



Rethinking Success

Message Guide



Message Guide: Rethinking Success

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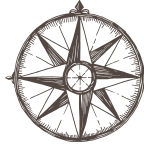
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A Note from The Groups Team

“And then to Sam’s surprise and utter confusion Aragorn bowed his knee before them; and taking them by the hand, Frodo upon his right and Sam upon his left, he led them to the throne, and setting them upon it, he turned to the men and captains who stood by and spoke, so that his voice rang over all the host, crying: ‘Praise them with great praise!’

- The Lord Of The Rings: The Return of the King

There’s a moment at the end of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* where Aragorn is crowned king. The battle is over. The throne is his. Power, victory, honor... it’s everything you would expect success to look like.

But then something surprising happens. The king walks into a crowd... sees four hobbits... and instead of standing above them, he bows.

That moment reframes everything.

Because deep down, we all have a vision of success: A life that matters, a story that holds together, a finish that feels complete. But the problem is... most of the definitions of success we inherit don’t lead where we think they will. Some lead to emptiness. Some lead to compromise. Some lead to pride that slowly reshapes our hearts.

And that’s why this series matters. Because Jesus doesn’t just save us; He redefines success.

Not as:

- What you accumulate
- What you achieve
- What others think of you

But as:

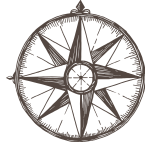
- Who you become
- What you love
- And whether your life is aligned with God’s kingdom

In the weeks ahead, we’re going to explore different versions of success: empty success, incomplete success, ambition-driven success, and ultimately... true success. And we’ll see this clearly: Success is not measured by what you build for yourself, but by what you surrender to God.

As you walk through this with your group, don’t just talk about success. Let God reshape your definition of it. Because the goal isn’t just to finish life with more. It’s to finish life well.

Excited to study God’s Word with you,

The Groups Team



A Note For Life Group Directors

At The Heights, we define Life Groups as life-changing communities where you can belong, believe, and become a 5G disciple.

- **Belong:** A group where you can meet Jesus in a community that welcomes and accepts you.
- **Believe:** A group where you can know Jesus through His Word and His people.
- **Become:** A group where you can follow Jesus in every area of your life, and help others do the same.

Our Life Groups exist to help every person at The Heights take their next step as a follower of Jesus, even if their first step is their next step. To help people become who God designed them to be, we keep our approach simple and intentional by building our groups around three life-giving rhythms. These rhythms enable Life Groups to create the kind of consistent, relational environments where people can truly belong, believe, and become.

Meet Weekly

Life Groups at The Heights meet every week because we believe that consistency builds community. When we gather regularly around God's Word, pray for one another, and share life together, relationships grow deeper and transformation happens faster. Making your group a weekly priority on the calendar communicates that spiritual growth and biblical community are essential, not optional. When people show up consistently, life change becomes possible.

Hangout Monthly

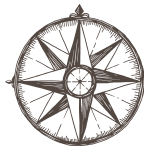
Once a month, we encourage every Life Group to host a Hangout, a time to intentionally create a warm, welcoming space for new people to experience community. These gatherings are designed to be fun, relational, and open to anyone, especially those who may not yet know Jesus. They also provide strategic opportunities to invite your "ONE", the person you're praying for and investing in, to experience authentic community.

Your Hangout could be anything from dinner out, board games in or a simple backyard cookout. The goal isn't to plan a perfect event; it's to help people encounter the love of Jesus through genuine relationships.

Serve Quarterly

At least once a quarter, we want each group to serve together in a way that blesses others and strengthens the group's sense of mission. Serving together turns our focus outward and reminds us that we are part of God's work in the world. Some groups choose to partner with ministries and events already happening at The Heights. Other groups create their own opportunities to meet needs right in their neighborhood.

These three rhythms - Meet Weekly, Hangout Monthly, Serve Quarterly - work together to create the heartbeat of Life Groups at The Heights. They help us move from simply attending church to living as a spiritual family who is sent together.



Additional Resources

As we explore this series, our Groups Team has provided additional resources to help you go deeper into the words of Jesus and discover what success truly is. This series is designed to help our church rethink success through the lens of the gospel. We want every person to:

- Identify false definitions of success that shape their life (comfort, control, approval, power)
- Recognize where those definitions are leading
- See how Jesus redefines success through surrender, humility, and faithfulness
- Take a next step toward aligning their life with God's purposes

The goal is not just clarity. It's reorientation.

Articles and Overviews

In the pages ahead, you'll find articles and overviews designed to help you rethink success through the lens of the gospel. Each passage exposes the definitions of success we tend to build our lives on—and invites us to see how Jesus redefines what truly matters.

These resources will help you prepare your heart for Sunday's message and your Life Group discussion. As you study, remember: this is not just about gaining insight, but about reorienting your life.

Because success, as we often define it, can quietly shape our priorities, relationships, and identity. But Scripture shows us a better way.

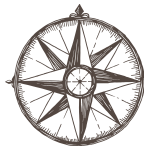
Family Discipleship

At The Heights, we believe faith formation isn't confined to a class or a church building—it's shaped in the everyday moments of life. And in this series, we're helping families rethink one of the most important questions we all carry: What does it mean to live a successful life?

Because long before our kids define success for themselves, they're already absorbing it—from culture, school, sports, and even us. This series is an opportunity to intentionally shape that definition around the way of Jesus. To help you bring this into your home, we've provided simple next steps at the end of each Life Group guide:

- **Faith Talks** are simple, intentional conversations that help you bring up the things of God with your kids and grandkids in everyday life. They don't have to be long or formal, just real, meaningful moments of reflection in the ordinary rhythms of your family: around the dinner table, on the way to school, or while winding down before bed.
- **Faith Walks** are where conversation turns into action. These moments don't have to be big or complicated. They may look like serving a neighbor, encouraging a classmate, forgiving someone, volunteering together, or giving time to meet a need. Each step becomes a way of living out what true success looks like.

These Faith Talks and Faith Walks are designed to help you integrate the gospel into your everyday life, turning belief into movement and faith into legacy.



Life Group Schedule

We all live with a vision of success. A picture of what it means for life to matter... to work... to feel complete. But the definitions of success we inherit don't always lead where we think they will. Some lead to emptiness. Some lead to compromise. Some quietly reshape our hearts in ways we don't even notice. In this series, we'll walk through key passages of Scripture that expose the kinds of success we often pursue, and show how Jesus redefines success in a way that actually leads to life. As we study together, we'll discover that true success is not found in what we build, achieve, or accumulate... but in who we become as we follow Him.

