

GROWING IN CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER

(A prerequisite for promotion in God's Kingdom)

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” **(Romans 8:28-29)**

INTRODUCTION:

We are now living in the lawless and perilous times that the Apostle Paul wrote of in the book of 2 Timothy. The Apostle Paul wrote,

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” **(2 Timothy 3:1-5)**

It is crucial given the times that we are now living in, that we as believers do not become conformed to this world, (Romans 12:2) especially given the nearness of the rapture and the Lord's return. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18) Growing in Christlike character is always a prerequisite for promotion in God's Kingdom. God first prepares the man or woman of God before He gives them a significant ministry platform.

The Christian walk is like rowing upstream against the tide or current of this world which would try and drag us away from God's best plan for our life. Growing in Christlike character needs to be a daily choice. At any time we are either growing in our walk with the Lord or going backwards in our walk with the Lord. (In other words we are either pressing forward in our walk with the Lord or drifting back as the current of the world pulls us downstream and away from the things of God and a wholehearted commitment to Christ) If we do not consciously choose each day to grow in Christlike character, the enemy will invariably cause us to compromise in our walk with the Lord by distracting us with temptations and other things and through bringing wrong influences and associations into our life.

Jesus Himself predicted that in the days that we are now living in, that the love of many would grow cold. Jesus said,

“And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” **(Matthew 24:12-13)**

So as Christians it is crucial that we have a commitment to growing in Christlike character in our walk with the Lord. Especially as leaders we need to seek to grow more and more in Christlike character, so that we can model Christian living to those that we lead and mentor.

The bible clearly emphasises the importance of all believers growing in character and becoming mature disciples;

The Apostle Peter wrote,

“But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.” (2 Peter 1:5-10)

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” (1 Timothy 6:6-11)

If we are to truly have credibility as leaders and as Christians to make a difference in our world for eternity, we need to consistently demonstrate Christlike character. As believers we are called to be the salt and the light in this world.

Jesus made this clear when He said,

“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” (Matthew 5:13)

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” (Philippians 2:14-15)

The Apostle Paul also wrote in his letter to Titus about the importance of Christians living in a way that would glorify God as he shared about the qualities of a sound church. We can see this in Titus 2:1-10

I will now be quickly looking at 1) Why growing in Christlike character is so important for all believers, 2) What can hinder us from growing in Christlike character, and 3) How we can grow in Christlike character

1) Why growing in Christlike character is so important for all believers

It is a key to:

- i) **Consistently relating to others in a right way.** That we always have integrity in the way that we relate to others (Romans 12:21) and that we have a genuine love and concern for others. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8) Having good godly boundaries in our life helps to keep our lives uncomplicated and enables us to consistently do the right thing by others – This is especially the case with opposite sex relationships (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8)
- ii) **Promotion in the Kingdom of God.** Promotion only comes from above in God's Kingdom (Luke 1:52) (1 Samuel 16:1-13) (Psalm 75:6-7) (Luke 14:11)
- iii) **Remaining strong in our walk with the Lord in the lawless and perilous times that we are now living in** (2 Timothy 3:1-5) (Matthew 24:10-13)
- iv) **Maintaining a good reputation.** (Proverbs 22:1) It takes a long time to earn a good reputation, but it can be quickly lost overnight through poor choices
- v) **Being effective in discipling and mentoring others as we model Christian living to those around us.** (1 Peter 5:1-4) (1 Thessalonians 2:5-9) Our children will invariably grow up to be very much like us. The way that we live our life has a far greater impact on others than what we say to them. Jesus Himself modelled to His disciples what it was to live a God glorifying life as they spent time with Him. (Mark 1:38-42)

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, *for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.*” (1 Timothy 4:12-16)

