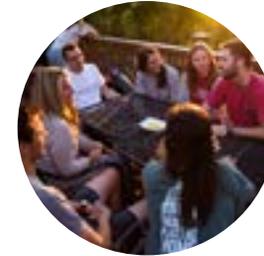


weekend. I came to realize after a semester living that life, the “fitting in” I was seeking never left me fully satisfied. I found myself constantly searching for more, thinking that alcohol and partying was the answer; but it was never enough. That same year, God so lovingly put someone in my life who gave me the option to choose something more. The women in my sorority who were running after Jesus and a life of virtue were so patient with me as I dug my way out of the party scene, and they helped lead me into the arms of the One whom I had been seeking. He was waiting to fill me with his merciful and endless love that drinking and partying could never offer.

11. What is one action you can commit to this week to grow in temperance or moderation towards alcohol?

Response: Let the group discuss. Invite your students to make a written commitment that you can follow up with next week!



Chapter V

Success

CHAPTER 5

SUCCESS

Goal: Awakening an Awareness to Christian Excellence

Leader's Guide:

This week, we are discussing the topic of success and the Church's understanding of Christian excellence. As we begin, here are a few statistics that illustrate the Greek system's impact on our nation (feel free to share these with your participants!):

- *Over 85% of the students in campus leadership on 730 campuses are members of Greek-letter organizations.*
- *As alumni, Greeks give approximately 75% of all money donated to universities, which is four times more than non-Greek alumni.*
- *Forty-three of the 100 members of the U.S. Senate are members of a fraternity or sorority. Thirty-six percent of the House of Representatives are members of a sorority or fraternity.*
- *Of North America's 50 largest corporations, 43 are headed by Greek men and women.*
- *Since the founding of Greek-letter organizations in 1825, all but three U.S. Presidents were Greek. 40 of 47 U.S. Supreme Court Justices are Greek.*

- *63% of all U.S. Cabinet members since 1900 have been and are Greek. All of the Apollo 11 astronauts were Greek.*

Success is not a foreign concept to Greek life. Seeing the above statistics, it's easy to see that Greeks are successful not only on the college campus but in the world post-graduation. In Greek houses, members are encouraged to strive to be successful, as many of their founders had been. However, a disordered emphasis on success can lead to anxious perfectionism, fear of failure, or rebellion and rejection of responsibility. How can we view and pursue success rightly and with virtue? How can we strive for excellence in a wider culture that often encourages the opposite?

Some of your participants may be struggling under the pressure to succeed in worldly ways; others may struggle to be motivated to excellence and to give their best every day. Perhaps there may have been a draw to Greek life to be a part of something that can give access to greater friendships, academic successes and extracurriculars to add to a résumé. The goal of this chapter is to help your participants identify and break free from the strain to be perfect and successful in their endeavors and to embrace a true Christian understanding of excellence.

Intro: Identity and Success

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

In this chapter, we will continue to make sense of the harmony God desires for us from the beginning of creation. We've talked about some common struggles within Greek life – the temptation to put our identity in who the world says we are and the temptations to misuse sex and alcohol. Today, we will continue our conversation by talking

about success – what the world says about success and what the Church says about it. To kick us off, let's discuss:

1. How would you describe the difference between success and excellence?

Response: Let the group discuss. Potential answers include: success has more to do with an end result, whereas excellence has more to do with the process; success is more defined outwardly, by the world or by those around you, whereas excellence is more internal and doing the best that you personally can do, etc.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

According to Merriam-Webster, success is defined as a “favorable or desired outcome” or “the attainment of wealth, favor or eminence.” This seems to be along the lines of how people today view success -- in a recent Poll published in USA today, 81% of Generation Y surveyed said that their most important goal in life was wealth, and 54% said being famous.

Worldly motivation for success tends to be oriented toward recognition, wealth, and fame. However, seeking these things, thinking they will lead us to happiness and fulfillment, tends to leave us disappointed.

2. Have you felt the influence of the world's view of success in your own life? What were the results of chasing that standard of success?

Response: Let the group discuss.

3. How might the four human motivations we've been talking about (approval, comfort, security and power) drive us to seek the world's view of success?

Response: Let the group discuss. Possible answers include:

Approval and Appreciation: *“If I get this award, then everyone will see what a success I am” or “If people see how successful of an athlete I am, people will start to talk about me and desire to know me.”*

Emotional and Physical Comfort: *“When I get good grades, a promotion at work, or recognized for something I did, I will have proof that I am not a failure.”*

Security and Control: *“My reputation as a successful person will help me get what I want in the future” or “If I'm successful in the classroom and get the job I want, then I can make a lot of money and secure the lifestyle I want.”*

Influence and Power: *“I love the respect I get when I'm leading other people” or “I don't matter unless I'm in a position of leadership.”*

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

We can find how the Church would define excellence in the following verse.

(Read Colossians 3:23-24.)

Excellence is the ability or the habit of giving the best of ourselves in our daily commitments and responsibilities – regardless if the task is monumental or small, or if it is seen by many or only a few.

4. Do you think you value the Lord's inheritance more than the world's? If not, why?

Response: Let the group discuss.

5. Who are examples for you of people who live out the Church's vision for excellence well? What is it about the way that they live that inspires you?

Response: Let the group discuss.

6. Based on the definitions for success and Christian excellence, in what ways are these two concepts similar? In what ways are they different?