April 19

Empty Success: Luke 12:13–21

The rich man builds bigger barns, believing more will finally bring security and satisfaction. From the outside, his life looks successful, but God calls him a fool. This passage reveals a sobering truth: it's possible to gain everything you thought you wanted... and still lose what matters most. Jesus shows us that success is not found in what you accumulate, but in being rich toward God.

April 26

Incomplete Success: 1 Kings 11:1–11

Solomon had everything—wisdom, power, influence, wealth. By every outward measure, he was successful. But over time, his heart drifted. What began as blessing slowly became compromise. This passage exposes the danger of incomplete success: achieving great things externally while losing alignment internally. True success is not just what you accomplish, but whether your heart remains fully devoted to God.

May 3

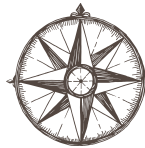
Ambition-Driven Success: Mark 10:35–45

James and John ask Jesus for positions of glory. They want success, status, and significance. But Jesus reframes everything: greatness in His kingdom is not about power, but about service. Success in the kingdom of God is not climbing higher—it's laying your life down for others.

May 10

Misplaced Success: John 4:1–26

The Samaritan woman has spent her life searching - for love, identity, satisfaction - but nothing has truly fulfilled her. Jesus meets her in that place and exposes a deeper truth: we often chase success in places that can never satisfy our soul. True success is not found in what the world offers, but in receiving the living water that only Jesus gives.



Articles and Overviews

These articles and overviews are designed to help you rethink success through the lens of the gospel. Each passage reveals how easily our definition of success can drift - and how Jesus invites us into a better way. We encourage you to take time with these resources to deepen your personal study, reflect on what is truly shaping your life, and consider how Scripture redefines what it means to live well. Because success is not just about what you achieve... it's about who you are becoming and what your life is aligned with. As you engage these passages, ask not only what they mean, but how they are calling you to live differently.

A Biblical Theology of Success

The Fulfillment and The Response

From the beginning of Scripture to the end, success is not defined by what we achieve, accumulate, or control—but by how closely our lives are aligned with God. While the world measures success by visible outcomes, the Bible consistently points us to something deeper: trust over results, faithfulness over recognition, and surrender over self-advancement. As we trace the story of Scripture, we discover that true success is not advancing our own story, but living in step with God’s no matter the cost, and no matter the outcome.

Biblical Stage	How Success is Commonly Misunderstood	How God Defines Success	Key Scripture	Core Insight (Statement)
Creation (Eden)	Autonomy, becoming your own authority	Living in right order under God	Genesis 1–2	True success is living in joyful alignment with God’s design and authority.
Fall	Redefining good/evil for yourself	Trusting God’s word over your own	Genesis 3	Failure begins when we redefine success on our own terms instead of trusting God.
Patriarchs	Visible results (land, legacy, security)	Trusting God’s promises without seeing fulfillment	Genesis 12, 15	Success is trusting God’s promises even when you cannot yet see the outcome.
Joseph Narrative	Status, comfort, control	Faithfulness in obscurity and suffering	Genesis 39:2	Success is measured by God’s presence with you, not your position before others.
Exodus / Law	External conformity	Covenant obedience flowing from relationship	Deuteronomy 6	Success is loving God and walking in His ways from the heart.
Conquest / Judges	Power, dominance, victory	Faithful dependence on God	Judges 2:11–19	Success collapses when we replace dependence on God with reliance on ourselves.
Kingdom (Saul → David → Solomon)	National strength, wealth, influence	Heart-level devotion and obedience	1 Samuel 16:7	Success is determined by the condition of your heart, not the scale of your influence.
Wisdom Literature	Prosperity as ultimate good	Rightly ordered loves and fear of the Lord	Ecclesiastes 2; Proverbs 1:7	Success without God is empty, no matter how full life appears.
Prophets	Results, impact, visible change	Faithfulness regardless of response	Jeremiah 7	Success is faithfulness to God’s calling, not the results you can measure.
Jesus (Gospels)	Power, recognition, avoiding suffering	Total obedience and surrender to the Father	Luke 22:42	The most successful life is the one fully surrendered to the will of God—even to the point of the cross.
Church (Acts/Epistles)	Growth, influence, platform	Faithful witness, disciple-making, endurance	Acts 1:8	Success is faithfully making disciples and bearing witness, regardless of opposition.
New Creation	Earthly legacy, accomplishments	Being received by God and made whole	Matthew 25:21	Final success is hearing “Well done” from God and being brought fully home.

Two Cities Tale

Success in the City of God

There are a few institutions in life that you don't vote into existence. They're just there... built into reality. You're born into a family, you live under some form of government, and if you're following Jesus, you belong to the church. Scripture doesn't treat those three institutions like optional add-ons; it roots them deep in the story of humanity.

- God creates the family in Genesis 1–2: man and woman are formed and commissioned to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. It's the first community—the place where identity begins.
- God establishes government in Genesis 9: the same call to multiply and fill the earth is repeated, but now something new is introduced... the sword. Because once sin enters the story, what was once sustained by trust now has to be protected.
- And then the church, anticipated in Israel, but fully formed in Acts 2: where God gathers a people not by blood or borders, but by the Spirit, centered on Christ.

Three institutions. All from God. All good.

And that's what makes what I'm about to write so easy to miss. Because when something is good, when it's built into the very structure of life, it doesn't have to be rejected to be misused. It can simply be reordered. And when that happens, it doesn't immediately look wrong. However, here's what's unsettling if you really think about it: You can build a life that looks completely right... and still build it on the wrong foundation.

- Your family can look great... deeply invested, always present... but underneath it all, your kids are carrying the weight of your identity.
- You can care about what's happening in the government... stay informed, stay engaged... but find your emotional life rising and falling with every headline.
- You can be deeply involved in church... serving, leading, showing up every week... but quietly measuring your worth by how you're doing compared to everyone else.

From the outside, everything looks solid. But underneath? That's a different question.

Not visibly at first. Not in ways people would immediately notice. But over time, it shows up: in pressure, in conflict, in what actually has the final say in your life.

Which raises a deeper question: **How can two people build the same kinds of lives... and end up in completely different places?**

The difference between a life rooted in God and one that only appears to be is not found in the institutions in which you belong, but in the love that those institutions are built on.

Competing Blueprints

That bolded question isn't theoretical; it's one the church has had to answer before. In the early fifth century, as the Roman Empire began to fracture and eventually fall, people didn't just panic politically... they panicked theologically. If the greatest empire in the world could collapse, what did that say about the stability of everything else? And more specifically, what did it say about the people of God living inside of it?

Into that moment, Augustine steps in and writes the classic called City of God, where he essentially says, “You’re all asking the wrong question.” The issue isn’t whether Rome stood or fell. The question is deeper than that. It’s actually the same one we’re asking now: **How can two people build the same kinds of lives... and end up in completely different places?**

Because here’s what made Augustine’s answer so disruptive - both groups were building lives that looked strikingly similar. They build families. They live under governments. They gather in religious communities.

