

THE REAL WIN



Pursuing God's Plan
for Authentic Success

MEN'S BIBLE STUDY

COLT MCCOY
MATT CARTER

LifeWay | Men

The background of the entire cover is a grayscale photograph of a mountain range, likely the Smoky Mountains, with soft, rolling hills and peaks under a light sky.

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INTRODUCTION

If you're like most men, you've tasted success at different points in your life. You've set goals and achieved them. You've put your nose to the grindstone and worked day after day to see different dreams come true. Sure, things may not be going exactly as you planned right now, but there have been moments in the game of your life when you felt you were playing well and taking the lead.

In other words, you know what it's like to win.

And yet, if you're like most men, you've also felt a nagging sense that what you're working so hard to achieve might not be the right goal after all. You do your best at work and at home, but there are times when you can't stop feeling you've got your ladder leaning against the wrong wall.

We've felt the same way. Both of us have experienced moments of victory that were amazing—honestly. And yet both of us have stumbled through more than our share of failures in our efforts to win at life in a way that really counts.

That's why we've written this study—because we've discovered there's a real win out there for each of us. There's a real win out there for you. There's a way to live and love and work and play that feels genuine instead of hollow. And it's a way that allows us to become the men we were truly created to be.

We don't promise that everything will be rosy, because it won't. You'll still fail, as we did. You'll have to learn some things the hard way, as we still do.

But we can promise the teaching in this study is based on biblical principles and the more you learn to pursue God's way of doing things, the more your definition of *success* will change and grow in the most important areas of your life. In other words, your quest for authentic success can start here. We call it the real win.

If you want that kind of life—that kind of win—then keep reading.



HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS STUDY

1. Attend each group experience.

- Watch the DVD teaching.
- Participate in the group discussion.

2. Complete the content in this workbook.

- Read the lessons and complete the learning activities.
- Memorize each week's suggested memory verse.
- Be honest with God, yourself, and others about your failures and successes as a man.
- Ask God to help you become a man who pursues the real win in life.



WEEK 1

THE REAL WIN

WELCOME

TO THIS GROUP DISCUSSION OF *THE REAL WIN*.

OPENING ACTIVITY. To facilitate introductions and highlight the theme of this study, spend a few minutes as a group playing a round of Flip. Find a partner and take turns flipping a coin. The person who isn't flipping the coin should call heads or tails while the coin is in the air, and that person is awarded a point if the call is correct. No points are awarded or deducted for an incorrect call. After five flips the partner with the most points is declared the winner.

Use the following questions to debrief the activity.

- Did you care whether you won the game of Flip? Why or why not?
- What do you like best about winning games or challenges?
- What emotions do you typically experience when you lose?

What ideas or images come to mind when you hear the word *success*?

How can people determine whether they've achieved success in life?

To prepare to watch the DVD segment, read aloud the following verses.

After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

MATTHEW 25:19-21

WATCH DVD session 1.

DISCUSS the DVD segment with your group, using the following questions.

What did you like best about the visual elements in the DVD segment?

What did you like best about the discussion between Colt and Matt? Why?

Describe some of your favorite hobbies and interests as a child.

How have you been influenced by those hobbies and interests as you've grown into adulthood?

What steps have you recently taken to prepare for success in this life?

Respond to Matt's statement: "The Bible's definition of *success* is not achieving the goal, but the Bible's definition of *success* is being faithful in the little things that God gives you."

Colt mentioned that he's always struggled with losing. What obstacles prevent you from more consistently serving God with the little things He's given you?

