

Bible Studies for Life Series for June 1: Your ticket for real success

May 27, 2008

• Proverbs 1:1-7; 2:4-8; 3:5-6,11-12

Adults want to succeed in their lives. Just watch TV's infomercials. They're geared to show adults how they can succeed with little effort—in making a fortune in real estate, in getting physically fit or in finding a perfect new love relationship. Many adults bounce from program to program and shell out bucket-loads of money in an attempt to discover their ticket to success. But are any of these programs about real success in life?

As important as making money, pursuing good health, and finding romance may be to adults, Scripture points to something greater as the ticket to real success. It points out that God wants people to succeed in life by trusting in him and living according to his ways.

Learn from Scripture (Proverbs 1:1-6)

Most of us get it backwards when it comes to the definition for success. For many success is about self-fulfillment, but real success in biblical terms involves fulfilling the purposes God has for us. That kind of success is more difficult to achieve, but it is possible. Success of the real kind can be found and experienced by applying principles of wisdom learned from Scripture.

For this study, we will focus on the wisdom literature attributed to Solomon, but likely gathered from many sources. This literature, called

Proverbs, makes up a body of ideas about how to live life as it was understood by the Hebrews. This collection of sayings and sage advice is God's path to knowledge, wisdom, healthy relationships and to a more satisfying life.

To get the most out this book, we need to explore it diligently. God's wisdom in these holy verses is plain, straightforward and understandable. But to make it work, you have to study it. Therefore, the first step to wisdom is to become willing to learn from the Scriptures and understand the Bible as authoritative and guiding in our lives.

Application

- By continuing to explore and apply diligently God's wisdom in the holy Scriptures, believers can increase in living rightly—and thus in living successfully. Share a plan for daily Bible reading with your learners. Some websites will e-mail a daily Bible reading straight to your inbox. If your church provides daily devotional material, bring samples.

Revere the Lord (Proverbs 1:7; 2:4-8)

Real success—in the biblical sense—is based in living out God's plan for our lives. Discovering and understanding that plan begins with reverence. Solomon taught the way to wisdom began with this. The Psalms are full of supporting evidence with the view that the Lord is God, and we are not. Thus, it is a matter of position, and more precisely, it is a matter of recognizing our position as subject of the heavenly King.

Proverbs 2 teaches wisdom begins when a person acknowledges reverence for God. Once this proper positioning takes place then—and only then—can

true wisdom to live successfully come into play.

Various sports offer illustrations of this. A baseball batter cannot hit a pitched baseball until assuming the proper batting stance. A baseball fielder must in “baseball ready” position before the baseball is ever pitched if they hope to make a great catch. A tennis player cannot make an “ace” serve until the mechanics of the serve and timing are perfected. Both of these are based on the posture of the player, and this is especially so when it comes to receiving wisdom from God.

Application

- We show we treasure wisdom by diligently seeking to understand God and follow his ways. But how does this look practically speaking? In other words, how can a Christian be “baseball ready” when it comes to living the faith?

It begins with a position of humility that allows us to look in the mirror and say, “God is in charge here.” It continues with an attitude of dependence that says, “If I am to please God with my life today, I must choose to trust God for decisions and actions.”

Ask your participants to assess their readiness for gaining wisdom. Ask them to assess their reverence for God.

Live by faith (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Living by faith is indeed a challenge. Solomon understood this when he suggested we trust in God and rely on God for insight and guidance. Living by faith means trusting God to take us beyond the limits of our own understanding into where God would have us go.

The challenge for us is trusting that God knows the ways to real success far better than we do. The great temptation is to think we can figure it out on our own, or if we work hard enough. The reality is that we need a guide and God can be that guide—if we will trust God and live by faith.

Living by faith necessarily includes lots of time spent learning God’s ways. Praying, studying Scripture and fellowshiping with other believers is a great way to do this. Living by faith is difficult if not pursued with some discipline, as well as some sacrifice of “self” along the way. The good news is the Lord wants to guide us in our decisions—great or small—and help us to find the right pathway.

Application

- Recognizing the limitations of our understanding, we can succeed in living right by trusting in the Lord completely and following his guidance in all we do. A good illustration of this principle is a hiking or fishing guide. When we trust someone experienced and follow them, we can be rewarded with incredible vistas and views we’d never find on our own. Or, in the case of a fishing guide, we’re able to catch fish better than if we tried based on our limited experiences. You might introduce this section of material by telling about a time you followed someone else’s experience or wisdom and reaped a benefit.

Appreciate God’s correction (Proverbs 3:11-12)

Solomon advised the Lord’s instruction and loving correction are to be desired, not despised. But who among us has received discipline or correction and enjoyed it? It is difficult to hear things about our flaws that need improvement. It is embarrassing and sometimes damaging to adult

egos to be reminded that we are not without a source of authority and correction—God the Father.

Mark Twain is often credited for saying: “When I was 19 years old my father was the dumbest man on the earth. It’s amazing how much he learned by the time I turned 25.”

We always appreciate the wisdom of God’s correcting love long after the affect is first felt. When a loving parent takes the time to discipline and confront a wayward child, in the long run that child knows he or she is loved. When an unloving or lazy parent takes no time and fails to engage the child with corrective action, the child ultimately comes to understand that as a less loving parent. So it is with God!

Application

- We can be sure when God corrects us through his word or by some other means that his correction is proof he loves us and desires our success in life. Provide your participants with a personal story of a time when a parent corrected you and, although it was painful, you grew from the experience. Parents who are raising difficult children will be encouraged to be reminded that correction and guidance are good for the child, even though the child doesn’t like such treatment. You may want to give parents of young children a chance to discuss this together—understanding their children’s need for correction can help them understand their own need for correction from God.