

God's Formula for Success • Proverbs 3:5–6

Few things in life are more precious to a man than the success of his sons. A loving father will suffer pain, lose his fortune and even sacrifice his life for the children whom he dearly loves.

So it is not hard to imagine an ancient Jewish father sitting with quill and parchment to write the words of Proverbs 3:

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.

Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.

Of all the lessons learned in a lifetime by this father, which is the most important of all if one is to truly find success in the sight of God and man? The answer is found in the next two verses: “Trust in the LORD with all you heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

To the father who wrote this formula for success, these were experienced words from his heart. But, through the Holy Spirit who guided him, they became inspired words from God.

God's formula for success is found in two parts. The first is to trust God all the way. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

God calls us to radical reliance. This is a command that runs contrary to the way most of us are trained to think and respond. Normally, we are told to develop self-dependence, to rely heavily on “gut feelings” or instinct.

I think it must be particularly difficult for someone who is a pilot to learn how to fly by

instruments rather than by instincts. When you feel like you are flying upside down and the instruments say you are right side up, you have to have a lot of trust in those instruments not to flip your aircraft over. There's no halfway. When visibility is zero, you have to fly by instinct or instrument. And which one you decide to trust will determine success or failure.

God says we have the same choice for flying through life. We can rely on our own insights or trust in him with all of our heart.

It's really quite a clear-cut choice. Our instincts tell us to be out for ourselves; God says to live for others. Our instincts say we'll get away with sin; God says we're accountable. Our instincts warn us not to go overboard on this religion stuff; God tells us to live all-out for him alone.

It takes a conscious decision and commitment to live this way! You begin every day telling God that he's the boss, not you! Every decision is under his authority and you know it. Prayer for his guidance and will is routine. It is anything but a matter of duty and drudgery — you are absolutely wholehearted about trusting God for absolutely everything.

God gives to us a multitude of opportunities

to trust him in life. You see, God wants us to succeed. A lot of people really don't believe that. We have some incorrect assumption that God wants us to fail and we want ourselves to succeed when it's really

the other way around. God is the one who wants us to succeed and our bent is toward failure. So God gives us all kinds of opportunities to trust him, and in trusting him we can then find success.

***Our instincts tell us to be out for ourselves; God says to live for others.
Our instincts say we'll get away with sin; God says we're accountable.
Our instincts warn us not to go overboard on this religion stuff; God tells us to live all-out for him alone.***

For our purposes here, let's put these opportunities for trust into two categories. One is "trauma trust" and the other is "time trust". Let me see if I can explain the difference.

"Trauma trust" is when everything gets kicked out from under you and there is basically no other option besides trusting God. Examples of this would be bankruptcy, severe illness, family break-up, arrest, depression, the death of a loved one, facing difficult decisions, even a combination of several or all of these traumas.

The Hebrew word for "trust" means "lying helplessly face down." For some people it takes the great traumas of life to learn what it means to "lie helplessly face down" before God and rely on him instead of oneself.

Let me say that this is the way a lot of people learn to trust God, but it sure is the hard way to go! Don't rebel or resent! Take even trauma as an opportunity to trust God and live his formula for success.

A childhood friend of mine relied on himself instead of trusting God. He made a colossal mess of his life. He went through the traumas of losing his job, his wife and his child. But then he switched from instinct to instrument — from relying on himself to trusting God with all his heart. A fantastic change has taken place in this life — "trauma trust"!

The better way is to trust God before trauma strikes . . . everyday, through time. Those who trust in this way don't have to have life kicked out from under them before they "lie helplessly on the ground" in complete dependence on God. They willingly lie down at the feet of God every day and declare complete trust in him.

In "time trust" God takes us through the schoolhouse of faith. In the first grade we learn to trust him for the little things like what to wear, what to eat and which teacher we'll have. Then God promotes us through the grades — trusting us to trust him more and more through major decisions, grand opportunities, even terrible traumas. With "time trust" we lean on God 100% as a way of life. So, when some new and

unexpected thing comes along we are not rattled but confident.

Bill and Pat Arvan were missionaries to the Philippines for over thirty years. They have been to me both a challenge and an example of what it means to "trust God all the way". When they graduated from St. Paul Bible College they decided that they wanted to learn what it meant to really trust God for everything in life. They moved to the Pacific Northwest where they began a ministry without any promise of income or place to live or any of the normal resources or comforts of life. And God provided their needs on a day-by-day basis. They survived and flourished and grew in their faith.

God has never let them down. Their stories abound! One time they asked God to provide the money to come back to the United States for a special family event. They needed about \$1200.00. They told no one but God. Bit by bit from a dozen different sources, all the money came in at just the right time.

