

Making Your Life Successful In God's Eyes

Not many people are intentionally trying to fail in life; but obviously many will finish their lives with "the hand writing on the wall" taken from the book of Daniel: "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." Tekel means, "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting."

Why will this happen?

The first reason is that people want to be a success in their own eyes, and so they define success differently from God. Thus, even if they are fortunate enough to "succeed," they discover too late that they were aiming for the wrong target.

We live in a culture which is very success-minded; but it is this very culture which is so wrong-headed that it measures success only in terms of one's career, education, financial status, skill, achievement, invention, cleverness, body fat, possessions, etc. And we breathe the cultural air that honors and rewards those who chase one of these carrots!

Suppose we could know ahead of time how God will evaluate us when it is our turn to stand before Him? We can, and it's a take-home exam!

I call these The Seven Markers of Success: (1) Your soul, which means your intimacy with God, (2) Your oneness with your mate, (3) Your joint venture of preparing your children to live a successful life, (4) Your restoring and maintaining your relationships, (5) Your stewardship of all your physical resources, (6) Your use of your gifts and abilities to advance the Kingdom, and (7) Your loving others into the Gospel of Christ!

The second reason people fail to succeed is their lack of God's grace. No person can achieve success in these seven areas apart from the continual gift of Christ's righteousness! It must be all of grace or it will be a failure in God's eyes! Therefore, having the right target will not be enough. In fact, every attempt to live up to God's standards without trusting Christ alone is guaranteed to disappoint and frustrate you.

The third reason people fail to succeed is their lack of godly leadership. God extends special graces to His people by providing "coaches" to demonstrate and teach how to succeed in these seven areas.

This month's devotional is an attempt of one such "coach" to inspire you to discover God's highest and best for your life! This is the journey that leads toward your personal destiny!

Lesson 1

God created leaders to benefit those they lead. Pastors, elders, dads, moms, mayors, governors; all will give account to God for how they modeled for, served, and protected those in their charge!

Not all designated leaders understand the true nature of godly leadership; but where there are moms and dads and spiritual leaders who do, those in their care prosper!

Those children who take advantage of the leadership of godly parents gain the preparation for success in life. The same can be said of adults who eagerly glean from their “coaches.” They are taking advantage of God’s gift of leadership.

Scripture Study: Read Luke 22:25-27. (*5 minutes*)

What are some of the characteristics of the leaders in society? _____

What do you think Jesus wants all leaders to understand? _____

Scripture Study: Read Hebrews 13:7, 17. (*10 minutes*)

Why do you think the author of Hebrews said, “...considering the result of their conduct...”? _____

How is this a message to both leaders and their followers? _____

In 13:17, what charge is given to anyone who leads? _____

In 13:17, what charge is given to those who are to be led? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank God for any of the godly leaders He has provided in your life.

Ask God for His grace to be His type of leader.

Trust Jesus this morning to be your wisdom and help.

Worship God with your whole being!

Lesson 2

The purpose of leaders is not to find their fame or to use people to fulfill their own dreams, but rather to provide the atmosphere for those under them to succeed in God's eyes.

Being a good leader and a good follower are two sides of the same coin, for all Christian leaders are daily following Christ as their own Shepherd.

Even leaders need leaders, for everyone is accountable. Thus humility, courage, and faith are required each day, regardless of your current position.

Scripture Study: Proverbs 29:2 KJV says, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn." (5 minutes)

Have you ever experienced the mourning of being under a wicked authority?

When God provides you with a righteous leader, what are the benefits to your life?

Scripture Study: Read 2 Corinthians 1:24. (5 minutes)

Paul can be very strong about defending and insisting upon correct doctrine; but he does not use his God-given authority to _____

What is Paul's passion? _____

And how do you think he did that? _____

Scripture Study: Read Colossians 1:28. (5 minutes)

What is the goal of Paul's ministry? _____

What does this imply for your own leadership? _____

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

If you have caused someone under your care to mourn, ask God's forgiveness.

Rejoice to be under the righteous King's shepherding authority!

Exalt Him as the Lord and Ruler of your days and of all that happens to you.

Pray His will into the various areas of your life.

Lesson 3

To succeed in life, it must be well with your soul; and only God Himself is sufficient to nourish and sustain your soul.

Jesus said, “I have food to eat that you do not know about”; and it is learning to know about and partake of this food that will determine your success.

He also said, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” Here Jesus explains how a man becomes successful.

Scripture Study: Read the sad story of a man whose soul was measuring success by something other than God in Luke 12:16-20. *(5 minutes)*

Examine 12:19. What was this man’s soul depending upon? _____

In 12:20-21, how do you think this man fared when God evaluated him?