- vi) **Standing out in our Christian witness to others.** For some we may be the only bible that they ever read in their life (Philemon 1:6) (Matthew 5:16)
- vii) **Developing healthy relationships with others** (Ephesians 4:26-32)
- viii) **Remaining strong when confronted with temptations in our life.** (James 4:7) (Proverbs 3:7-8) The Devil only comes to steal and to kill and to destroy
- ix) **Having ongoing peace in our heart as we do the right thing by others**

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” (2 Corinthians 13:11)

- x) **Avoiding much pain and suffering in life as we continually seek to do the godly thing in all circumstances.** There are always consequences of sin
The Apostle Peter wrote,

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” (1 Peter 5:8-9)

- xi) **It greatly influences our choice of friends** (Birds of a feather flock together)

We invariably get drawn to people who are like minded. The closer we get in our walk with the Lord the more we will seek to spend time with people who have a great desire to love God and to glorify Him with their lives

- xii) **God entrusting to us greater responsibilities and greater influence over the lives of others.** To God opening up greater platforms of ministry for us (Matthew 25: 14-23)

We see in the life of Joseph in the book of Genesis that though he was faced with temptations, he was committed to doing the right thing at all times. He fled the advances of Potiphar's wife determined to honour God with his life. (Genesis 39:10-12) As a result of his great integrity and faith in God, in just one day he was promoted from the prison to the palace to be second only to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt. (Genesis 41:14-16) (Genesis 41:37-43) There is always a kairos time for promotion in God's Kingdom after we have allowed God to develop the necessary character in our life. God knows where we are. God knew where to find David, a mere shepherd boy, (1 Samuel 16:1-13) when He was looking at appointing a new King for Israel.

- xiii) **God entrusting to us greater resources as we prove faithful in the little** (Luke 16:10-13) (1 Samuel 2:7) (Deuteronomy 8:18)

- xiv) **Other people entrusting to us greater responsibilities as they see the genuine character and integrity in our life** (Joseph was an example of this)

- xv) **Bearing much fruit in our lives as we remain strong in our walk with the Lord,** (John 15:16)

- xvi) **Experiencing the life and life more abundantly that Jesus spoke of which comes from walking in obedience to God's plan for our life.** Living a godly life is the key in the long run to seeing God's consistent favour and blessing upon our lives and on all that we do for Him (Isaiah 1:19), and

- xvii) **To experiencing good health and a long life** (Proverbs 3:7-8) (1 Kings 3:14)

2) What can hinder us from growing in Christlike character

- i) **Having selfish ambition** (James 3:14-16) (1 Corinthians 3:1-3)
- ii) **Wrong friends and associations** (1 Corinthians 15:33) (Proverbs 12:26)
- iii) **Not being fully consecrated in our walk with the Lord.** *The last day's church will be characterised by many Christians living a compromised and lukewarm Christian life, where people will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.* (Revelation 2:12-17 – The Compromising Church) (Revelation 2:18-29 – The Corrupt Church) (Revelation 3:1-6 – The Dead Church) and (Revelation 3:14-22 – The Lukewarm Church)
- iv) **Being undisciplined in what we look at and listen to** (2 Samuel 11:1-18)
- v) **Allowing wrong thoughts to remain in our mind.** Our thought life will greatly affect our character, either for the good or for the bad. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “A man is what he thinks about all day long” In the book of Proverbs we read, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. ...” (Proverbs 23:7)
- vi) **Having no clear God given vision and focus for our life** (Proverbs 29:18)
- vii) **Not being planted in a healthy bible based local church fellowship**
- viii) **Having no accountability to other mature believers who can speak godly counsel into our lives** (Proverbs 18:1) (Proverbs 14:14)
- ix) **Being undisciplined in the reading and study of God's Word.** Allowing the busyness of life and other distractions to stop us from spending quality time in God's Word
- x) **Failing to repent quickly of known sin in our life.** The more we entertain sin in our life, the stronger its hold becomes upon our life. Ongoing sin in our life will harden our heart and negatively affect our faith. (Hebrews 3:12-14)
- xi) **Walking in disobedience to God's word and His plan for our life.** (Choosing to do our own thing rather than whole heartedly pursuing God's unfolding plan for our life) Continual disobedience will desensitize us to the leading and conviction of the Holy Spirit, AND
- xii) **Refusing to forgive others quickly.** Failing to forgive others who have hurt us will negatively affect our relationships with others and our walk with the Lord. (Matthew 18:21-35) (Matthew 24:10)
In the book of Hebrews we read,
“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord; looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;” (**Hebrews 12:14-15**)

