name the last five winners of the Miss America contest.
- 3) Name the last five winners of the Nobel or Pulitzer prize.
- 4) Name a few teachers who had a big influence on you.
- 5) Name a few friends who helped you get through a difficult time.
- 6) Name a few relatives who you have learned some valuable things from.



Which questions were easier to answer? #1-3 or #4-6? Why? What does that say about success?



What is something that you really want to be successful at?



## CHASING THE AMERICAN DREAM

In 1931, Historian James Truslow Adams popularized the phrase "American Dream" in his book *Epic of America*. He said, "life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement."

In our society, chasing the American dream usually means working as hard as possible now so that we can later receive a coveted social status, successful career, big salary, dream house with or without kids, and a comfortable retirement. Right now, there are over 118,000 books on Amazon.com on the topic of success that promise to help you attain the American Dream.

Rightfully so, Christians have challenged the pursuit of the American Dream. But, before we move on to confront this type of living, we need to first affirm that success in and of itself is a gift from God.

In the beginning, Adam and Eve were told to "be fruitful and multiply" in their work and in the home (Gen. 1:28).

Right from the start, they were commanded by God to be productive! It is important to see that God gave them an ambitious task that went beyond devotional times and church attendance.

As we flip through the bible, we see God over and over again blessing individual people with success. It was said of Joseph, "the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did" (Gen. 39:23). It was said of David, "In everything he did he had great success, because the Lord was with him." It was said of Hezekiah, "And the Lord was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook." As you can see, God is in the business of making people successful.

It is promised for you that if you trust in God and obey his commands, He "will then make you successful in everything you do" (Deut. 30:9).

Work, and the success that accompanies it, is a gift from God "for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). God created each of us with specific "works" in mind. Therefore, we should seek to find out what those things are and work hard for his glory alone - asking him for success along the way.

# success is a gift

# the problem



Success is a **gift** from God. But, we **abuse** this gift by using our work, family, and spiritual achievements to acquire praise from God and others.

## Read

- 1) Psalm 1:1-3
- 2) Joshua 1:7-8
- 3) Matthew 16:24-26
- 4) Matthew 20:20-28

Answer the questions below after reading each passage of Scripture...

*What is the path of success according to the passage? What kinds of activities does it include?*

*How is this path different than the one the culture has laid out for us?*

## THE ROOT ISSUE

We've learned that success is a gift. We've also learned that there are two paths of success: one that is God-centered and another that is me-centered. God's path of success involves obedience, Christian community, delighting in God, meditating on God's Word, self-sacrifice, service, and humility. The world's path of success is one big game of King of the Hill. It involves climbing over other people on the ladder of success to feel a sense of worthiness. We want to be the most recognized or esteemed in whatever circles we run in. We desire admiration, praise, attention, and respect for our accomplishments.

Elizabeth Hartley-Brewer, a writer for The Observer, said, "From the classroom to the boardroom to the football field, the constant pressure on all of us - to win and keep on winning - is doing more harm than good." Her phrase, "to win and keep on winning" is a good way to describe what most of us feel it takes to stop being mediocre and make our lives count for something.

Pop legend Madonna said in Vanity Fair magazine, "My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. And that's always pushing me, pushing me. Because even though I've become Somebody, I still have to prove that

*I'm Somebody. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will."*

It is easy to relate to Madonna's struggle. We all strive for success to get something that will validate our existence. Here are some common reasons we become addicted to success:

**Approval and appreciation.** "If I get this award, then everyone will see what a success I am" or "If people see how successful of an athlete I am, people will start to talk about me" or "Since I'm talented in this one area, I need to show off my skills more so that people will notice me."

**Influence and Power.** "I love the respect I get when I'm leading other people."

**Emotional and physical comfort.** "When I get good grades, a promotion at work, or recognized for something I did - I feel less like a failure."

**Security and control.** "If I'm successful, people will finally listen to me and do what I ask" or "If I'm successful in the classroom and

get the job I want, then I can make a lot of money and secure the lifestyle I want."

Isn't it easy to relate to Madonna's struggle to prove herself and be a "Somebody"? It's disappointing to hear that even when a success like Madonna has climbed up one more rung on the ladder, the satisfaction eventually wears off. We never get to the point of perfect fulfillment. We always need more. So, we stay in the cycle of addiction.