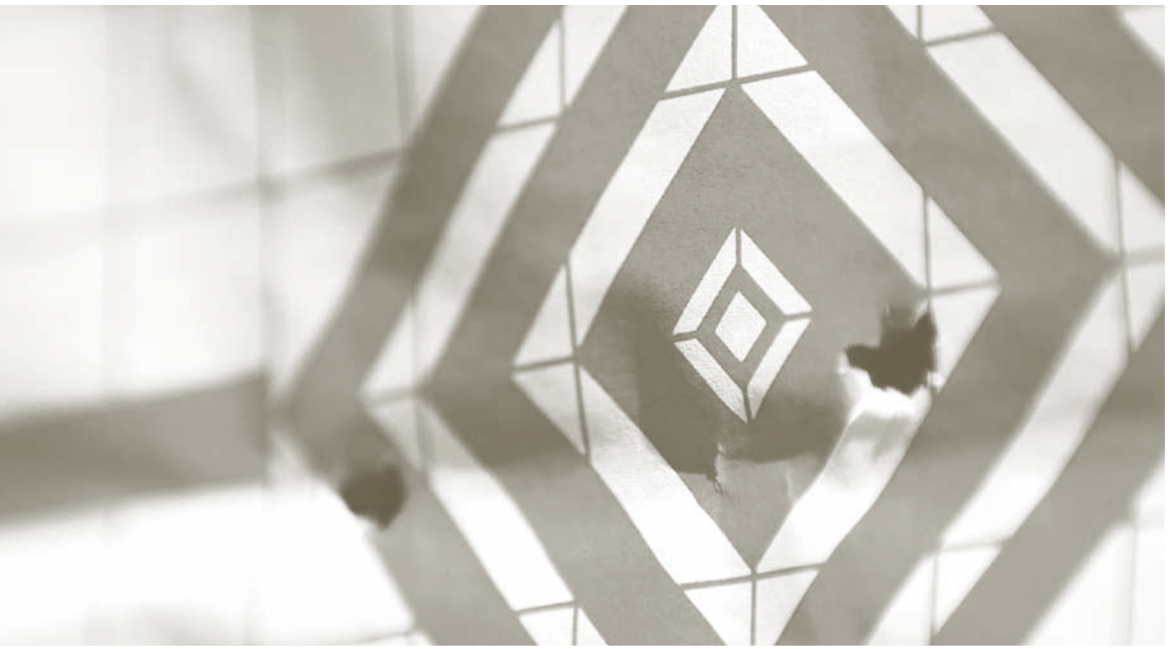
APPLICATION. Throughout the week keep an eye open for the gifts God has given you in this life. Make a list (mental or physical) of the little opportunities you encounter to serve Him faithfully in the little things.

THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE MEMORY. Isaiah 26:4:

Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.

ASSIGNMENT. Read week 1 and complete the activities before the next group experience.

What Is **Success**?



When it comes to the game of life, many of us are aiming at different targets. We have many different definitions of what it means to be successful in this world.

For example, success might be—

- landing a great job and rising to the top of your field;
- attracting the hottest, most understanding wife possible;
- living a life full of excitement and adventure;
- making a ton of money and feeling financially secure;
- gaining power and influence over people and large portions of the culture;
- being respected by others;
- doing something important and changing the world for the better.

These examples of success reflect the most popular values in our culture; they surround us every day. Do you see the ultimate goal of your life represented in the list? Or are you aiming at a different target when you live and work each day—a different purpose?

We'll begin this study by redefining *success* in a way that's significantly different from the previous examples; we'll look at success from God's perspective. In doing so, we'll gain a better understanding of what it means to serve God faithfully and to trust Him with our lives. And through it all we'll start to discover what the real win is all about.

WRESTLING WITH SUCCESS

COLT'S STORY

My whole life I've been hardwired to win. My dad was a successful coach for more than 25 years, so I learned early on that there's a pretty fine line between winning and losing, success and failure. I also learned early on that I don't like to lose.

Now if you're a boy growing up in Texas with a football in your hands, chances are good that you dream of playing at the University of Texas, leading your team to victory during the national championship, and winning the Heisman Trophy to be recognized as the best college football player in the country. That's the ultimate victory for someone like me.

I came so close.

During my senior year in 2009 I was the starting quarterback for the University of Texas Longhorns. We had a great team, and we'd had a great season by the time I traveled to New York City for the presentation of the Heisman Trophy. This was my second year as a finalist for the award, and I felt that I had a good chance to win.

In the closest points race since 1985, I came in third. Not bad, but the bottom line was that I didn't win. Part of my chance for ultimate victory was gone.

