



Small Group Leader Guide

Proverbs 3:1-6 | What Jesus said about...success

Prepare: Things to do before your small group gets together

- **Ask** yourself how you define success? How do you measure it? What is the relationship for you between success and significance? **Reflect** on the experiences of your life that you consider successes.
- **Pray** and spend time with God letting him examine you. **Thank** God for his mercy, that resulted him willingly taking upon Himself the injustice of the cross. **Praise** him for His undeserved grace that has blessed you and changed you. **Ask** God to open your eyes, ears, and heart to the prevalence of injustice around you and to compel you to be used to address it.
- **Read** Proverbs 3. **Explore** the Scripture to see how success is described. **Consider** again the relationship between success and significance, in light of God's Word. **Submit** your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- **Preview** this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- **Pray** for your small group members by name, asking God to use you to be a teacher of influence for each person in your group, for the glory and cause of Jesus. **Seek** God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply God's word to their lives. **Commit** yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

To The Point – What to impart to your small group

Key Verse: Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success. (Proverbs 3:3-4, ESV)"

Objectives: Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:
• **Discuss** success and significance, how they are related and how they are different.
• **Discover** how God makes success and significance available.
• **Apply** God's wisdom to your life, guiding you to experience true success and significance.

Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience

Conversation Starter: Measuring success

Ask Consider each of these scenarios:

- You reach the top of your industry, and are recognized among your peers as a respected leader.
- You live in the home of your dreams, with paid help to keep it in order and from where you can throw lavish parties that regularly show up in the society web sites.
- Your children all have impressive careers and earn considerable incomes.
- You are known as an elite athlete, the person that the owner builds the team around.
- You accumulate significant wealth that allows you to provide for your family for generations to come
- You are a celebrity of renown. Your skill is considered "genius," and the spotlight is a comfortable place for you.

Which of these are most appealing to you and why?

Allow participants to respond.

Say These are all "ultimate scenarios" for a variety of measures of success. As such, they may not entice you to the degree of other, but related, measures. Success is an interesting phenomenon, because it seems intrinsic to our nature to pursue it. Nobody grows up (at least in our culture) wanting to be insignificant, forgettable, or to lead a life of irrelevance devoid of meaning. So much is at stake with success, too. We see so much unhappiness, dissatisfaction, brokenness, and other

Open in prayer for your time together.

An Opening Appeal (Proverbs 3:1-2)

What does it mean to you to "not forget" God's teaching?

Allow the group to respond. The responses could highlight:

- *Becoming familiar with God's Word.*
- *Staying immersed in God's Word with a regular frequency.*
- *Having a mindfulness or mental assent to the importance of God's Word.*

Similarly, what does it mean to let your heart keep his commandments?

Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:

- *It distinguishes from just knowing God's Word, but also revering it as God's loving directive.*
- *The "heart" as a storing place is an expression for having affection for God and His right to speak into our lives with His commands.*
- *"Keep," indicates a clear exhortation toward protectively cherishing God's commands as valuable.*

Putting these together, you see God directing you to both mentally and emotionally value God's Word with a very high regard. Verse 2 makes claims about the benefit of doing so. What are these benefits, and how does keeping and not forgetting God's Word deliver these promised benefits?

Verse 2 does not promise to add years to your life, like a prescription to correct problems. However, it is prescriptive to give a fullness of life. It indicates that when life is lived with a mindfulness for God's Word and a love for the commands of God, the result is a life of purpose and meaning, a richness of significance.

Love and Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

What does it mean to you to not let steadfast love and faithfulness to forsake you, to bind them around your neck?

Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:

- *The two are inseparable. Steadfastness of love is indicative of faithfulness, and faithfulness can not exist apart from love.*
- *This reiterates and emphasizes that God is the God of relationships. Our tendency is to consider God's command an expression of a contractual standard or an impossible standard against which we must always struggle. In these first verses, though, we see that living in accordance with God's command as an expression of love for God is indeed possible, because God's commands are given in the context of His love for His creation.*
- *Love and faithfulness for God and others is a God-honoring approach to life. Love is not self-serving and faithfulness is evocative of God Himself, whose mercies are everlasting and patience is enduring.*

Verse 4 makes another impressive claim, that if you follow the exhortation of verse 3, you will experience the benefits of verse 4. What are some ways you would define or describe having favor and good success in the sight of God and man?