Scripture Study: Read John 6:27-29. *(10 minutes)*

Rewrite John 6:27, replacing the concept “work for” with the idea of “success”: e.g. “seek success” might be an interesting equivalent. _____

Then use the same method to rewrite Jesus’ actual words in 6:29. _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Work through Matthew 6:33 in prayer.

Spend some time waiting upon Him as a way to make more room for Him.

By faith feed upon Jesus Christ as the food of your soul.

Lesson 4

Jesus presented Himself as the food your soul needs. He connected (1) coming to Him, and (2) believing in Him, with experiencing Him as God's health and life for your soul.

Everything else in your life depends upon your willingness to come to Jesus regularly for His love, His grace, His acceptance, His guidance, His restoration, His encouragement, and His adequacy.

There are those nasty times when we fail to nourish our souls in Christ, and then we will attempt to feed off some other source, which always ends in emptiness and frustration. Don't be discouraged. Just return to your first love, and He will renew your joy!

Scripture Study: Read John 6:32-33, 35. *(10 minutes)*

Journal what these verses are saying to you as you consider the wellness of your own soul.

Scripture Study: Read Revelation 3:15-20. *(5 minutes)*

How do you think these Christians were defining success? _____

What does Jesus do to help them change their definition to His definition?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Come sit quietly with Jesus this morning.

Soak up His nearness as He sits with you.

Hold up your soul to Him for His tending.

Pray His life-giving grace into the situations that surround your life.

Lesson 5

God has given each person a jurisdiction of oversight; and it begins with one's own soul. You must take the responsibility to guard your own soul. The Proverbs liken a man's soul to a city without walls when the person fails to exercise self-control. (Proverbs 25:28)

You cannot delegate this responsibility to another and call it submission. You alone must guard and keep your soul so that your fellowship with God is not frustrated.

Your soul is like a garden; and you must fence it and patrol it, or the "deer" will eat it. "Neither give place to the devil," says Paul as he exhorts you to rise up and resist the things which nibble away at your soul: worry, fear, anger, unforgiveness, sexual defilement, greed, pride, independence, impatience, unbelief, etc.

Scripture Study: Read Proverbs 4:23 with the understanding that "heart" is often synonymous with "soul." (10 minutes)

What do you think God means when He tells you to "watch over your heart"?

What happens when you let down your guard and become careless about the state of your soul? _____

What can happen to your human relationships if you allow the devil to develop a beachhead of bitterness or disappointment in your soul? _____

Scripture Study: Read 1 Peter 5:5b-9. (5 minutes)

When you resist humbling yourself, when you allow anxiety to camp out in your soul, what picture does Peter paint of this condition? _____

Instead of resisting God, Peter exhorts you to resist _____, which is what is called "guarding your soul." This is success.

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Might it be good this morning to humble yourself before God and to draw near to receive some much-needed grace?

Bring your soul to Him and allow Him to set you free from any place Satan may have gained access.

Lift your soul to God and adore Him who loves you.

Strengthen your friends by praying for the safety of their souls.

Lesson 6

Is your career important? Absolutely. It isn't the measure of success, but your moral purity and your skills bring the values of the Kingdom right into the lives of those around you. Where you work is one place where success in God's eyes is lived out.

What about fun, rest, and recreation? Are they important? Absolutely. When you define success the way God does, then laughter and fun feed and refresh you with God's pleasure.

What about money? Can a Christian be financially well off? The Scriptures censure the one who does not use his finances wisely; and when this happens, it means he is not using God's definition of success. A Christian can be rich if he is also rich toward God.

Scripture Study: Read Proverbs 12:24. (5 minutes)

Why do you think God values the character trait of diligence? _____

Scripture Study: Read Mark 6:31. (5 minutes)

What Kingdom value does Jesus put upon rest? _____

Read Deuteronomy 5:14-15. Why did God designate one day per week not to work? _____ Do you refrain from work one day per week? _____

Scripture Study: Read this verse in 1 Timothy 6:17-19 which balances the warning verses. (5 minutes)

Apparently Scripture anticipates that some of the Christians will be _____.

What does Scripture exhort the affluent Christians to do with their resources?

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Place your career, your recreation, and your finances on God's alter so that everything you are and have will feed into His success for your life.

Bow before Him and offer Him your adoration.

Pray for those around you to gain God's perspective on success.

Ask and receive His blessing upon your life today.

Lesson 7

The three greatest people who ever lived were single: John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul, so if you are not married, you have even more time and energy to devote to advancing the Kingdom. In fact, I think I hear Paul calling you right now!

But if you are married or if you plan to marry, then your covenant partner is the most important person in your life after God!

If married, you cannot succeed in life without prophetically mirroring the romantic drama that is taking place in heaven between Christ and His bride, the Church!

Scripture Study: The passage of Ephesians 5:22-33 has to be one of the most profound things ever written! Study it carefully. *(15 minutes)*

How does Paul compare the roles of the husband and wife to Jesus and the Church?