Response: Similarities include striving for greatness, a strong work ethic, can be oriented toward making a difference in the world, etc. Excellence is different from success because it focuses more on the intentions and efforts behind our actions, not just the results or outward appearances. We can pursue a task or a role with excellence and still not be seen as successful or rewarded as such; we can also pursue and achieve success in a task or position but not have done it excellently, with our best effort, integrity and charity.

God's Vision for Success

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

St. Paul is an incredible example of the Church's vision of true excellence. One of the most successful evangelists in the history of the Church, St. Paul did not define himself by his successes but by the salvation of Christ.

(Read 1 Cor. 2:1 – 5.)

7. How can we reconcile St. Paul's humility in these verses with the Church's vision for excellence?

Response: Paul's humility is a testament to his greatness! He gives his best despite his weaknesses. He knows that all he has done is because of Jesus. This causes him to strive after all that God is asking of him but also helps him accept failures and embrace his own weaknesses with trust.

8. Why do you think God would desire to use our weakness to demonstrate his power? How can we strive for excellence while still embracing our weakness in the name of Christ?

Response: Our weaknesses allow his power to be on full display – when it is obvious that we couldn't do something in our own strength, his providence is revealed. He doesn't expect perfection from us, but obedience and trust. We can continually improve our weaknesses and surrender them to Jesus, asking him to transform them. We can receive our successes with humility and our failures with trust and hope, giving all glory to God.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Though St. Paul's humility is admirable, we aren't called to simply hide away and seek no greatness at all. Rather, we are to do all for the glory of God; our living fully alive and the use of our gifts and talents actually gives God glory and is a testament to the power of the Holy Spirit!

Saint Thomas Aquinas describes the call to greatness through the word *magnanimity*:

“Magnanimity makes a man deem himself worthy of great things in consideration of the gifts he holds from God”...Indeed, the magnanimous person continuously strives to perfect the virtues in all areas of his life. He is not content with simply being good. He reaches out toward excellence. For example, magnanimity may impel a good man to go beyond his daily obligations and make more sacrifices in his daily life for the sake of others. He may be driven to defer to others’ preferences, to endure criticism with patience, or to avoid defending his opinion in non-essential matters. These are small ways of living “greatness of soul.” ... As Aquinas explains, “if his soul is endowed with great virtue, magnanimity makes him tend to *perfect* works of virtue.”¹

9. Like St. Paul, how has God provided opportunities for you to use your God-given talents and work ethic for his greater glory? How have you been a witness of true excellence for others?

Response: Let the group discuss.

10. In what ways do you struggle to live up to the excellence to which you are called? Why do you think the temptation to mediocrity is present in the human heart? Where do you see mediocrity in your own life?

Response: Let the group discuss. For the second question, possible answers include: human sinfulness; fear or anxiety; laziness or desire for comfort; comparison to the efforts of others, etc.

(Note to leader: Please read aloud.)

Whatever projects, assignments, goals, plans, hopes, dreams, or opportunities that come our way, we can practice filtering them through the lens of bringing glory to God. In time, we will begin to be able to discern if we are chasing our own glory or God’s in our desire for success. Also, when we are truly doing it for the Lord, we will work harder and better than if we are simply working for ourselves. When an opportunity comes your way, consider: am I chasing worldly success or true Christian excellence? Examine your motivations, seek ways to glorify God and give your best in what you choose!

Success and Excellence: Greek Life Testimonies

(Note to leader: Feel free to read aloud or print these testimonies for your group to read and reflect upon, either during your study or outside of your study time.)

Male Testimony:

In today’s social media age, displaying a put-together and successful image of yourself is one of the biggest temptations for college students, and this was a trap I definitely fell into. Having to constantly keep up with other men on my campus and in my fraternity by maintaining the right image, social life, grades, involvement and approval from women brought much fear, anxiety and stress – although I didn’t really recognize the root of it at the time. Over the course of college, as I continued to be invited into a life of prayer, the Lord revealed these burdens to me and the reality that I was placing them on myself. There was no space for Him to tell me who I am and to receive my identity as a beloved son until I let go of the perfect image of myself that I tried to construct. It was scary at first but ultimately it was a leap I had to take in order to really allow the Father into my heart.

Female Testimony:

For as long as I can remember, I have associated my worth with my achievements and accomplishments. In college, that was no different. I graduated early with two majors and served in leadership positions for every organization I was in, including the executive board of my sorority. On paper, I was incredibly successful; but I personally felt unfulfilled and empty. Upon graduation, my biggest regret was not giving more time to my faith and friendships. I started praying daily and attending daily Mass, and it was unbelievable how much my time was multiplied and how joyful I felt. After graduation, I learned that success wasn't about accolades, but rather, it was about living a well-balanced life with Jesus Christ at the very center. I don't regret a single minute that I gave to the Lord, and I wish I had learned that earlier on.



Chapter VI

Rest

11. What is one thing you want to commit to this week to reorient your understanding of success?

Response: Let the group discuss. Feel free to have your group write down a commitment or choose one you can do together. Consider closing this study by praying the Litany of Humility as a group.

(Note to leader: If time remains, consider walking your group through the [Litany of Humility](#) or praying it together. You could invite your group to pray it throughout the week as their action step.)

¹ Edward Sri, "Called to Greatness: The Virtue of Magnanimity." *Lay Witness* (November/December 2009), <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/philosophy/called-to-greatness-the-virtue-of-magnanimity.html>