Still, we had the national championship to play for—another chance to accomplish the dream I'd been pushing for my whole life. We were the underdogs against the University of Alabama Crimson Tide, but I was confident we could win. I'd played with my teammates for four years at that point, and I knew what we were capable of. We'd trained together for weeks, and I'd never felt more prepared than I did going into that game.

Part of that preparation was spiritual, and that's how I came across Isaiah 26:3-4 during my devotions in the days leading up to the national championship:

You keep him in perfect peace
whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you.
Trust in the LORD forever,
for the LORD GOD is an everlasting rock.

That's the text I meditated on as I took the field for the biggest game of my life, and it's become the passage that undergirds what my life is about today.

The game itself couldn't have started out much better for my team and me. Our defense intercepted the ball from Alabama, and our offense drove right down the field. I completed several passes in a row and was trying to run for a score when I got hit by a three-hundred-pound defensive lineman and felt something go wrong with my right shoulder—my throwing shoulder.

It wasn't a huge hit. I'd taken a lot worse over the years, and I wanted to bounce right up and try again for that touchdown. But my right arm was numb from the shoulder to my fingers; I couldn't raise it or grip the ball. I was in shock as I jogged over to the sideline and talked with our trainers. I wanted to get back on the field!

But I never did. The trainers worked to get me back in shape while my backup, a freshman, did his best to lead our offense. Eventually, I was taken to the locker room to confirm the worst: my arm wasn't getting better anytime soon. I sat on the bench for the rest of the game and watched as my team fought valiantly. In the end, though, we lost.

My dream was dead.

Walking off the field after the game, I felt more disappointed than at any other point in my life. That's when the sideline reporter for ABC tugged on my jersey and asked for an interview. I nodded, and she asked the question I knew was coming: "Colt, what was it like for you to watch this game—the last game in uniform—from the sideline?"

I didn't know what to say, so I started by talking about my passion for the game of football and about how much I wanted to get back on the field. I congratulated Alabama on its victory and praised my team for fighting hard.

Then I said something that still surprises me to this day: “I always give God the glory. I never question why things happen the way they do. God is in control of my life, and I know that if nothing else, I’m standing on the Rock.”

I know those words came to me because of God. Yes, they came partly because I’d been meditating on Isaiah 26:3-4 before the game, but there was more to it. During the most difficult and disappointing moment of my life, God gave me peace. Something clicked into place, and I truly understood that God was my Rock and that my life wouldn’t be shattered, no matter how many dreams I failed to achieve.

I realized that God was in control, and He would always be in control.

What were some of your most ambitious dreams as a child?

Record three.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How do you typically respond to disappointment?

Look again at Isaiah 26:3-4. What does it mean that God is “an everlasting rock” (v. 4)?

REDEFINING *SUCCESS*

One of the nice things about sports is that it’s pretty easy to figure out whether you’re winning or losing. If you’re playing football and your team has more points than the other team, you’re winning. If you’re running a race and you see someone running in front of you, you’re losing. It’s simple.

Unfortunately, real life is more complicated. Most men like to win as often as possible, but when it comes to everyday life, there are no specific measures that tell us whether we’re ahead of the game or behind.

For example, think through the following list of circumstances men commonly face in today's society. Is it even possible to pinpoint what winning looks like for each one?

- A married man wants to be a good husband to his wife.
- A single man longs to have a loving wife and family.
- A man is struggling with a particular sin and wants to be free.
- A younger man is looking for a satisfying career.
- A father wants to be a good role model for his children.
- An older man is dissatisfied with his job and wants to feel fulfilled.
- A father is preparing for his child to leave home.

Circle any of the previous situations that directly apply to you.

What would you consider to be a win for the situations you circled?

Here's the point: all men define *success* in their own ways. They all have dreams they're shooting for and goals they're trying to achieve. But are they the right dreams? Are they the correct goals? How can anyone know?

We've written this study because both of us have tried to come up with our own versions of success in this life, and we've both failed. You'll hear more about those failures—and the lessons we learned from them—in the pages to come. Thankfully, all of the times we've missed the mark have helped us gain a better understanding of what authentic success looks like for men who are attempting to follow Christ.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you that you're winning the game of your life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not confident Fully confident

How would you define success in life?