3) How we can grow in Christlike character

- i) **We must firstly have a desire and commitment to grow in Christlike Character.** (*Matthew 16:24-25*) That we ALLOW the Lord to continually do the work of change in our lives. That we have a genuine desire to become more like Christ in our life. This needs to be an ongoing daily choice (Luke 9:23)
- ii) **We need to meditate on the word of God on a regular basis and to allow the word of God to change and transform our lives** (Joshua 1:8) (Romans 12:2)
- iii) **We need to learn to respond to trials and challenges in a right way with faith and perseverance rather than growing bitter.** What God allows us to go through in life is ultimately for our own good. (Romans 8:28-29)
- iv) **We need to be people of prayer who seek God's help in times of trials and temptations.**

In the book of Hebrews we read,

“Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (**Hebrews 4:14-16**)

Jesus Himself said

“Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41)

- v) **We need to make time to spend alone with the Lord. The more intimate our relationship is with the Lord, the more we will want to glorify God with our lives.** (Psalm 37:4) (John 14:21)
- vi) **That we are always faithful in the little things.** (Luke 16:10) Our character is most proven by how we act when we are alone. By what we do in secret. We need to have integrity at all times, because though others may not see what we are doing in secret, God sees everything that we do in life.
- vii) **That we need to continually have a right perspective with money.** As Christians we are only stewards of what God entrusts to our care. Money is a good servant but a poor master. The bible is full of scriptures that encourage us to master money so that it does not master or run our own lives. (Luke 16:11) (Matthew 6:24) (1 Timothy 6:7-11)
- viii) **We need to keep short accounts with God and be quick to forgive others.** We need to ASK God for a repentant heart. (1 John 1:9)
- ix) **The importance of quickly heeding the promptings and counsel of the Holy Spirit.** This is a great key to keeping the pipeline of communication open with God. We need to learn to be quick to respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit when He addresses areas in our life that need to be changed.

x) **We need to be continually quick to take all wrong thoughts captive before they take us captive. We need to replace wrong thoughts with Christ centred thoughts.** (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) We need to win the battle for the mind as believers if we are to become more Christlike and fulfil our full potential in Christ. The enemy will continually try and bombard our mind with wrong and discouraging thoughts.

Having enough sleep helps us to win the battle for the mind. On the other hand when we have not had enough sleep and are tired, we are more prone to allowing wrong thoughts to establish strongholds in our mind.

xi) **WE NEED TO HAVE A TEACHABLE SPIRIT** (Proverbs 19:20) (Proverbs 10:17)

xii) **We need to choose our friends wisely and seek to have godly role models in our life** (Proverbs 13:20)

xiii) **We need to learn to continually walk in the Spirit.** (Galatians 5:16) (Galatians 5:22-25) That we do not always yield to our fleshly nature (Galatians 5:19-21)

xiv) **We need to keep our FOCUS on the eternal things** (Matthew 6:19-21) – **As believers we are in the world but not of it.** (John 15:19) (John 17:14-16) We must not allow the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and desires for other things to enter into our lives and to pull us away from wholeheartedly living for God. (Mark 4:18-19) We need to continually set our mind on things above. (Colossians 3:1-2) We will all one day as believers stand before the judgement seat of Christ to be rewarded for our life here on earth. (2 Corinthians 5:9-10) With this in mind it encourages us to live a godly life and to follow God's plan for our life. (Ephesians 2:10)

xv) **We need to be disciplined in what we look at and listen to** (Philippians 4:8) If we allow wrong things into our eye gaits and ears we can begin to develop wrong desires. Once these wrong desires develop we are then prone to stumbling into sin.

