

Proverbs 3 (1-12) – The Pattern of Success

Some time ago, we gave a message from Psalm 20 entitled “Praying for Success”; today, we will look at the pattern of success. This passage gives us a framework for godly wisdom and success, but we need to be careful, because it can be easy to focus on the blessings first. And a proverb is not about a promise, it is about a practice. This is not about entitlement, it is about encouragement. This is about a pattern of life, about developing clarity and confidence in our Christian walk. We need it, because in our development as a disciple, we can find ourselves:

- Angry & Anxious
 - It’s not working / I can’t make it work
- Clouded & Confused
 - I’m not sure of the next step / I’m not sure of my direction at all
- Defeated & Discouraged
 - I just keep losing / I just can’t win
- Lazy & Lonely
 - I don’t feel like it / I don’t have any help
- Selfish & Sinful
 - I must have this / I must do this
- Unmotivated & Unsure
 - I have no reason to try / I’m not sure it’s worth it

Why do we get off track? The problem is a reciprocal cycle:

- Losing focus can lead to failure and frustration
- Failure and frustration can lead to losing focus

The sequence can change, but the problem is the same:

- We lose focus, we have failures, and we get frustrated
- We lose focus, we get frustrated, and we have failures
- We have failures, we get frustrated, and we lose focus
- We have failures, we lose focus, and we get frustrated
- We get frustrated, we have failures, and we lose focus
- We get frustrated, we lose focus, and we have failures

How do we get back on track? The sequence can change, but the solution is the same:

- The key is to develop and maintain our focus, so that when we get frustrated, and when we have failures, we can have clarity and confidence in our direction, and find faithfulness and fruitfulness, even in the midst of failures and frustrations

How can we get focused and keep our focus? Today we will look at six fundamental principles that can help us regain and maintain our focus, so that we may have confidence in our Christian walk, and wisdom for the way. It is important to note that the blessings which are the result of applying these instructions happen within the context of a faithful Christian life. This is not about entitlement, it is about encouragement. It is a matter of discipline. When we lose our devotion to discipline, we lose our focus, and so we miss out on these blessings. Yes God will lift burdens in the time of crisis, but He will give blessings in the time of consistency.

Vs.1-2 – the Principle of **Connection** – This is about a lifestyle for a lifetime. The heart refers to the core of our spiritual life, including the mind, will, and emotions, i.e., to keep (guard) something with our heart means we are fully engaged. If you fully engage yourself with the Word of God, it will build both quantity and quality into your life. This it isn't a recipe for instant results, but it means that if you are consistent in this area then the quantity of your life will have quality (it will be fulfilling). We often deceive ourselves in this area, and we may be reading the Word but not relishing it, we may know the verses but they have no value to us. We are not fully engaged, we are not keeping the Word with our mind, will, and emotions. There is a difference between knowing the Bible, cheerleading for the Bible, and actually being shaped by the Bible (Ezra 7:9-10). I am amazed by the apathy people have towards God's Word. Friends, apathy leads to atrophy. A quality connection brings a quality life.

Vs.3-4 – the Principle of **Character** – Exodus 34:6 – God was making the covenant with Moses. Steadfast love and faithfulness (“mercy and truth”) is a declaration of God's character. God wants His children to reflect His character. Covenants are about a relationship. This is about being true to God (honest, confessing, faithful) and trustworthy to people. Bind them around your neck – outward lifestyle (discipline). Write them on the tablet of your heart – inward lifestyle (devotion). If you are true to God and trustworthy to people, you will develop a reputation for wisdom and reciprocal results. Other people will want to be involved in the things you are involved in; your investments will pay off. The right character brings the right results.

Vs.5-6 – the Principle of **Commitment** – Proverbs 4:23 – this is about obedience and submission. This is part of what Jesus taught us to pray, “Hallowed be thy name”. The object of our confidence is God; our trust is in His way. Again, with our core, our essence, our mind, will, and emotions. This is total commitment, and it will bring us the confidence we need without the anxiety we fear. Our confidence is not in ourselves, we do not trust our own intuitions or worldly wisdom if it is against God's will and God's way (and we will know what God's will and way is if we have been doing vs.1-4). We are to be submissive to God's declared will in our decisions and as a lifestyle. If you are truly submitted to God, then you can count on God to guide you to your goal. In other words, you will be driven to God's desires for you. The right driver will bring you to the right place at the right time.