The concept of the real win is built on two simple but strategic components: whom you serve and whom you trust. Those two decisions change everything for a man, and we'll take a deeper look at each one this week.

What we need you to understand now is that pursuing the real win may require you to redefine your definition of *success*. It may require you to change your understanding of what it means to win by exploring what success looks like through the lens of the Bible rather than through the lenses of our culture or your own desires.

Are you willing to do that? Pursuing the real win takes resolve, and the decision to shoot for it is a choice you make more than once. It requires courage, faith, and determination—and it certainly isn't always easy.

But take it from two guys who've been knocked down a few times and learned a few things: it's worth it.

WHY FAITHFULNESS IS KEY

The real win in this life is built on two simple ideas: whom you serve and whom you trust. You've probably figured out that God should be the *whom* in both of those phrases. People can find authentic success in life only when they commit to serve God and trust Him.

But what does that actually mean for guys like us? What does it look like to serve God every day? Why should we trust Him, and how do we go about it?

What ideas or images come to mind when you think of serving God?

What does it mean to trust God?

Let's start by taking a deeper look at what it means for us to serve God as men in search of the real win.

FAITHFUL IN SMALL THINGS

In the Bible a good place to start exploring the concept of serving God is Jesus' parable of the talents in Matthew 25. If you're not familiar with that story, a rich guy went on a long journey. Before he left, he gave different sums of money to three of his servants in order to keep his business rolling. The first guy got five talents, the second guy got two talents, and the third guy got one talent. A talent was payment for six thousand days of work, so each servant received a lot of money.

The first two servants immediately got to work and started investing the money they'd been given. But the third servant took a different approach. He decided to hide the money by digging a hole and burying it.

Here's what happened next:

After a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, "Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more." His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master."

MATTHEW 25:19-21

Notice that the word *faithful* pops up a couple times. That's an important concept to keep in mind when it comes to serving God. Here's the dictionary definition:

Faithful: (1) strict or thorough in the performance of duty; a faithful worker; (2) true to one's word, promises, vows, etc.; (3) steady in allegiance or affection; loyal; constant.¹

What friends and family members would you describe as faithful? Why?

Would your friends and family describe you as faithful? Why or why not?

The second servant got the same praise as the first one. But the third didn't fare so well. He dug up the talent he'd been given, wiped off the dirt, and brought it back. He said he'd been afraid because the master was a "hard man" (v. 24), and he didn't want to risk losing anything. So he'd done nothing with the money. Not surprisingly, the master wasn't impressed:

His master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

MATTHEW 25:26-30

What's the difference between the first two servants and the third servant? Faithfulness. The first two servants had been given resources, and they faithfully served their master by using those resources to do the work their master wanted done. The third servant focused on himself rather than his master. He didn't want to work; he didn't want to take risks. So he did nothing. He was unfaithful.

Here's the point: authentic success in this life means being faithful with the little things God gives us. We find the real win by serving God and doing His work with whatever resources we've got.

What are some of the main resources you've been given that could be used to serve God and do His work on earth?

Which of these resources are being wasted on pursuits that don't have eternal significance?

What steps could you take this week to make better use of one or two of those resources?

We'll keep digging into this concept as we move through the study and focus on key pursuits such as leadership, work, family, and so on. For now, though, notice how the first two servants were rewarded. When they faithfully served with a few resources, they were given more resources—not to get fat and happy with but to continue serving and doing their master's work on a larger scale.

The same can be true of us. When we're faithful to serve God with whatever He's given us, He will give us greater opportunities to serve faithfully and do the work of His kingdom.

Fill in the blank for this statement: “If only I had more _____,
I could make a real difference in my community.”

What steps can you take to approach God about that missing resource?

FAITHFUL AT ALL TIMES

We just talked about the good news: we can experience the real win as men by faithfully serving God with the little things He gives us. And as we’re faithful in those small things, He will give us a chance to be faithful with bigger things. That’s authentic success.