Allow the group to respond. Responses could include:

- *Favor with God is seen in being included in His good work. His determination to gift you supernaturally to participate in the eternity-impacting labor of winning the lost and making disciples, expanding the Kingdom. You find favor with God by enjoying the fellowship and leadership of His Holy Spirit, and the Fruit of His Spirit being borne in you as you walk by faith and not by sight.*
- *Favor with man is expressed in little and big ways, from being like Joseph where you have audience with people of significance for the glory of God, to being like Daniel, where you are allowed to work alongside unbelievers and live out your faith in dynamic, dramatic ways, or even like Paul, or John, or Lydia, where you are blessed to be put into relationships with unbelievers where you can glorify Jesus and bless others with loving service and a willingness to share the Gospel.*
- *The term "success" is best understood not in terms of worldly success as we might define it, but in "good understanding." In this regard, "favor" and "good success" are linked, meaning that as a person commits to faithful, steadfast love, he/she is blessed by being known with a good reputation for having a good reputation. This favor is bestowed by God, acknowledged by people, and facilitates a life of significance in serving both.*

Living toward Significance (Proverbs 3:5-6)

These next two verses put the first four together to translate the intent of the mind and the commitment of the heart into the feet of faith. What is significant to you about verse 5 that articulates what you need to do to live a life of significance?

Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:

- *The faithful love rooted in intellectual and emotional affection for God is expressed in trust. You cannot say you love God or believe God if you do not trust God.*
- *The word "trust" means to lean upon it, to put your full weight on it expecting it to*

reliably support you.

- "Trust" also means to expect something to protect you. Not merely to shelter you in the moments of adversity, but to do so at an essential level. Omnipotent God offers such a protection for those who trust in Him.
- "With all your heart" is a figure of speech that encompasses heart, mind, and will. It means to trust God with the totality of your being, completely and without reservation.
- "And do not lean on you own understanding" clarifies that you cannot trust fully in God and at the same time lean on your own understanding. You cannot do so with "all your heart" if part of your trust (your faith, your love) is on your self (your own wisdom, wit, resources, etc.).

What does it mean to you to acknowledge God in all your ways?

Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:

- Acknowledging God means to know God as He truly is. To know God is to obey God. It is more than mental assent, or philosophical/theoretical agreement, but actual submission to God.
- "In all your ways" illuminates the reality that God is God of every detail of your life. There is no aspect of your life where God's wisdom is not superior to your own. There is no circumstance where God's provision is unavailable to you. To acknowledge Him in all these matters is to trust Him for guidance and direction in all matters, regardless of their grandiosity or seeming insignificance.
- "In all your ways" describes your course of life. Wherever you go, whatever you do, in all things, totally trust in God.

The promise attached to this command is that God will make your path straight? What does this mean to you?

Allow the group to respond. Responses may include:

- Making your path straight means that it will lead to its intended destination.
- It means that it is a successful path, no wrought with roadblocks or detours.
- This does not mean that you will not have adversity or challenges, but that God overcomes all these obstacles.

Putting all this together, how does this passage in proverbs offer a roadmap to a successful life?

God defines a successful life as one that is lived by faith where a person trusts in God in all things, because that person loves God mentally, intellectually, emotionally, and relationally. Accordingly, the person agrees with God about this measure of success, discovering that a life of significance in God is the true measure of success.

How does this passage challenge you to redefine success?

Allow the group to respond.

What is one thing you can do this week in response to pursuing a new standard of success?

Allow participants to respond.

Jesus in Focus

Where in this study do you see Jesus: Christ-like practices, examples, principles?

Among the many acceptable answers:

- *Jesus is the embodiment of God's wisdom. He is self-described as "the way." He invites you to follow Him. Logically, if you truly follow Jesus, you are walking by faith in all your ways.*
- *Jesus said that He came to give you an abundant life, and if you want true life, you have to die to your self. This echoes the Proverb's call to abandon self in favor of submitting to God's way.*
- *Jesus demonstrated perfect submission to the Father. He thrice denied Satan's temptations and even submitted to the Father all the way to the Cross. It shows that God's ways rarely make sense and they are never the way we would choose for ourselves, but God in His unparalleled wisdom shows that His way alone accomplishes His purpose.*
- *The totality of the life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels could (and is) arguably be labeled unsuccessful because Jesus was a homeless, itinerant preacher with local renown who was killed for stirring a relatively small regional uprising. From a human perspective, he was no king over nations, he was no general commanding mighty armies, or person of influence who influenced the actions and attitudes of the world. Yet, in His submission to the Father, and His willingness to die ignominiously on the cross, only to rise from the grave three days later, He demonstrated true success and everlasting significance as the King of all kings, the General of the Lord's Army of the heavenly host, and the One who alone came to save the world from its rebellion against God.*

What are some other Scriptures that come to mind or are relevant to this chapter's themes, teachings, or emphases?

Among the many acceptable possibilities:

- *John 10:10*
- *Isaiah 40:3*
- *Proverbs 2:8; 3:23; 11:5*

What is one "take-away" for you from this chapter?

Allow the group participants to respond.

Say While "success" and "significance" are related, they are revealed in this passage (and in all of Scripture) to be distinctly different. Let us not compromise the opportunity to receive a crown of significance from the Father because we instead dedicated our lives to pursue a brass ring of success.

Let's close in prayer:

Invite the group to pray for one another. **Pray** over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. **Pray** over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important. **Confirm** your plans for your next gathering!