Specifically apply what Jesus does in Ephesians 5:25-27 to how a husband might relate to his wife. _____

How might different needs in men and women account for husbands being commanded to nourish and cherish, and wives being commanded to respect?

Why do you think success in one's marriage is so important to both God and people?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you more insight into the mystery of marriage.

Look back at the text and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you from this passage.

Worship Jesus as the Savior-Bridegroom!

Ask God to bless you with His success in life.

Lesson 8

God has arranged it so that neither the husband nor the wife can fully live up to the lofty model given in Ephesians 5:22-33 without His grace revealed in the cross of Christ.

Adam abdicated his responsibility, and Eve led into disobedience. Both the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve will have to die with Christ to their natural instincts in order for these qualities of love, respect, patience, and service to be lived out.

The cross of Christ cuts across the man's inclination to lead harshly or to be passive, while the same cross cuts across the woman's inclination to usurp authority.

Scripture Study: Reread Ephesians 5:22-33. *(10 minutes)*

Are you receiving the grace of God to live as the husband or wife described in this passage? _____

Men/women, what advice would you give to another Christian man or woman who wishes to succeed in his or her marriage? _____

Scripture Study: Read Galatians 2:20-21. *(5 minutes)*

How might you use the power of having been crucified with Christ to enable you to live as God's husband or God's wife? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Pray through Galatians 2:20-21, and by faith participate in His death and resurrection.

Use your faith to reckon/count/consider that Christ is living in you.

Praise God for giving you the adequacy of His Son.

Pray for God to glorify Himself in your marriage and the marriages of others.

Lesson 9

For a man and a woman to become “one flesh” in the sense of complementing one another and fulfilling one another, they must have a certain wellness of soul. Otherwise, selfishness, fears, old wounds, or stubbornness, as well as a host of insecurities, will defeat their efforts to build together.

Those who wish to hear Father’s “well done” over their marriage must continually invest time and energy in their romance, in their listening to one another, and in their mutual desire to serve the other in the roles assigned by the Creator.

Scripture Study: Read about Christ’s example of suffering which forms the background for Peter’s words about making marriage work in 1 Peter 2:21; 3:1-7. *(10 minutes)*

What might a wife read here that is beyond her natural ability? _____

What might a husband read here that is beyond his natural ability? _____

Scripture Study: Read Peter’s charge to the pastor-coaches in 1 Peter 5:1-9, where he shows that he wants them to help God’s people not fail in the face of Satan’s efforts to deceive and destroy. You can see how this applies to helping them succeed in their marriages. *(5 minutes)*

Finish this sentence: “This passage might help someone succeed in his or her marriage by

_____.”

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Bring your soul to the Lord for His tending today.

If married, ask for insight into your mate.

Ask God for ways to encourage your mate.

Pray for those in your church who are preparing for marriage.

Lesson 10

God has reserved for Himself a vast army of those who never marry or who are not married for a significant part of their lives. Paul experienced a grace to not be married and desired as many as possible to join him in using more of their time in extending the Kingdom.

Those who wish to be married but are not should not waste their single years as though God was not working in their best interest. The Psalmist writes, “Serve the Lord with gladness”; and God is raising up His army of singles all over the world who are following in Paul’s footsteps.

Scripture Study: If you are married, study 1 Corinthians 7:1-17 and read over 7:18-40. If you are not married, scan 1 Corinthians 7:1-7, but study 7:18-40. (15 minutes)

What is success for the married? _____

What insights does Paul give to the married that are often misunderstood or challenged in today’s society? _____

As for Christians marrying non-Christians, what does it say in 1 Corinthians 7:39 and 2 Corinthians 6:14?

What was Paul’s advice to those who were slaves? _____

Why do you think that Paul’s advice would be most unpopular in today’s world?

What would Paul say to those in the church today who are not married? _____

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Whether married or unmarried, surrender your rights to your Savior!
Worship God for His sovereign control over the details of your life!
Give Him your unmet needs and turn to Jesus to receive God’s help.
Pray a blessing over the singles and the couples in your church.

Lesson 11

God is the original romantic! The falling in love, the thrill of seeking another, of wooing another, of being sought, of a love that goes beyond the joys of friendship; all of this is derived from something within the nature of God Himself.

He is ever the artist, the One with the capacity for love, for emotions, for intimacy and oneness that is the source of all that humans know of romance.

No one can say, "I'm not romantic"; because he was when he courted. Sadly, many lose this precious, fragile gift from God due to neglect. Cultivate romance. God likes it.

Scripture Study: Read Revelation 19:1-16 with the glasses of romance! *(10 minutes)*

Can you see the background of knights in shining armor riding white chargers, coming to rescue the damsel from the dragon? _____

In order to see what a romantic God is, try summarizing this passage by removing every romantic element. _____

Thinking on paper: *(5 minutes)*

Why might God be glorified by even more romance in your marriage?