Vs.7-8 – the Principle of **Cultivation** – if we will fear the Lord and turn away from evil, then we will not be acting wise in our own eyes. It is pride in our past, our position, our possessions, or our potential that keeps us from keeping the fear of God before our eyes and it makes us think that we can get away with rebellion and wickedness. It eventually brings destruction: James 1:14-15 – progression – enticed (own desire), ensnared (lured, dragged away), enslaved (gives birth to sin), endorsed (it brings forth death) – we are lured away, then caught up, we do the thing, and then we die for it (and willingly). The world feeds it, the devil enflames it, the flesh indulges it. If you dwell on a thought the thought dwells in you. Ironically, the wisest man who ever lived, the man who wrote these very proverbs we are studying today, was a role model in a negative way. Solomon's preoccupation with so many women is what pulled him away from God (1 Kings 11:1-3). If the wisest man who ever lived can be pulled away why do we think we know better? Just because we can teach wise things doesn't mean we automatically do them ourselves. If, instead of conceit, we will develop and maintain humility and holiness, it will foster physical health and emotional well-being. The right seeds bring the right needs.

Vs.9-10 – the Principle of **Consistency** – the firstfruits were the portion which represented the whole, honoring God as the source of all material blessing. This is about giving God your best. Certainly this means more than money, but it doesn't mean less than that. This is about honoring God in every facet of life. This is about faithfulness, not a formula for prosperity regardless of our heart. We have to stay consistent even when things don't look so good (Habakkuk 3:17-18). Too many people have a "pragmatic yardstick". If they are doing well physically, socially, financially, according to their own standards, then they assume this means they are doing right in their relationship with God. It can be legalistic, and lead to license. In other words, I tithe, and my finances are good, so I must be doing the right thing, regardless of whether or not I am really following God with my heart. They are following their formula and it's working for them, but going through the motions is not godly consistency. True wisdom does what's right because it is right, even when it doesn't seem to work right. If we will stay consistent, then God will consistently cause us to prosper. The right trend will bring the right end.

Vs.11-12 – the Principle of **Conviction** – Hebrews 12:5-11 – training – children don't naturally take correction very well, do they? They say no, they cry, they throw a fit, they may do harm to themselves, and if they aren't trained to learn about correction, they will grow up without learning one of life's most important lessons. Some learn faster and some learn better than others, but they all start by struggling against correction. Christians can be the same way. When Christians won't heed God's warnings, and they allow adversity to make them grumbly hateful instead of humbly grateful, they don't grow up either. This is about being convinced that God knows what He is doing in developing godliness in our lives, and allowing God to bring conviction of sin into our lives by His Word, or through His people. Unfortunately, this is where we want to revert to childhood instead of growing up to maturity, to be able to mentor others, and to minister to people. When it gets intense we tend to indulge.

People do whatever it takes to avoid or crowd out God's voice of conviction and correction. If you keep struggling against God, it only gets worse. Then you will start resenting God and loathing Him instead of loving Him. Instead of seeing yourself as a son in whom He delights, you'll just wonder why God is punishing you. You'll think God isn't fair. You'll treat others as you think God treats you. The truth is that you might just be punishing yourself. If you do not discipline yourself, God will discipline you. Conviction isn't only when it is convenient; it is proven to be real when it isn't convenient. If we will allow the conviction of sin, it will bring true conviction for our lives. If we accept conviction and correction from Him, then we can be corrected correctly and we can have strong convictions for and about Him. It is the process by which we see progress. Conviction and correction is how God molds our morals and shapes our spirituality. It is often painful but it produces results in those who don't rebel. If we repent, we move forward, and it results in our having clarity and confidence because we know that God loves us and is doing what is best for us. We will glorify Him even when it seems like we have every reason to be dissatisfied. That will truly shine the light of Christ through us, when we can say, not my will but thy will be done. The right conviction brings the right conception, and that means clarity and confidence.

By focusing on these six principles, when we do get frustrated, and when we do have failures, we can still have clarity and confidence, and find faithfulness and fruitfulness, even in the midst of failures and frustrations, to the glory of God. That is the pattern of success.