We see this in the book of James;

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.” **(James 1:12-16)**

xvi) We need to have a clear God given vision for our life. (Proverbs 29:18) This helps us to remain disciplined and focused in our walk with the Lord.

The Apostle Paul emphasised the importance of knowing the will of God for our life when he wrote,

“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” **(Ephesians 5:15-17)**

xvii) The importance of being continually filled with the Holy Spirit

Being continually filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, is a great safeguard against the spirit of deception that is now prevalent in the world.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,” **(1 Timothy 4:1)**

Being continually filled with the Holy Spirit helps us to live an overcoming and victorious Christian life.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,” **(Ephesians 5:18)**

The Apostle Paul also wrote,

“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” **(Ephesians 3:17-19)**

AND

xviii) That we always have a commitment to glorifying God with our life.

(That we continually choose to be God pleasers rather than man pleasers)

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” **(1 Corinthians 10:31)**

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” **(Colossians 3:17)**

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” **(Colossians 3:23-24)**

IN CONCLUSION:

Growing in Christ-like character is a great key to fulfilling our God given destiny. When we look at the bible we see that godly integrity was a trait of those leaders that were used in a mighty way by God.

- Moses was the meekest man in the world, (Numbers 12:3)
- Joseph refused to compromise when confronted with temptations to sin, (Genesis 39:6-13)
- Nehemiah was a man of prayer and integrity, (Nehemiah 1:11)
- The Apostle Paul was completely set apart to glorify God with his life, (Galatians 2:20) (Philippians 3:7-8)
- King David was a man after God's own heart and committed to doing the will of God for his life, (Acts 13:22) and
- Joshua was a faithful assistant to Moses before being raised up to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land. (Joshua 1:1-3)

As Christians we need to be simply committed to allowing the Lord to do the work of change in our lives, as we choose to submit to the unction and urging of the Holy Spirit to live in a right way.

In the book of Hebrews we read of the importance of progressing and growing in our walk with the Lord,

“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.” **(Hebrews 6:1-2)**

Growing in Christlike character is the key to promotion in the Kingdom of God and to experiencing God's ongoing favour and blessing upon our lives. In the long run we will experience the benefits that come from living a godly lifestyle such as having good relationships, fulfilled lives and enjoying good health and long life.

We are now living in the lawless days that the Apostle Paul wrote about. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) If we are truly to have credibility as leaders and to be the salt and the light as believers in the world, it is crucial that we live our lives with godly integrity and a passion for the things of God.

Growing in Christlike character is also a great key to remaining strong in our faith, especially given the times that we are now living in, where we see lawlessness on the increase and greater opposition to the things of God.

The Apostle Peter wrote,

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” **(1 Peter 5:8-9)**

Jesus Himself emphasised the importance of letting our light so shine before men that they would see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16) In the book of James we also read about the importance of our faith also being reflected in the good works that flow out of our genuine love for the Lord. That faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:14-22)

In a world that is full of compromise, it is so important that we do not as Christians become conformed to this world, but continue to set ourselves apart for God's Kingdom plan for our life, being in the world but not of it. (Romans 12:2)

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus, to the glory and praise of God.” **(Philippians 1:9-11)**

So may I encourage you to seek to grow in Christlike character, so that you can *fully embrace* all that God has planned for your life and that your life would make a great difference in the lives of many for eternity as you seek to glorify God with your life here on earth.

Living a godly life is a great key to prospering in every area of our life.

The Apostle John wrote,

“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.” **(3 John 2)**

Like the Apostle Paul we want to be able to say at the end of our time here on earth,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” **(2 Timothy 4:7-8)**

**THE MOST
POWERFUL
TESTIMONY
IS A
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