How might you cultivate more romance in your marriage? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Whether single or married, ask God to give you a romantic way of viewing life.

Ask the Holy Spirit to enlarge your creative side so that you can see and inject more beauty into all the practical things in life.

Admire all the incredible artistic handiwork that God continually displays as part of your worship.

Sit before Him this morning and enjoy Him.

Lesson 12

The pace of life favors a most unhealthy condition which is called, “emotional drifting.” This occurs when a husband and wife do not daily and weekly carve out times of listening to one another “with their eyes” as in truly giving each other their full attention.

Oneness is something that is always being built, or the gradual drifting apart which leads to misunderstanding and loneliness will occur without anyone’s intention.

This relationship is sacred, and it must be guarded as the most precious treasure! Tender communication nourishes the life of the marriage. Make the time.

Scripture Study: Think about marriage as you read Ephesians 4:26-32. *(10 minutes)*
What things do you see in this passage that must be ruled “out of bounds” for oneness in marriage to build? _____

How must the tongue be used in marriage if a couple is to grow in oneness?

Scripture Study: Read 1 Peter 3:7 again. *(5 minutes)*
If a couple is not to drift emotionally, the husband must _____

Thought question: What can a wife do to help prevent emotional drifting in the relationship?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

If you have used your tongue hurtfully or in anger, ask for God’s forgiveness.

Ask your Savior to teach you more about loving your mate.

If you have any unforgiveness in your heart, renounce it now.

Worship and praise God for loving you and for tending you.

Lesson 13

Of all the names or titles by which God may be known, it appears that Jesus' favorite was, "Father." That should tell us a great deal about how God values children and the family, for He has chosen to relate to us as our heavenly Father while calling us His children.

To succeed in the adventure of parenting is to share some of the special joys and sorrows in the heart of God.

There is a connection between the generations that is not easily understood by Westerners. There is something in us that is part of the image of God that is not satisfied without the legacy of our heirs.

Scripture Study: Take a fresh look at something you may not have noticed in Ephesians 3:14-15. *(10 minutes)*

To what group of people does God relate in this passage? _____

And where does the text see these families? _____

How does God relate to these family groupings? _____

Scripture Study: Read Psalm 127:3-5. *(5 minutes)*

What does the Psalmist call children? _____

How does this text picture the patriarch? _____

Would you say that this text is showing us something of what God calls success?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

By faith in the Son, draw near to your Father in order to be a child to Him.

Receive His gifts to you this morning.

Ask Him for the wisdom to be successful in being a parent.

Pray over your children and the living generations of your family.

Lesson 14

What is the job description of a parent? Fathers and mothers are equippers. They are charged to prepare their children to leave their home with the ability to be successful in the Seven Markers of Success.

This is a huge job, far beyond the unaided ability of any parent. They will constantly need to be receiving wisdom and grace from the Father of all families in order to fulfill their mission; and He makes Himself available for both, twenty-four/seven.

Scripture Study: Interestingly, the second table of the law begins with something which is the foundation of all future societies; and Paul ties it into “the manifold wisdom of God which will defeat the demonic realm” when he quotes Exodus 20:12 in Ephesians 6:1-4. Read his New Testament rendition of a parent’s job description. *(15 minutes)*

Why do you think Paul begins by addressing children? _____

If the father and mother are to make a child successful, they must enable the child to _____

Why do you think this is so essential to the future well being of the child?

Why do you think that fathers are singled out for a particular caution? _____

What is the role of the father in training and equipping the children? _____

Which parent is charged to be the leader in child training? _____

How many fathers do you know who were adequately trained to be able to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord”? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

If you have any unforgiveness or resentment toward your own parents, come to your Savior to be restored today.

If you have any unforgiveness or resentment toward your children, come to your Savior to be made whole today.

Ask God to equip you to succeed as a parent or a grandparent or as a future parent.

Pray for the parenting that is going on in your church.

Lesson 15

The book of Proverbs is a fantastic child-training manual. It is especially written to equip fathers to make their children successful in God's eyes. What a gold mine of practical instruction!

The bonding of parents with their children coupled with discipline is designed to enable a child to exercise self-control, which is essential to his healthy development and eventual success in every area of life.

Scripture Study: Read Proverbs 2:1-22 with the hope that you could facilitate all of this becoming adopted in the heart of your child. *(15 minutes)*

Since you know that you cannot simply legislate these things into the heart of a child, what are some of the ways you think a father might transmit these values so that the child willingly owns them? _____

If we suppose that the father is training the child for a period of eighteen years, how do you think his training methods might change over this span?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Using this text, pray some of these things into your own soul!

If you weren't properly fathered, now is your chance to allow God to father you by studying your way through this father's manual.