So the difference can’t just be the institutions themselves. It had to be something deeper.

The Fault Line Underneath

It’s a little like walking onto a construction site. You see two buildings going up with same materials, same framing, same visible structure. From the outside, they look identical. But what you can’t see at first is the foundation underneath. But that foundation is quietly determining everything: the direction, the stability, and what the structure can actually hold over time.

And eventually, the foundation always tells the truth.

Not in the easy moments, but in the moments when something is threatened.

That’s what Augustine was getting at. The difference between the City of Man and the City of God is not the institution you can see; it’s the foundation you can’t.

Same Institutions, Different Foundations

What Augustine begins to show is that love is not just emotional, it’s architectural.

What you love most doesn’t just shape your feelings; it builds your world. It organizes your life. It determines what everything else is for.

And what begins in the heart eventually takes shape in structures, relationships, and systems. That means family, government, and even the church are not neutral spaces. They are being formed, constantly, by whatever sits at the center.

In the City of Man, where love is curved inward on the self, those institutions are still present, but they are subtly reoriented.

- Family becomes about identity, control, or legacy.
- Government becomes about power, security, or dominance.
- Church can become about performance, status, or validation.

The institutions themselves are not the problem. They are still good gifts, but they’ve been recruited into resting on the wrong foundation. That’s why in the City of God, those same institutions are not removed; rather, they are rebuilt from the inside out.

- Family becomes a place of stewardship and formation rather than possession.
- Government becomes a means of justice and restraint under God rather than ultimate hope.
- Church becomes a community of worship and witness centered not on itself, but on Christ.

Same materials. Same institutions. Different foundation.

What's It Really Built For?

This is what makes Augustine's insight so searching. Because from the outside, the two cities can look almost identical.

Both build families. Both establish order. Both gather in worship.

Underneath though, everything is being pulled in a different direction. In the City of Man, everything ultimately bends inward, toward the self. In the City of God, everything is ordered upward, toward God.

And once the foundation shifts, the institutions shift with it. Both cities are building toward what Augustine calls "peace", but they mean completely different things by it.

In the City of Man, peace is simply control... whatever preserves the self.

In the City of God, peace is something deeper... it is the right ordering of life under God, where everything is aligned according to His design.

Which means even your definition of the "good life" is being shaped by what sits at the center. A disordered love will redefine success in terms of comfort, power, or approval... and institutions will bend to serve those ends. But when love is rightly ordered, those same institutions begin to aim toward something higher, formation, faithfulness, and ultimately the glory of God.

What City Are You Building?

Which leads to a reframing of the question. The issue is not: *"Which institutions are good or bad?"*

Scripture has already answered that. They are all from God. They are all good. The deeper question is: *What foundation are they being built on?*

Because at some point, the framing goes up, the walls take shape, and from the outside, your life starts to look like something. Family, career, rhythms, and even church involvement can all look solid, even impressive. But eventually, the question isn't what you've built; it's what's been holding it up the whole time

After all, foundations don't stay hidden forever. Pressure reveals them. Loss exposes them. Time tells the truth.

And what looked successful can start to crack if it was built on the wrong center. The reality is, you are building something with your life right now. The question is not whether you are successful, but whether your success is resting on the love of self or the love of God.

The Score Takes Care of Itself

Projecting Success vs. Forming People

The legendary San Francisco 49ers coach Bill Walsh once told his team, “The score takes care of itself.”

At the time, it sounded almost backward. After all, isn't the point of football to win? But in his book of the same title, Walsh explained something deeper: if you focus on the scoreboard, you might win occasionally; but you won't become the kind of team that consistently does.

So he shifted the focus.

From outcomes to habits. From results to formation. From performance to becoming the kind of team that wins.

And over time, everything changed. The players changed. The culture changed. And eventually the scoreboard did too. And whether we realize it or not, the same thing is true of every room we lead.

Because every room has a scoreboard. Even if no one talks about it. There's always an unspoken question in the air: “What does success look like here?”

In some environments, success looks like having the right answers. In others, it looks like having your life together. In many places, it looks like being impressive, polished, or put-together.

And the answers to that question - whether stated or not - begins shaping people almost immediately in what they say, what they hide, what they pursue, and ultimately what they become.

Which means the real question isn't whether your Life Group is forming people. It's what kind of people it's forming.

What We're Really Addressing

In this series, we're exposing the definitions of success that quietly shape people's lives:

- Success as accumulation
- Success as control
- Success as approval
- Success as achievement

These aren't just ideas. They are drivers. They shape decisions, relationships, priorities, and ultimately, the direction of a person's life. And what Scripture does is not just critique those definitions. It replaces them.

Not by focusing on what you build, but on who you become. Which means Life Groups can't just be places where ideas are discussed. They must become places where lives are reoriented. Because we're not just leading conversations. We're helping shape people.

Learning to Listen Beneath the Surface

In a training room, a good coach doesn't just evaluate performance; they ask: *What are you aiming at? What are you trying to become? What's driving your decisions right now?*

Life Group leadership works the same way. When someone answers a question, they're often revealing more than they realize: *What they think success looks like. What they're afraid of losing. What they're trying to prove.*

In other words, they're revealing what's driving them. And if conversations stay at the surface, those deeper drivers remain untouched. That's why good leaders slow the moment down and ask:

- "What does success look like for you in that situation?"
- "What are you hoping that will give you?"
- "Have you seen that actually satisfy?"

These kinds of questions help people move from talking about Scripture to seeing how Scripture speaks into the direction of their lives.

Creating a Room Where People Don't Have to Perform

One of the quiet pressures people carry is the need to appear successful, even spiritually. The pressure to have the right answers. The pressure to say the right things. The pressure to look like they're growing.

But the gospel creates something different.

Because in Jesus, success is not something we achieve - it's something we receive and live out. That means Life Groups should be places where people don't have to pretend. People should be able to admit misalignment and acknowledge misplaced priorities.

Because authenticity grows when people realize: *"I don't have to prove I'm successful in this group."*

When the Gospel Reorders a Life

When Jesus speaks about life, He consistently reframes success. He said things like:

- *"What does it profit a man to gain the whole world...?"*
- *"The last will be first..."*
- *"Whoever loses his life will find it..."*

These aren't just ideas. Instead, they are invitations to a different way of living. That means real Life Group conversations will sometimes feel uncomfortable. Because people just may begin to realize that the ladder they're climbing in their career is leaning against the wrong wall. Or that the success they're pursuing isn't actually working and leading where they hoped.