*"To be honest with you I'm a junkie. I'm addicted to success. There is no rehab for success - or I'd go check in right now."*

**- Rapper 50 Cent**

There is such a thing as rehab for drugs and alcohol. But, the bad news, as 50 Cent said, is that there isn't a rehab for people addicted to success. The reality is that much of the world is addicted and we don't know where to turn for help.

*How have you experienced people around you*

# solutio

The Gospel confronts the way we pursue the praise and admiration of others through our accomplishments. Pastor Tim Keller explains the futility of such a pursuit: *"Many people pursue success as a way to overcome the sense that they are somehow 'outsiders.' If they attain it, they believe, it will open the doors into the clubs, into the social sets, into relationships with the connected and influential. Finally, they think, they will be accepted by all the people who really matter. Success promises to do that, but in the end it cannot deliver."*

Both the irreligious and the religious are guilty of selfishly pursuing worthiness through our accomplishments. The irreligious use their God-given gifts to achieve things that will bring themselves praise rather than God. And the religious do the same thing in a different way. Rather than seeking to glorify God with their religious achievements, they use them to either *earn* God's praise or fish for the compliments of others. But, the applause of others will never be enough and trying to earn God's praise is futile because *"all our righteous acts are like filthy rags"* (Isa. 64:6) when we contrast them with his perfect deeds. The bad news is that God, in the end, will turn away everyone who has used their success to glorify themselves. Yes, this includes even good religious people (Matt. 7:21-23).

But, the good news is that when we admit our sin, God offers forgiveness (1 John 1:9). In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the son returns home and says, *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."* Then the father clothed him with his robe and threw a huge feast (Luke 15). This is an illustration of what happens when we admit our sinful failures to God and are covered by the success of Jesus. The greatest accomplishment we could ever receive was not earned by us, but was purchased through the blood, sweat, and tears of Jesus. Keller says, *"...the salvation of the world came not through climbing the success ladder, but through surrender, service, sacrifice, and death."*

Jesus' death on the cross is where our success begins! It was there that our failures were placed on him and his righteousness was imputed to us (2 Cor. 5:21). The power that success has over us is broken when we realize that we have been made *worthy* by Jesus and have nothing left to prove. When we have nothing left to prove, we can live sacrificial lives that look "unsuccessful" to the world around us and *climb down* the ladder to help those below us.

Heaven will not be filled with people who have the most impressive resumes. Rather, it will be filled with people who cast the crown of their successes at the feet of Jesus crying out *"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power"* (Rev. 4:11).

## redeeming success:

You can't **redeem** the world's upside down view of success without being redeemed yourself. So the first step is to trust in Jesus, who lived a perfect life and died to make you righteous before God (2 Cor. 5:21). Those who are made righteous by God are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13), who empowers you with the motivation and ability to redeem success in the following ways:

### take the right path

*"As long as he sought the Lord God gave him success"* (2 Chron. 26:5). *"Be careful to obey all the law... do not turn from it... that you may be successful wherever you go... meditate on it day and night."* (Josh. 1:7-8). *"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful... so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We are called to walk on God's path of success which involves a daily dependence and submission to him and the Scriptures. Are you setting yourself up for success by meditating on the bible and seeking out God's guidance daily?

### work hard

We live in a world where everyone wants success but no one wants to work for it. The Apostle Paul said, *"...I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me"* (1 Cor. 15:10). Even though we aren't saved through success, we still work hard since we were *"created in Christ Jesus for good works"* (Eph. 2:10). We should follow Paul's example of working hard at the tasks God has given us - giving him all the credit along the way. Also, remember that suffering and sacrifice always goes along with true success. The path for Christians involves denying ourselves and taking up our crosses daily (Mark 8:34). Is the path you are on marked by self-sacrifice and suffering or comfort and isolation?

### do what you love

The pursuit of success will be miserable if you are doing what others want you to do instead of doing what you were designed to do. Don't let the fear of parents or money or any other selfish thing get in the way. If you are delighting in God, he will *"give you the desires of your heart"* (Psalm 37:4). Have the courage to follow those godly desires no matter how much money you will make or who disapproves. Because our identity and worth is in Jesus and his success, we can take risks and not be afraid of failure.

What is your initial reaction to the Gospel message above?

Which of these do you need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live out more fully?