Worship God as your Father. Draw close to Him.

God hears the prayers of parents, so pray for your children!

Lesson 16

Why do children (at a very young age) lie, hit, steal, pout, manipulate, and blame shift when they have never seen any of this behavior displayed in the home? They are born with the sin nature, which was inherited from Adam and Eve.

A parent's job is to love them, instruct them, correct them, and thereby train them to forsake their natural instincts so that they will not self-destruct in later life.

And since parents still struggle with some of the same temptations, their role as parents constantly reinforces their own commitment to obey the ways of life themselves.

Scripture Study: See the magnitude of the problem that all people must overcome in order to be successful in God's eyes. Read Proverbs 22:15. *(10 minutes)*

What is the child's problem? _____

What happens to the child if he is allowed to just have his own way? Read Proverbs 29:15 for the answer. _____

In 22:15, what do you think God means by, "the rod of discipline"? See Proverbs 23:13-14 and 13:24. _____

Scripture Study: Read Proverbs 3:1-35. *(5 minutes)*

Can you picture a father tenderly sharing this type of wisdom with his children?

How might your life be different if your father (assuming that he did not) had been able to lovingly instill these values and insights into you? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Come to your own Father God and welcome His loving corrections.

Surrender your soul to the Lord as your worship.

Ask for Christ to make clear the wisdom of God to you for your family.

Pray for the children surrounding your life.

Lesson 17

So much of what a child learns is “caught rather than taught,” which means that the conversations, the attitudes, the voice tones, and the values which are daily expressed in the home by the parents are the most influential factors in the child’s life.

Children study their parents. They listen and take in all that is going on around them, and they don’t miss much. Facial expressions and body language of parents are not lost on children. Whatever is there, they get.

God “parented” His adult children by instructing them to make everyday activities a classroom for their children. He knows that all children are “home schooled” at one level.

Scripture Study: Read this incredible text in Deuteronomy 6:1-18 that is designed to enable the whole family and tribe to inherit all that God desires to give them.

(15 minutes)

In this text, what is the relationship between the people’s obedience and their ability to inherit the blessing? _____

What is the connection between loving God and listening to God? _____

How are they told to teach their children? _____

What later happened to God’s people when they failed to teach their children as instructed?

If God commands Christian parents to teach their children at home, how do you think the church’s children’s ministry fits? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Bring your family life before the Lord and lay it at His feet.

Receive His grace and His guidance into the spiritual condition of your family.

Worship Him as the true Father of your family and your extended family.

Lay hold of God’s promises for your children and grandchildren!

Lesson 18

Everything in life revolves around relationships because God exists in the community of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He exists in relationship, and He created us in His image.

Sin broke this sacred fellowship with the God who loves us; and the Curse that resulted came upon us as the consequence of a broken relationship.

Redemption has always been about restoring broken relationships, which must begin with God Himself. Salvation is defined in terms of reconciliation.

Scripture Study: Read this powerful text in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. *(5 minutes)*
In just a sentence or two, summarize this passage in terms of relationship.

Scripture Study: Read Ephesians 4:1-3. *(10 minutes)*

What do you think Paul means here by your “calling”? _____

For the purposes of God to be fulfilled, why do you think that unity in the Spirit is so important? _____

What character qualities are required to mend a strain on a relationship?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Sit quietly before the Lord and ask Him to bring any relationship to your mind in which you have violated one of these four character qualities.

Bring any failures into the light and renounce them.

Believe that the blood of Jesus Christ actually cleanses you from all guilt.

Ask God to use you to express love toward those who have hurt you.

Lesson 19

Sometimes we are tempted to think, “I don’t have a problem with God; its people who bug me.” While we all can identify, we also know this isn’t God’s viewpoint.

In God’s Kingdom, how we relate to people is directly tied to how we relate to God.

Most of our suffering comes from trouble we experience with others and our responses to these difficulties. We often do what we feel like doing or saying, and then reap huge losses. Following Jesus involves making changes that bring new life.

Scripture Study: Read the surprising words of Jesus in Matthew 22:36-40. *(5 minutes)*
Why do you think Jesus called loving God the greatest and foremost commandment?

How do you think the entire law and prophets (an expression which encompasses the entire Old Testament) flow from these two commands? _____

Scripture Study: Read Romans 12:18 first, and then read this in the context of 12:14-21. *(10 minutes)*

Finish this sentence: “Even when someone refuses to be at peace with you, you can

Why do you think Paul calls these verses “overcoming evil”? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Pray through Romans 12:14-21.

Claim each command as a promise of God sending His grace to give you His ability to obey.

Speak blessings over every strained relationship in your life.

Use your access code to God (standing in grace) and draw near to Him.

Lesson 20

Your unwillingness to forgive the person who has wronged you must be among the Top Ten on the Stupidest Sins hit parade!