And in those moments, leaders don't rush to fix. They gently bring people back to Jesus. Because only the gospel has the power to reorder what people are living for.

What This Means for Life Group Leaders

This all requires a different kind of awareness. After all, the goal here is *not* just: better discussion, more insight, and clearer answers.

The goal here is: Helping people see where their definition of success is leading them and then helping them realign their lives according to Scripture.

This will require the courage to ask deeper questions, the patience to listen carefully, and the wisdom to connect Scripture to real life. Because when that happens, something powerful begins to take place:

- The person chasing success begins to find rest.

- The person driven by approval begins to find freedom
- The person trying to control everything begins to surrender

Life Groups become more than places where Scripture is discussed. They become training rooms where people are being formed into the kind of life that actually lasts. And just like Bill Walsh discovered... when you focus on forming the right kind of people... the scoreboard takes care of itself.

A Sample Discussion Flow in the Training Room

1. Surface the Definition of Success

Before we move too quickly to application, we want to slow down and see what's actually driving the passage. Every story reveals a vision of success—what someone is chasing, building, or trusting to give their life meaning. Helping your group name that clearly is critical, because you can't redirect a life until you first understand what it's aimed at.

- *“What does success look like in this story?”*
- *“What is this person chasing or building?”*
- *“Where do you see that same pursuit in our world today?”*

2. Diagnose the Heart

Once the definition of success is on the table, begin to explore why it's so compelling. Every pursuit is rooted in a deeper desire—for security, approval, control, or significance. Good leaders help people connect the external pursuit to the internal longing, and gently expose where those pursuits are not delivering what they promise.

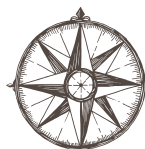
- *“Why do you think we're drawn to that version of success?”*
- *“What are we hoping it will give us?”*
- *“Where have you seen that fall short in real life?”*

3. Reframe Through the Gospel

This is where transformation happens. After exposing false or incomplete definitions of success, bring the conversation back to Jesus. He doesn't just critique our version of success—He replaces it with something better. Help your group see how the gospel redefines what truly matters, and invite them to take a concrete step toward aligning their lives with that vision this week.

- *“How does Jesus redefine success in this passage?”*
- *“What does a successful life look like according to Him?”*
- *“What would it look like to actually live that out this week?”*

If conversations stay at the level of ideas, people may think differently, but not necessarily live differently. But when people begin to see where their definition of success is leading them... and begin to realign their lives with Jesus... everything starts to change.



Life Group Guides

We want to provide the context and resources to help every person at The Heights take their next step as followers of Jesus, even if their first step is their next step. Consider these guides that will walk you through this series in personal as well as corporate study.



The Parable of the Rich Fool

“Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.”¹⁴ But he said to him, “Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?”¹⁵ And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully,¹⁷ and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’¹⁸ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.’¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’”²⁰ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Luke 12:13-21

Commentary

Luke 12:13–21 presents a man who appears, by every cultural standard, to be successful. His land produces abundantly. His problem is not scarcity, but surplus. And like many, he interprets this abundance as an opportunity to secure his future.

At first glance, his plan seems wise. He assesses his situation, develops a strategy, and executes it efficiently. Tear down smaller barns, build bigger ones, store more, and finally enjoy the life he has built. This is the logic of success as the world defines it: accumulate enough, secure enough, and eventually you can rest.

But Jesus tells this story to expose a deeper reality. The man is not just managing his resources—he is revealing his definition of success. Throughout the parable, his focus is entirely inward:

- “What shall I do?”
- “I will do this...”
- “I will store...”
- “I will say to my soul...”

God is absent. Others are absent. Eternity is absent. His life is full—but only of himself.

The issue is not that he is productive or even wealthy. The issue is that he believes success is found in what he can store, control, and secure for himself. His identity, security, and future are all tied to what he has built.

And then comes the interruption: “Fool! This night your soul is required of you...”

In a single moment, everything he defined as success is exposed as fragile. The wealth he trusted cannot extend his life. The future he planned cannot be guaranteed. The security he built cannot hold.

Jesus’ point is not subtle: It is possible to be successful in everything that seems to matter... and fail in the only thing that actually does.

The man's mistake was not that he planned for the future—it's that he planned for a future that did not include God. He stored up treasure for himself, but was not "rich toward God." That final phrase reframes everything. To be "rich toward God" is to define success differently:

- Not by what you accumulate, but by what you entrust
- Not by what you control, but by what you surrender
- Not by what you build for yourself, but by your alignment with God

The parable forces a question that sits underneath every life:

What are you building your life on—and will it last?

In the end, success is not measured by the size of your barns, but by the direction of your life. Because a life spent accumulating without aligning will always end the same way: Full of possessions...but empty before God.

Leader Helps

1. Help people see the subtlety of the problem

The rich fool is not immoral, reckless, or obviously sinful—he's successful. That's what makes the warning so powerful. Many people in your group may see themselves in his diligence, planning, and desire for security. Gently help them see that the danger is not success itself, but defining success without reference to God.

2. Listen for modern "bigger barns"

As people share, pay attention to what they are building or relying on for security:

- Career advancement
- Financial stability
- Family success
- Reputation or influence

Ask follow-up questions that connect the passage to real life: *"What feels like your 'bigger barn' right now?" "What are you trusting to give you peace about the future?"*

This helps move the conversation from abstract to personal.

3. Move from accumulation to alignment

The goal is not to make people feel guilty about success, but to redefine it. Help your group see that Jesus is not calling us to have less ambition—but to have a different aim.

- *"What would it look like to be 'rich toward God' in your current season?"*
- *"How would your decisions change if success was measured by alignment, not accumulation?"*

This is where the conversation shifts from conviction to transformation.

If you don't remember anything else: "You can build a full life and still miss what matters most."



Facilitator Guide: April 19

Luke 12:13-21

Session Big Idea

You can build a full life and still miss what matters most.

Icebreaker

Tell about a time when you achieved something you thought would feel really satisfying—but it didn't last like you expected. What was that experience like?

Observation

Good Bible study starts with what we see (observations), moves to what it means (interpretation), and ends with how we live (application).

As you read Luke 12:13–21 together, notice:

- What prompts Jesus to tell this parable?
- What warning does Jesus give before the story begins?
- What problem is the rich man trying to solve?
- How many times does he refer to himself (I, my)?
- What is his plan for the future?
- What does God say to him—and why?

Interpretation

This parable exposes a powerful truth: it's possible to succeed in ways the world celebrates and still fail in what matters most.

- What definition of success is driving the rich man's decisions?
- Why does his plan seem reasonable—or even wise—at first?
- What is missing from his thinking and planning?
- Why does God call him a “fool”?
- What does it mean to be “rich toward God”?