Now here’s the bad news: it won’t be smooth sailing for any of us. We’ll all go through tough times and difficult circumstances—even if we’re serving God.

If you don’t agree, just look at these words from the apostle Paul:

Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:24-27

Whoa! Paul was describing just some of the hardships he’d been through in his efforts to serve God and spread the gospel message. He did the right thing, and he still faced all kinds of adversity. The same will be true for us.

How have you experienced tough times in the past year?

How did those tough times affect the way you used your resources in serving God?

The big challenge for us as men is to continue faithfully serving God even when things get tough. We need to keep working and keep the right focus even when challenges knock us down, even when we feel disappointed or discouraged, and even when we don't understand what's going on.

What helps you stay focused on a challenging task?

How do you stay focused on God during a challenging time?

When we can serve God and be faithful with the little things despite the troubles in our lives, we'll hear the same words the first two servants heard:

Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.

MATTHEW 25:23

We'll be able to say what Paul said near the end of his life:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

2 TIMOTHY 4:7-8

That's the real win.

FAITHFULNESS AND YOU

MATT'S STORY

I have vivid memories of the night I began to feel massive pains in the pit of my stomach, completely out of the blue. I was taken to the hospital and was told I needed an emergency appendectomy. The operation went well. I stayed overnight to be safe, and then I went home. Problem solved.

Or so I thought. A couple days later I was sitting at my desk at work when I got a phone call from my wife. She'd heard from the doctor. They'd found a malignant tumor in my appendix after the operation. I had cancer.

It turned out to be a carcinoid tumor of the appendix, which is a fairly rare type of cancer. Such tumors typically start to spread either when they become 2.0 centimeters long or when they break through the appendix wall. My tumor was 1.9 centimeters long and had already broken through the wall, so this was bad.

Doctors also told me that if this type of cancer spreads into your lymph nodes, you're done. Chemo doesn't work. Radiation doesn't work. It's a slow-growing cancer, so it takes a few years to kill you. And there's no hope.

I'll spare you the gory details of all my tests, but the upshot was that my blood levels came back abnormally high, and my lymph nodes had swollen significantly—a double dose of bad news. It looked as if the cancer had already spread.

The other possibility was that my blood markers were high because of the original tumor and that my lymph nodes were swollen because of the surgery. The only way to know for sure was to wait a few months and see whether anything changed, but I could tell the doctors were less than hopeful. Chances were slim that it would turn out all right.

As a 31-year-old man, I was preparing to die.

For the next three months I sat on pins and needles, thinking, hoping, and praying. I experienced every dark emotion imaginable. What would happen to my wife and children? What would happen to my church? I struggled to understand why God would allow this to happen to me.

During the darkest of those days, a friend pointed me to Psalm 39:4-5. He'd been praying for me, and he felt that God wanted to speak to me through that passage:

Show me, O LORD, my life's end
and the number of my days;
let me know how fleeting is my life.
You have made my days a mere handbreadth;
the span of my years is as nothing before you.
Each man's life is but a breath (NIV).

I chewed on those verses awhile. Have you ever breathed on a window on a cold winter's day? It fogs up, but then the fog instantly disappears. That's what David was saying a man's life is like—here for a brief moment, then gone. David knew that when a man grasps how short his life is, he begins to live with a new sense of what's truly important.

God was showing me there's a direct connection between understanding how short my life is and the urgency with which I'd live that life. God wanted to teach me how to number my days, how to know time was short, and how not to live in vain. God wanted me to live with holy urgency. That was a tough lesson to learn, and I was still missing an essential ingredient: trust.

The night before my next round of tests—the ones that would tell me whether I'd live or die—I paced around my bedroom and vented to my wife, Jennifer, about how frustrated I felt. Anxious and exhausted, I yelled, "What does God want from me? I've done everything I can think of. What's He trying to teach me?"

Calmly, my wife looked at me and said, "Matt, I don't know what God's trying to teach you. But I know this: He wants you to *trust Him*."