This sin wreaks havoc in your own life, regardless of what insult has been forced upon you.

By all means, let the Word of God persuade you to live by no other code than the radical word of Jesus who commanded all His people to forgive as many times as it takes.

Scripture Study: As you read Matthew 18:21-35, put yourself in Peter's place of asking his question and listening to Jesus' answer. *(15 minutes)*

Refresh Peter's question using your own words and circumstances. Just begin with, "Lord,

_____."

State the principle Jesus used to answer Peter. _____

Then Jesus illustrated the principle with a story. What happened to the man who refused to forgive his fellow servant? _____

Have you ever experienced the "torturers" of which Jesus spoke? _____
Why do you think it makes God angry when we refuse to forgive another person?

Do you think it is possible to be successful in life while refusing to forgive someone who has deeply hurt you? _____
So what determination do you wish to make? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Don't try to dig stuff up; but do ask the Holy Spirit if there is someone you need to forgive. If there is, then give your resentment and anger and unforgiveness to the Lord.

Receive His forgiveness for your own soul.

Pray blessings over those who have hurt you.

Lesson 21

Paul frequently referred to himself as the “doulos” or servant/slave of the Lord. He saw Himself as literally “belonging to the Lord”; and thus his life revolved around using all that he had at his disposal in serving the Lord’s interests. This is called, stewardship.

Paul used another word that described this sacred relationship. It is the word, “entrusted.” God has entrusted things into his hands; and the sense of living to please his “Master” was Paul’s joy and identity.

Scripture Study: Do something different this morning. Begin reading in the middle of a story at Luke 15:25 and read through 16:13 as if it were of one piece. (5 minutes)

Jesus follows up talking about the older brother by launching immediately into another story about a manager or steward. Could there possibly be a connection? What do you think? _____

What kind of steward was the younger son before he returned home? _____

What kind of steward do you think this same son was after he came home and after he wore the robe, the ring, and the shoes? _____

What was wrong with the older son’s stewardship, for the story implies that he was hard working and reliable?

What was wrong with the manager/steward Jesus described in Luke 16:1?

Obviously this steward was a liar, so exactly what was it that he did which illustrated a point Jesus was making about the stewardship we all have?

In 16:10-11, what are the two things entrusted to us in Jesus’ story? _____

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Come to Jesus as your Lord. Tell Him that you are His steward.

Receive from Him fresh joy in being allowed to serve His interests!

Delight yourself in your Savior this morning!

Receive His blessing and favor upon your using the things He has given you to bring joy to His heart!

Lesson 22

There is such joy in seeing yourself as God's steward, for stewards spend a lot of time working in intimacy with those they serve. The stewards have unlimited access to their masters; and they are greatly trusted to use all the resources of the master.

Seeing yourself as God's steward infuses your life with such a great sense of purpose. Those who take on this identity are released into meaningful service regardless of their circumstances.

Joseph experienced betrayal, jealousy, and hatred; but as he assumed the role of the steward in one situation after another, God brought him into something we could easily call, "success."

Scripture Reflection: Assuming that you are familiar with the life of Joseph, draw some lessons for yourself from his life for your own journey through life. *(10 minutes)*

What might have happened to Joseph if he had not readily assumed the identity of being a steward? _____

How do you think God might have used Joseph's years of serving others as the preparation for fulfilling his ultimate destiny? _____

Can you look back in your life and see times or places where you failed to assume this role and perhaps lost something God was offering to you? If so, what are your thoughts about it? _____

Scripture Study: Read 1 Peter 4:10. *(5 minutes)*

Finish this sentence: "Peter sees all Christians as _____."

How does "the manifold grace of God" figure into Peter's view of all Christians?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Present yourself to Jesus as His steward.

By faith, draw from Him His grace to use the gifts He has entrusted to you.

Acknowledge God as the one in control of your life just as He was over Joseph's life.

Worship your Father as the One who is to be revered and trusted at all times!

Lesson 23

You are the steward of God. He created you for this privileged position; and this lies right at the heart of your identity.

He loaded you with gifts of His choosing; and by working in dependency upon Christ, He has added talents and abilities.

It is foolishness to compare your gifts and talents with those of another. Never diminish the value of your gifts. The only issue is: are you using what you have?

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 25:14-30. *(10 minutes)*

Do not draw the wrong theology from this parable. Jesus has not gone on a journey and simply left you to work for Him. He is with you now; and it is His being with you that empowers you to accomplish your stewardship.

What is Jesus saying when He speaks of men receiving smaller or larger gifts?

What two things in this parable made the master angry? (hint: what the man did and why he did it) _____

What is the message of 25:28? _____

What is the message of 25:29? _____

Journaling: Share your thoughts with God about this topic of your gifts and their use.

(5 minutes) _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Thank your heavenly Father for giving you so many abilities!