Help your group see: the issue is not wealth—it's what he trusts and builds his life on.

Application

This is where the conversation moves from understanding to reorientation.

- Where are you most tempted to define success by accumulation, security, or control?
- What feels like your “bigger barns” right now?
- What are you trusting to give you peace about the future?
- Have you experienced something you thought would satisfy—but didn't?
- What would it look like for you to be “rich toward God” in this season?

Leader Tip: Gently press toward honesty. This week is about exposing what's underneath the surface.

Faith at Home

Faith Talk: At dinner or during the week, At dinner or during the week, talk about what it means to have “enough.” Ask:

- “Why did the rich man think more would make him happy?”
- “What are some things people think will make life better—but don't last?”
- “What do you think it means to be rich toward God?”

Faith Walk: As a family, choose one simple way to practice generosity this week:

- Give something away
- Serve someone in need
- Share time or resources intentionally

End by thanking God that our security is not found in what we have, but in Him.



Life Group Guide: April 26

Incomplete Success

Week 2

Solomon Turns from the LORD

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, ² from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. ³ He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. ⁴ For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. ⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶ So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. ⁷ Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. ⁸ And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.

1 Kings 11:1-11

Commentary

1 Kings 11 presents one of the most sobering moments in all of Scripture—not because Solomon lacked success, but because he had so much of it. By every visible measure, Solomon was the definition of success:

Unmatched wisdom. Unprecedented wealth. International influence. Peace and prosperity

His kingdom was everything Israel had hoped for. And yet, this passage reveals a deeper truth: You can achieve everything outwardly and still drift inwardly.

The text begins with a subtle but significant phrase: “Solomon loved many foreign women...”

This is not just about relationships—it’s about misaligned love. Over time, what Solomon loved began to shape what he tolerated... what he tolerated began to shape what he embraced... and what he embraced ultimately reshaped his heart.

The warning God had given was clear: these relationships would “turn away your heart.” And that is exactly what happens. Not all at once. Not in a moment of rebellion. But slowly.

“His heart was not wholly true to the Lord...”

That phrase is the key to the entire passage. Solomon does not abandon God completely—he simply stops being fully devoted. And that is where incomplete success begins. He continues to lead, build, and function—but his heart is divided. And eventually, what begins as internal drift becomes external compromise:

- He follows other gods
- He builds places of worship for them
- He leads others into the same misalignment

The man who once built the temple for God is now building altars for idols. This is the danger the passage exposes: Success that is not anchored in God will eventually pull your heart away from Him. Solomon didn't fail because he lacked wisdom. He failed because he stopped aligning his life with what he knew was true. His life raises a sobering question: What happens when your success gives you the freedom to follow your desires instead of God?

Because success doesn't just reveal your character—it often amplifies it.

In the end, Solomon's story reminds us:

- External success cannot sustain internal faithfulness
- A divided heart will always lead to a divided life
- And the greatest threat is not failure—but slow drift

True success is not what you build, achieve, or accumulate. It is a heart that remains fully aligned with God over time.

Leader Helps

1. Help people feel the tension of Solomon's success

Solomon isn't an obvious warning story—he's someone people admire. That's what makes this so powerful. Help your group wrestle with this reality: "How could someone so wise drift this far?" This opens the door for self-reflection instead of distance.

2. Expose the drift, not just the decision

Most people won't relate to Solomon's extreme actions—but they will relate to slow drift. Listen for:

- Compromise that feels small
- Priorities that have subtly shifted
- Affections that are no longer centered on God

Ask: *"Where have you seen drift happen gradually in your own life?" "What have you started to tolerate that you once would have resisted?"*

3. Connect success to vulnerability

This passage isn't just about failure—it's about the danger of success. "How might your current success (career, family, influence, stability) actually be creating vulnerability in your walk with God?" This helps people see that success doesn't remove risk—it often increases it.

If you don't remember anything else: "Success that isn't anchored in God will eventually drift away from Him."



Facilitator Guide: April 26

1 Kings 11:1-11

Session Big Idea

You can succeed outwardly and still drift inwardly.

Icebreaker

Think about someone who is widely seen as successful (celebrity, leader, athlete, etc.) but whose life didn't end the way people expected. What went wrong?

Observation

Good Bible study starts with what we see (observations), moves to what it means (interpretation), and ends with how we live (application).

As you read 1 Kings 11:1–11 together, notice:

- What does the passage say Solomon loved?
- What warning had God already given about these relationships?
- What happens to Solomon's heart over time?
- What words or phrases describe his spiritual condition?
- What actions follow the shift in his heart?
- How does this compare to David's heart?

Interpretation

Solomon's life exposes a different kind of failure—not sudden collapse, but slow drift.

- Why is Solomon's story so surprising given his wisdom and success?
- What role do his loves and relationships play in his spiritual decline?
- What does it mean that his heart was “not wholly true” to the Lord?
- Why is partial devotion still dangerous?
- How does inward drift eventually lead to outward compromise?

Help your group see: the issue is not lack of knowledge—but misaligned love and divided devotion.

Application

This is where the conversation moves from observation to honest reflection.

- Where are you most tempted toward divided devotion in your life right now?
- What are you currently “loving” that could be pulling your heart away from God?
- Have you experienced drift that happened gradually, not suddenly? What did that look like?
- How might your current success (career, family, stability, influence) actually create vulnerability?
- What would it look like for your heart to be “wholly true” to the Lord in this season?

Leader Tip: This week is about drift, not dramatic failure. Help people see the small shifts.

Faith at Home

Faith Talk: Talk about what it means to stay close to God over time. Ask:

- “Why do you think Solomon drifted even though he was so wise?”
- “What are things that can slowly pull our hearts away from God?”
- “What helps us stay close to God?”

Faith Walk: As a family, choose one simple practice this week to stay aligned with God:

- Pray together daily
- Read a short Scripture together
- Limit or remove one distraction

End by asking God to keep your hearts fully devoted to Him.

Drift Diagnostic

Is Your Heart Still Fully Aligned with God?

Drift doesn't feel dramatic—but it always leads somewhere. Solomon didn't turn from God in a moment; he drifted over time. "His heart was not wholly true to the Lord..." (1 Kings 11:4) Drift is subtle. Quiet. Easy to justify. The question is not: "Have I walked away?" It's: "Am I slowly drifting?" Take a moment to reflect honestly:

1. Notice the Direction

Over the last season of your life, would you say you are:

- Growing closer to God
- Staying about the same
- Slowly drifting away

2. Spot the Subtle Shifts

Drift rarely starts with big decisions—it starts with small compromises. Have you noticed any of these?

- Less consistent time with God
- Prayer feels routine or absent
- Scripture feels optional
- Conviction feels weaker
- Sin feels easier to justify
- Busyness is crowding out what matters most

Which one quietly crept in?