The next day I went to the cancer ward and sat in the waiting room, surrounded by dying people. My Bible in my hands, I began reading the account of Jesus on the cross. As I read, I realized that Jesus fully trusted God even while He was being tortured and crucified. The cross didn't look like a win for someone who was going to save the world. Yet the cross was exactly what God had planned for Jesus. The nails were in Jesus' hands for a reason.

Something turned in my heart, and it hit me like a bolt of lightning: sometimes trusting God means you don't get to climb down from your cross. Whatever difficulty you're bearing, whatever goal you're not achieving, staying in that difficulty might be a part of God's perfect plan for your life.

In other words, losing in the eyes of the world might be success in the eyes of God.

After my second round of tests, I went back to my office, got on my knees, and prayed, "Lord, if it's Your will for me to die, I trust You." I'd said this to Him before, but this was the first time I really meant it. I fully surrendered right then. I let go. A peace and confidence came over me as I'd never felt before. Without a shadow of a doubt, I knew that every moment of my life was in God's hands.

The next day a phone call came. My blood work was normal. My lymph nodes were normal. All of my test results were normal. There was no sign of cancer anywhere. As of the writing of this book, I've been completely cancer-free for seven years.

Now I don't know if God miraculously healed me or if I'd never had any other cancer besides the appendix tumor. And I'm not saying that if you trust God, He will solve your problems the way my cancer was taken away from me. But this is what I know for sure: God brought me to a place where I said, "If You want to keep me on the cross, then I trust You." And I still do.

Who are some people you trust most in this life? Why do you trust them?

What are some obstacles that prevent you from trusting people?

CHOOSE TO TRUST

We've made the case that authentic success isn't about big achievements and flashy victories in this life. Rather, the real win means faithfully serving God in the little things, especially when the going gets tough. But how? How can we stay faithful and keep serving when we feel beaten down or afraid—when we don't even understand what God wants from us?

The answer is trust. You can't serve God—you can't be faithful with the resources He's given you—unless you trust Him.

How much do you trust God with the details of your life?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I don't trust Him. I fully trust Him.

What obstacles prevent you from trusting God more?

We wish we could give you some easy advice on that subject. You know, seven steps to build your trust in God. But in the end, trust mostly comes down to a choice. After all, how do you develop trust in a human being? You decide whether that person is trustworthy, and then you choose to act based on that belief.

The same is true with God. He's completely and perfectly trustworthy: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). If you believe God is the all-powerful Creator of the universe—if you believe He cares for you, if you believe Jesus sacrificed Himself on the cross so that you can be saved—you must choose to take actions that confirm your belief. In other words, you must choose to trust Him, and your trust will result in actions that you take by faith.

We want so badly to succeed as men. We want to reach our goals and find victory while we fight the good fight. But here's the big question: If you don't achieve your hopes and dreams in life, can you still trust God?

What's your answer to the previous question?

How can you actively demonstrate trust in God this week? What choices will you make, and what actions will you take?

As you'll see in the weeks to come, this study is all about trusting God in the deepest way possible. This is where the real win comes from in a man's life. You can trust God because He's always faithful.

1. "Faithful," *Dictionary.com* [online, cited 1 April 2013]. Available from the Internet: <http://dictionary.reference.com>.



IT'S ONE THING TO AIM FOR SUCCESS. IT'S ANOTHER THING TO GO FOR THE **REAL WIN.**

If you're like most men, you don't have much trouble figuring out when you miss the mark. You know when you fail to achieve the goals you've set for your life. But what if you're aiming at the wrong target? What if you hit the bull's-eye but still miss your chance to experience authentic success?

This Bible study challenges you to aim for the real win—to strive for the kind of success that comes from trusting God and serving Him. As you explore what true success looks like in the areas of faithfulness, leadership, idolatry, work, pursuit, and legacy, you'll discover what it means to live the way God intended.

So what's your target in life? God's standard for success is the only one that matters, so set your sights on following Him as you go for the real win.

Also Available

The Real Win Leader Kit includes resources for leading a six-session group study: one member book, *The Real Win* book, and one DVD featuring the authors' adventures on several hunting and fishing expeditions and their conversations about authentic success. ITEM 005558785

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