Come to Jesus this morning in order to simply abide in Him.

Drink in His life.

Believe Him to guide you and use you today.

Lesson 24

There is a close connection between stewardship and your ministry, for you are to steward both your material possessions (such as money) and your ministry gifts.

While the two could easily be combined, there is a value in distinguishing between the creation of and use of wealth and the use of cultivating and using your abilities.

Your ultimate success in God's eyes will involve your love for Him being expressed through both avenues.

Scripture Study: Read Romans 12:5-8. (*5 minutes*)

Which of these seven gifts are you actively using to serve God?

Which of these seven gifts do you believe are in your life but not yet developed?

What are the gifts of others that seem to especially help you to become more effective?

Scripture Study: Read Ephesians 2:10. (*5 minutes*)

Finish this sentence: "You were created for _____."

What does this tell you about the significance of works in your life? _____

We are not saved by our works, but we are privileged to join God in doing good works.

Scripture Study: Read Romans 2:6. (*5 minutes*)

Finish this sentence: "You will be judged for your _____ to determine your rewards."

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Pray through Ephesians 2:10.

Praise God for His plans for your life!

Pray His will into the various areas of your life.

Combat your doubts about yourself by using your faith to count on God's good works being fulfilled in your life.

Lesson 25

It is true that what you are is more important than what you do. Some rightfully emphasize that being is more important than doing; but ultimately the two cannot be successfully separated. Why? Because everyone is doing something, and “yes,” it flows from who you are.

But you were created in Christ Jesus for good works prepared beforehand so that you could live them out.

Using the talents and abilities given by God is certainly involved in hearing, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Scripture Study: Read Acts 14:26. (*5 minutes*)

The grace of God relates to who you are, for it is His grace that feeds and sustains and enables you.

But according to this verse, what was the purpose of this trip? _____

Scripture Study: Read 1 Corinthians 15:10. (*5 minutes*)

How can the grace of God prove vain in a person’s life? (It can: see Hebrews 12:15 or Galatians 2:21 if you need confirmation.) _____

As Paul received the grace of God, what resulted? _____

Scripture Study: Read James 2:18, 24. (*5 minutes*)

If a man claims to have true faith in Jesus, but there are no faith-works flowing from his life, what would James say about such a man? _____

Why would James say that? _____

Why do you think James is addressing this rather disturbing topic? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Ask God to deliver you from laziness or drivenness.

Give yourself into the Lord’s hands to direct you, motivate you, and thus use your life in His service.

Worship the Lord this morning for His Wisdom and His Grace coming into your life.

Thank Him for counting your life as important and useful to Him.

Lesson 26

Scripture extols hard work, passion, and being single-minded, as well as faithfulness; but drivenness can imitate these excellent qualities and yet not be approved by God in “that day.”

Satan tempted Jesus by trying to get Him to do something to prove who He was. Not Jesus. He knew who He was. He wasn't working to prove who He was; and neither should you.

Yet it is interesting that He would also say, “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.” (John 14:11)

Scripture Study: Read Ephesians 4:11-16. (*5 minutes*)

4:12 - The reason there are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in the church is to equip every Christian for his or her _____.

4:16 - What causes the growth of the body (the church)? _____

According to 4:16, how important is your ministry to the success of others?

Reflection: Since the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers are to equip others to make them successful in their various ministries, how do you see this working in your ministry? (*10 minutes*) _____

_____ Are you taking the initiative to draw this equipping from them? _____

What could you do that would help you become more fruitful in your ministry? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank God for all those who are investing in your life and in your ministry.

Ask God to anoint you and use you today.

By faith enter into His rest, for His works come forth best when you are participating in His accomplishments.

Lift your hands to express your adoration to Him who loves you!

Lesson 27

It could be argued that stewardship, ministry, and sharing your faith are all of one piece.

But it is helpful to take three different looks at something that may all fall under the heading of works, for the distinctions highlight different Biblical values.

How you use your money and possessions may or may not involve your gifts; and both of these can be used without your influence to helping others experience the Savior.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 10:26-42. (*5 minutes*)

10:32-33 - What do you think is Jesus' point here? _____

10:37-38 - How do these verses relate to one's eagerness to share the Lord with those who do not know Him? _____

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 28:18-20. (*10 minutes*)

Do these verses apply to all Christians or just to pastors? _____

What happens to your life as you trust Christ to lead you into fulfilling these verses right where you live? _____

What do you think are the negative effects on those Christians who fail to share this ministry with Him? _____

What do you think would happen to your local church if every Christian trusted the Savior to gently lead him or her into fulfilling this mission statement? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Don't condemn yourself. The Lord is gentle so let Him bring light to any failure on your part.

Come to Him without fear, and receive His forgiveness and relief from guilt and condemnation.

Pray for your lost friends and family members.