3. Examine Your Loves

Solomon's drift began with what he loved.

- What captures your attention most right now?
- What do you think about when your mind is unoccupied?
- What are you most excited about—or most afraid of losing?

What might be competing for your heart?

4. Evaluate Your Success

Success often creates space for drift.

- Where is your life going well right now?
- Has that success decreased your dependence on God?
- Are you trusting yourself more than you used to?

Where might success be creating vulnerability?

5. Realign Your Heart

Drift is corrected the same way it begins—through small steps. Choose one intentional step this week:

- Set aside consistent time with God
- Confess something you've been ignoring
- Remove a distraction that is pulling you away
- Re-engage in community or accountability

Write your step: _____



The Request of James and John

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” 36 And he said to them, “What do you want me to do for you?” 37 And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” 38 Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” 39 And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.” 41 And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. 42 And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mark 10:35-45

Commentary

Mark 10:35–45 reveals one of the most honest and exposing moments in the disciples’ journey with Jesus. James and John come to Him with a bold request: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” At its core, this is not just a question about position—it is a window into how they define success.

They have seen Jesus’ power, heard His teaching, and begun to grasp that He is the Messiah. And like many in their culture, they assume that His kingdom will operate according to familiar categories of power, status, and recognition. To sit at His right and left is to occupy the highest places of honor. It is success as proximity to greatness, visibility, and influence.

What makes this moment so striking is not just their request, but its timing. Jesus has just predicted His suffering and death. While He is moving toward the cross, they are thinking about thrones. This contrast exposes how deeply ingrained their definition of success still is.

Jesus’ response is both corrective and revealing. He tells them, “You do not know what you are asking,” and then reframes the conversation with two images: the cup and the baptism. Both point to suffering, sacrifice, and identification with His mission. In essence, Jesus is saying: the path to glory is not what you think. It is not upward mobility—it is downward surrender.

James and John confidently respond, “We are able,” not yet understanding that the road they are asking to walk is one marked by suffering, not status. And while Jesus affirms that they will indeed share in His suffering, He makes clear that positions of honor are not theirs to secure or control. The tension in the passage escalates when the other disciples hear about the request. They become indignant—not because they reject the pursuit of greatness, but

because they are competing for it as well. The entire group is operating from the same definition of success, and it is creating comparison, rivalry, and frustration.

Jesus gathers them together and delivers one of the clearest redefinitions of success in all of Scripture: “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them... But it shall not be so among you.”

With that statement, Jesus draws a sharp line between the way the world defines success and the way His kingdom does. In the world, greatness is measured by authority, control, and being served. In His kingdom, it is measured by humility, service, and self-giving love. “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant... whoever would be first must be slave of all.”

This is not a small adjustment—it is a complete inversion.

Success is no longer about climbing higher. It is about lowering yourself for the sake of others. Jesus then anchors this teaching in His own life: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

This is the ultimate redefinition of success. The most successful life ever lived is not marked by power or recognition, but by sacrifice and surrender. Jesus does not merely teach this—He embodies it. The cross is not a detour from success; it is the fulfillment of it. This passage exposes a question that sits beneath every ambition: Is your vision of success shaped by the world... or by Jesus?

Because ambition itself is not the problem. The problem is what ambition is aimed at. When ambition is aimed at self, it leads to comparison, striving, and emptiness. But when ambition is reoriented toward serving others and aligning with God’s purposes, it becomes something beautiful.

True success is not found in being above others. It is found in giving your life for others, just like Jesus did.

Leader Helps

1. Normalize the desire for greatness

Don’t immediately shut down ambition—Jesus doesn’t. Instead, He redirects it. “What does greatness or success look like to you right now?” This helps people engage honestly instead of giving “church answers.”

2. Expose comparison and competition

The disciples’ frustration reveals something deeper—competition for status. Listen for:

- Comparison (“I should be further along...”)
- Recognition (“I just want to be seen...”)
- Control or influence

Ask: “Where do you feel the pull to be recognized or validated?”

3. Reframe ambition, don’t remove it

The goal is not less ambition—it’s redeemed ambition. “What would it look like to pursue greatness through serving instead of being seen?” Help people see that Jesus offers a better vision of success—not just a different one

If you don’t remember anything else: “In God’s kingdom, success isn’t climbing higher; it’s laying your life down..”



May 3
Mark 10:35-45

Session Big Idea

In God's kingdom, success isn't climbing higher—it's laying your life down.

Icebreaker

When you think about success, what comes to mind first—achievement, recognition, influence, or something else? Why do you think that is?

Observation

Good Bible study starts with what we see (observations), moves to what it means (interpretation), and ends with how we live (application). As you read Mark 10:35–45 together, notice:

- What do James and John ask Jesus for?
- How does Jesus respond to their request?
- What do the “cup” and “baptism” represent?
- How do the other disciples react—and why?
- How does Jesus describe how rulers typically lead?
- What contrast does He make about leadership in His kingdom?
- What example does Jesus give from His own life?

Interpretation

This passage exposes how easy it is to define success the way the world does—even when following Jesus.

- What does James and John's request reveal about their definition of success?
- Why does their request seem reasonable from a worldly perspective?
- Why does Jesus say, “You do not know what you are asking”?
- What does Jesus teach about greatness and being “first”?
- How does Jesus redefine success in this passage?

Help your group see: the issue is not ambition—but what ambition is aimed at.

Application

This is where the conversation moves from understanding to reorientation.

- Where do you feel the pull to be recognized, elevated, or seen?
- In what areas of your life are you trying to “move up” or prove yourself?
- How do you typically respond when others get recognition instead of you?
- What would it look like to pursue greatness through serving this week?
- Who is one person you can intentionally serve in a meaningful way?

Leader Tip: Gently surface comparison, recognition, and hidden ambition.

Faith at Home

Faith Talk: Talk about what it means to be great in God's eyes. Ask:

- “Why did the disciples think success meant being important?”
- “What does Jesus say makes someone truly great?”
- “Why do you think serving others is hard sometimes?”

Faith Walk: As a family, choose one intentional act of service this week:

- Help someone without being asked
- Serve someone who can't repay you
- Do something kind without telling anyone

End by thanking Jesus for showing us what real greatness looks like.

Ambition: Two Competing Paths

Worldly Ambition vs. Kingdom Ambition (Mark 10:35–45)

Ambition is not the problem—it's where that ambition is aimed. In Mark 10, Jesus doesn't dismiss the desire for greatness; He redefines it. The world offers one vision of success built on status, recognition, and control, while Jesus presents a radically different path marked by humility, service, and surrender. This chart contrasts those two paths and helps us ask an honest question: Which version of success is shaping my life?