It is an exhilarating experience to talk with the Arvans about anything — because they have an absolute confidence in God. They really trust in him with all their hearts and don't rely on their own understanding.

And that is precisely what God wants us to do! We don't have to fly by instinct until we crash in some unavoidable trauma! We can choose to "lie helplessly face down" before God and completely trust him with all of our hearts. It's a good deal. We can't go wrong. It's "Part 1" of God's formula for success in life.

The second part is in the next verse, Proverbs 3:6. It is that we acknowledge God in all ways. This father writes to his son, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths".

This is where many Christians fail the formula. Most Christians have decided to trust God "all the way" for salvation. In fact, if you haven't decided to trust God all the way for salvation, you are not a Christian! That's the only way a person can become a Christian.

We're told in Ephesians 2:8, "... by grace you are saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God." Salvation from sin comes through faith (trust) in Jesus Christ as Savior. It's not anyone's own doing.

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ "with all your heart" then you are eternally separated from God by sin. Dependence on your own insights and good works just won't change anything!

However, if you want to become a Christian, decide right now that all of your trust for your salvation is in Jesus and not yourself. Once you have decided that, tell God, and you will become a Christian.

Unfortunately, some people trust God "all the way" for salvation but not for all the ways of their life.

Every person's life has many roads that we travel. We have the road to church and the road to work and the road to home and the road to shop and the road to friends and the road to sports and the road to entertainment. Our lives are very much like maps. Some roads are traveled often and some are traveled only once in a whole lifetime.

What God is here telling us is that to succeed in life we must acknowledge him, or pay attention to what HE wants us to do, in all these different areas, or ways, of our life. We must make him first - - - Number One.

It's easy to attend church on a Sunday morning and sing a hymn that uses the name of Jesus in praise. But do we equally acknowledge him when we switch roads on Monday morning and take the road to work? At work do we use the same name of Jesus abusively or profanely?

Do we acknowledge him on the way called marriage?

He has given to us explicit commands about husbands loving their wives and being faithful, about wives being submissive and faithful to

their husbands. Do we obey and acknowledge him on this road?

Let's try a practical exercise: Mentally map your week. What are all the ways you travel, the places you go? Who are the people you see? In which of those ways do you acknowledge him? Where is it clearly evident that you belong to Jesus Christ and are proud of it?

Now, what are the ways where you are not acknowledging him? We all have them, you know. For some it is the hidden way deep in our private thoughts. For another it is a distant way to a faraway city where no one knows how or with whom we spend the night. Still others fail to acknowledge the streets called finance or education or leisure.

God says: "In ALL your ways acknowledge him"

I suggest that you pick the streets of your life where you have not been living for Jesus Christ and resolve to trust him for a change. On that street you have chosen, make it clear in the way you live and in the words you speak that you belong to Jesus Christ.

And then, after a bit of time, add another street, another way, until before long every road on your map is marked as "Christ's Highway" and "in all your ways acknowledge him."

In the Middle East, especially around Jerusalem and Judea, there are many winding roads. In order to get from where you are to where you want to go it may be necessary to travel 10 times the direct distance. There are detours and switchbacks and crazy roundabouts. Only in modern times, with powerful equipment and sophisticated engineering, have the roads been made straight.

Our lives without God's direction are much like those winding Palestinian paths. Here we are at point A with our chosen destinations of

If you have never trusted Jesus Christ "with all your heart" then you are eternally separated from God by sin. Dependence on your own insights and good works just won't change anything!

places like Joy, Peace, Purpose and Happiness. Using traditional roadways, it is a hopelessly long journey filled with delays, constant backtracking, dangerous mountain curves and side paths that take us far off course.

Are these just clever words? I think not! There are multitudes of people who are looking for success along a road called greed, looking for pleasure on the highway of lust, looking for self-worth on the pike called power — and they are all lost. They aren't even coming close. Most of them are moving in the wrong direction.

But when God bulldozes and paves the path of your life, it is exhilarating to experience the speed with which life's most sought-after destinations can be reached.

Here is a Proverb from God that ought to be everyone's motto for life. It is the sure formula for true success. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

Father, many times we take the wrong paths

and we get hopelessly lost. And so we resolve now, with your help, to be called back to the road that is straight . . . to Christ's Highway. And Lord, with your help and by your grace, we resolve that we will trust you all the way, and that we will acknowledge you in all our ways, counting upon you to make straight our paths. In Jesus' name, amen.

Faith Matters is the Broadcast Ministry of
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
www.wooddale.org
©Leith Anderson