Ask the Lord for someone to disciple.

Lesson 28

“They overcame him (the devil) because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony...” – Revelation 12:11.

The only safe place for a Christian is living on the offense. Passivity, the fear of man, and embarrassment spell the loss of power and the thrill of living in the Kingdom!

Boldness was a mark of the early Christians, for they wanted others to know the incredible life they were experiencing in Jesus Christ!

Scripture Study: Read Romans 12:21. (*5 minutes*)

What attitude is Paul commending? _____

How would you apply this verse to your life? _____

Scripture Study: Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. (*10 minutes*)

According to 5:18, you have the ministry of _____.

In 5:19, your ministry is called _____.

In 5:20, Paul calls you an _____.

Also in 5:20, what else do you see yourself doing? _____

How might all this follow from Paul’s declaration of your being a “new creature” because of your union with Christ in 5:17? _____

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Come to Jesus and ask Him to freshly fill you with the Holy Spirit so that rivers of living water would flow from your inner man.

Sit with your Savior and draw from Him some of His love for the lost.

Pray to the Lord who is harvesting that He might send His people out today to share His truth and love.

Worship Him for His love that seeks the lost.

Lesson 29

Paul was not ashamed of the gospel; and you have to wonder why he wasn't. Certainly power was the measure of everything in Rome. The obvious answer: Paul was experiencing so much power in the gospel that being ashamed was a non-issue.

It is quite possible that when Christians are ashamed of the gospel that the reason can be traced to their not experiencing the power of the gospel in an ongoing way.

Scripture Meditation: Slowly read and reread Romans 1:16-17 so that it can sink down deep inside. *(5 minutes)*

Scripture Study: Read Acts 1:8. *(10 minutes)*

What do you think the role of the Holy Spirit is in enabling you to have power?

Why does Jesus say He wants you to receive the Holy Spirit? _____

What do you think Jesus was envisioning as He spoke these words?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Jesus invites you to come to Him when you are thirsty for more of the Holy Spirit, so come to Him now.

By faith draw from Him more of the Holy Spirit.

Ask the Spirit of God to anoint you to share the gospel today.

Worship the Savior who seeks worshipers.

Lesson 30

Success in God's eyes is the only success, but His definition of success is hugely different from our culture's definition. Your soul, your mate, your children, your stewardship, your ministry, and your witness are all things for which every person will give an account.

Your part is to actively follow Him into experiencing His grace in these seven areas.

Scripture Study: How can you possibly achieve success? Read Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28-30. *(15 minutes)*

What is the significance of Jesus saying to those who are weary from carrying a lot of responsibility in their own ability, "Come to Me"?

Why would you need to hear this often? _____

What is it that He gives to you every time you obey Him and come to Him?

What do you think is the difference between Jesus giving you rest in 11:28 and your finding this rest in 11:29? Explain. _____

What do you think Jesus means when He commands you to, "Take My yoke"? What is He really telling you to do? _____

How is it that you can learn directly from Him when you are in His yoke, which would not be possible when you are not in His yoke? _____

What are Jesus' commands, and what are His promises? _____

How might this passage enable you to be a success in God's eyes? _____

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Come to Jesus this morning and take Him up on His invitation.

By faith abide in Him or take up His yoke (your union).

In this precious place, learn of Him.

Discover the rest that will infuse your soul with His ability.

Lesson 31

Ultimately, the gospel is Christ Himself; for in the gospel, He gives Himself to the sinner. Paul sometimes speaks of the gospel in terms that suggest that it is Christ Himself; but usually He describes the gospel in terms of Christ's righteousness. Really, it is all of one piece.

To be successful you only need to abide in Christ, for then your life will produce fruit (God's definition of success). Paul calls this, "the gospel of His Son"; for Christ Himself is the source of anyone's success.

Scripture Study: Jesus pioneered the way by abiding in the Father; and He sets you up to succeed the same way by offering you the opportunity to abide in Him. Read about this in John 15:1-11. *(15 minutes)*

Start with John 15:11. Why does Jesus share "these things" with you? _____

What do you think Jesus means when He refers to, "My joy"? _____

How will "My joy" cause your joy to be full? _____

Now, trace backwards in this passage to discover what are the "these things" which would cause "My joy" to be in you. What do you find that might be the most fundamental to having "My joy" in you? _____

To abide in Christ means to use your faith to realize your union with Him. It means to stay in this awareness. It means to dwell in Him. It means to depend upon Him for your source of life and nourishment. What helps you to abide in Christ?

To abide in Him causes Him who is successful to live His life in you, which makes you successful.

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Read John 15:4-5 to the Lord and answer His call to abide!

Like a branch, let your need and your faith draw His life into your soul.

Be still before Him and give His words room inside your soul.

Enter into fellowship with Him, enjoying Him and soaking up His love.