Category	Worldly Ambition	Kingdom Ambition	Key Scripture	Diagnostic Question
Goal	Be great, be seen, be recognized	Serve others and honor God	Mark 10:43	What am I ultimately trying to become?
Direction	Upward (climb higher)	Downward (lower yourself)	Philippians 2:3–8	Am I trying to rise above others or serve them?
Identity	Built on performance and status	Rooted in being known by Christ	Luke 10:20	Do I need recognition to feel valuable?
Power	Control, authority, influence over others	Stewardship, humility, influence for others	Mark 10:42	How do I use influence when I have it?
Motivation	Approval, comparison, achievement	Love, obedience, faithfulness	Galatians 1:10	Who am I trying to please?
Response to Others	Compete, compare, resent	Celebrate, serve, lift up	Romans 12:10	Do others' success threaten me or move me?
View of Suffering	Avoid at all costs	Embrace if it aligns with Christ	Mark 10:38	Do I see sacrifice as loss or purpose?
Pace of Life	Hurry, strive, prove	Faithful, steady, surrendered	Psalms 37:7	Am I striving or trusting?
Result	Exhaustion, insecurity, emptiness	Joy, freedom, lasting impact	John 12:25	Where is this path actually leading me?
Ultimate Picture	Sitting on the throne	Carrying the cross	Mark 10:45	Am I trying to be served or to serve?



Life Group Guide: May 10

Misplaced Success

Week 4

The Woman at the Well

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John 2 (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), 3 he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. 4 And he had to pass through Samaria. 5 So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) 10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." 11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." 13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. [b] The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." 15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." 17 The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. 20 Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. 24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

John 4:1-26

Commentary

John 4:1–26 records one of the most personal encounters in the Gospels as Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. The passage begins with a note about growing tension between Jesus and the Pharisees. News has spread that Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John the Baptist, which prompts Him to leave Judea and return to Galilee. On the journey north, John tells us that Jesus "had to pass through Samaria." While this was the most direct route geographically, many Jews intentionally avoided Samaritan territory because of deep ethnic and religious hostility between the two groups. By stating that Jesus "had to" go through Samaria, John signals that something more than geography is at work—this encounter is part of the Father's mission.

Jesus arrives at the town of Sychar near the field associated with Jacob and Joseph, a place rich in Old Testament history. Jacob's well was a significant landmark tied to Israel's patriarchal past. John also includes a striking detail: Jesus, "wearied as he was from his journey," sits down by the well around the sixth hour, likely noon. The moment reveals both the humanity of Jesus and the setting for the conversation that follows. The Son of God experiences genuine physical fatigue and thirst.

A Samaritan woman arrives to draw water, and Jesus initiates the conversation with a simple request: “Give me a drink.” In the cultural context, this request is unexpected for several reasons. Jewish men rarely spoke publicly with women who were not relatives, and Jews generally avoided contact with Samaritans because of long-standing religious and ethnic divisions. The woman immediately recognizes the social barrier and asks how a Jewish man could request a drink from her. The narrator clarifies the tension by noting that Jews had no dealings with Samaritans.

Jesus responds by redirecting the conversation from physical water to spiritual reality. He tells her that if she understood “the gift of God” and recognized who was speaking to her, she would ask Him for living water. The phrase “living water” naturally refers to flowing water such as a spring or stream, but Jesus uses the term metaphorically to point to the life that He alone provides. The woman initially interprets His words literally and questions how He could provide such water without a bucket. She also invokes the authority of Jacob, the patriarch associated with the well, asking whether Jesus claims to be greater than him.

Jesus then clarifies the difference between ordinary water and the life He offers. Water from the well satisfies temporarily, but thirst inevitably returns. The water Jesus gives, however, becomes “a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” The image suggests an internal, continual source of life provided by God. The promise anticipates the later New Testament teaching about the Holy Spirit, who brings new life and ongoing spiritual renewal to those who believe.

The woman’s response reveals that she still understands Jesus primarily in practical terms. She asks for this water so she will no longer need to return daily to the well. At this point, Jesus gently exposes the deeper thirst of her life by asking her to call her husband. Her answer—“I have no husband”—is technically true, but Jesus reveals that He knows her entire story. She has had five husbands, and the man she currently lives with is not her husband. This revelation does not function as condemnation but as exposure. Jesus brings the hidden areas of her life into the open, demonstrating that He understands her situation completely.

Realizing that Jesus possesses supernatural knowledge, the woman recognizes Him as a prophet and shifts the conversation toward a longstanding religious dispute between Jews and Samaritans. Samaritans believed that Mount Gerizim was the proper place of worship, while Jews insisted that the temple in Jerusalem held that role. Her question may reflect genuine curiosity, but it may also serve as an attempt to redirect the conversation away from the personal exposure she has just experienced.

Jesus responds by moving the discussion beyond geographical debate. He declares that a new era of worship is coming in which the location of worship will no longer define true devotion. “The hour is coming,” He says, when people will worship the Father neither on Mount Gerizim nor in Jerusalem. Instead, true worshipers will worship “in spirit and truth.” This phrase emphasizes that authentic worship flows from a transformed heart aligned with God’s revelation. Because God is spirit, worship cannot be confined to a physical location but must arise from a genuine relationship with Him.

The conversation culminates with the woman’s expression of hope in the coming Messiah, who she believes will ultimately clarify all things. Jesus responds with a direct self-revelation: “I who speak to you am he.” This statement marks one of the clearest declarations of Jesus’ identity in the Gospel of John. In a remarkable twist, the Messiah reveals Himself not to a religious leader or influential figure, but to a Samaritan woman with a complicated past.

This encounter reveals several important themes in Jesus’ ministry. First, it demonstrates that Jesus crosses social, ethnic, and moral boundaries to reach people. Second, it shows that Jesus addresses the deeper thirst beneath

surface needs—the longing for life, truth, and restoration that cannot be satisfied by temporary solutions. Finally, the passage reveals that the life Jesus offers is personal and transformative. The woman arrives at the well seeking ordinary water but encounters the One who offers eternal life.

Leader Helps

1. Help people see the deeper thirst, not just the behavior

The woman's story is not primarily about her past relationships—it's about what she was searching for through them. Jesus isn't just addressing sin; He's exposing misplaced pursuit. Ask: "What do you think she was hoping those relationships would give her?" This helps move the conversation from surface behavior → deeper longing.

2. Connect her story to modern definitions of success

Most people aren't drawing water at a well—but everyone is returning to something, hoping it will satisfy. Listen for:

- Relationships
- Career success
- Approval
- Comfort or escape

Ask: "Where do you find yourself going back again and again, hoping it will finally be enough?" This makes the passage immediately personal.

3. Highlight Jesus' approach: exposure + invitation

Jesus both reveals her story and offers something better. He doesn't shame her—but He also doesn't leave her where she is. "Why do you think Jesus brings up her past before offering living water?"

Help your group see:

- Jesus exposes false sources of success
- So He can replace them with something that actually satisfies

If you don't remember anything else: "If you look to anything but Jesus for fulfillment, success will always leave you thirsty."



May 10
John 4:1-26

Session Big Idea

If you look to anything but Jesus for fulfillment, success will always leave you thirsty.

Icebreaker

What's something you were really excited about getting or achieving, but once you had it, it didn't satisfy like you expected?

Observation

Good Bible study starts with what we see (observations), moves to what it means (interpretation), and ends with how we live (application). As you read John 4:1-26 together, notice:

- Where does Jesus meet the Samaritan woman?
- What time of day is it when the encounter happens?
- What surprising request does Jesus make of her?
- How does the woman respond to Jesus' offer of "living water"?
- What personal truth about her life does Jesus reveal? How does Jesus describe the kind of worship the Father seeks?

Interpretation

Jesus begins the conversation by asking for water, but the discussion quickly moves to something deeper.

- Why is it surprising that Jesus speaks to this Samaritan woman?
- What does Jesus mean when He offers living water?
- Why does Jesus bring up the woman's personal life in the middle of the conversation?
- What does Jesus teach about worshiping "in spirit and truth"?

Application

This is where the conversation moves from understanding to honest reflection.

- Where do you find yourself going back again and again, hoping it will finally satisfy?
- What are you currently looking to for fulfillment, identity, or security?
- Have you experienced something that you thought would satisfy—but didn't?
- Why do you think we keep returning to things that don't ultimately work?
- What would it look like to receive the "living water" Jesus offers in your current season?

Leader Tip: This week is about exposing false sources of fulfillment. Create space for honesty.

Faith at Home

Faith Talk: Talk about what it means to be truly satisfied. Ask:

- "Why did the woman keep going back to the well?"
- "What are some things people think will make them happy—but don't last?"
- "What does Jesus say actually satisfies us?"

Faith Walk: As a family, choose one way to shift your focus toward Jesus this week:

- Spend intentional time in prayer
- Read Scripture together
- Replace one habit of distraction with time with God

End by thanking Jesus that He offers something that truly satisfies.

Thirst Diagnostic

Where Are You Looking for Fulfillment?

Jesus says, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again...” (John 4:13) We all have “wells” we return to—places we look to for satisfaction, identity, and security. The question is not if you’re thirsty... it’s where you go when you are. In your Life Group, take a moment to reflect honestly:

1. Identify Your Wells

Where do you most often look for fulfillment, especially when you feel stressed, empty, or restless?

- Achievement / success
- Relationships / approval
- Comfort / escape (entertainment, distraction, food, etc.)
- Control / planning / security
- Recognition / being seen
- Something else: _____

Which one do you return to most quickly?

2. Examine the Pattern

Think about your chosen “well”:

- When do you tend to run to this?
- What are you hoping it will give you?
- How long does the satisfaction actually last?

Be honest: does it truly satisfy—or just temporarily distract?

3. Expose the Deeper Thirst

Every surface pursuit is connected to a deeper desire: to be known, to be secure, to be loved, to matter, or to have peace. What deeper need are you hoping this “well” will meet?

4. Compare It to Living Water

Jesus offers something different—not temporary relief, but lasting fulfillment.

- How is what Jesus offers different from what you’ve been pursuing?
- What would it look like to turn to Him instead this week?

What is one practical way you can go to Jesus first instead of your usual “well”?

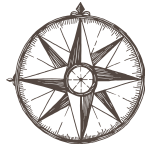
5. Take a Step

Choose one small, intentional shift this week:

- Pause and pray before turning to your usual habit
- Spend time in Scripture when you feel restless
- Talk honestly with God about what you’re really seeking
- Replace one “go-to” habit with time with Him

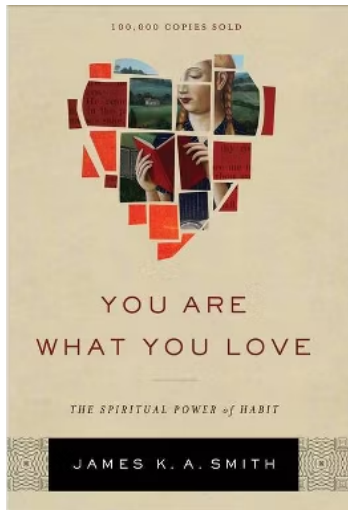
Write your step: _____

Reflect: If I keep going where I’ve been going... where will it lead me?”



Resources for Further Study

These resources will help you continue rethinking success through the lens of the gospel. As you engage them, reflect on what is shaping your life and how Scripture is calling you to live differently—because success is not just about what you achieve, but who you are becoming and what your life is aligned with.



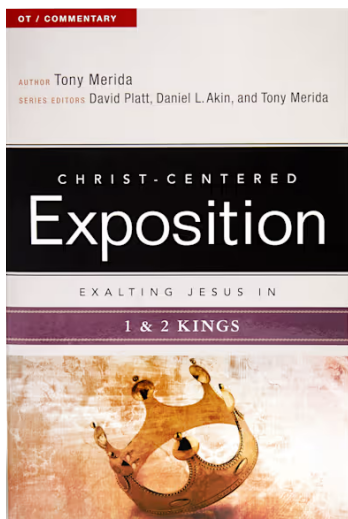
You Are What You Love

James KA Smith

What if the biggest factor shaping your life isn't what you believe... but what you love?

In *You Are What You Love*, James K.A. Smith argues that we are not primarily “thinking things,” but “loving things.” Our lives are shaped less by ideas and more by habits—what he calls liturgies—the everyday rhythms that train our hearts to desire certain things. From shopping malls to social media to Sunday worship, we are constantly being formed, often without realizing it.

The real question isn't just, “What do I think?” It's, “What is shaping what I want? This book will challenge you to see how your habits are forming your definition of success—and invite you to intentionally reorder your loves around the kingdom of God.



Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary Series

Various Authors

What if true success in studying Scripture isn't just understanding the text—but seeing how it points to Jesus and reshapes your life?

The Christ-Centered Exposition series helps you do exactly that. Each volume walks through Scripture with clarity and depth, consistently showing how every passage fits into the bigger story of the gospel. More than just explaining what the text says, it helps you see how it redefines what really matters.

As you engage these resources, you'll begin to notice something powerful: Scripture doesn't just inform your thinking—it realigns your life.

Because in the end, success isn't measured by how much you know... it's measured by how closely your life reflects Christ.

