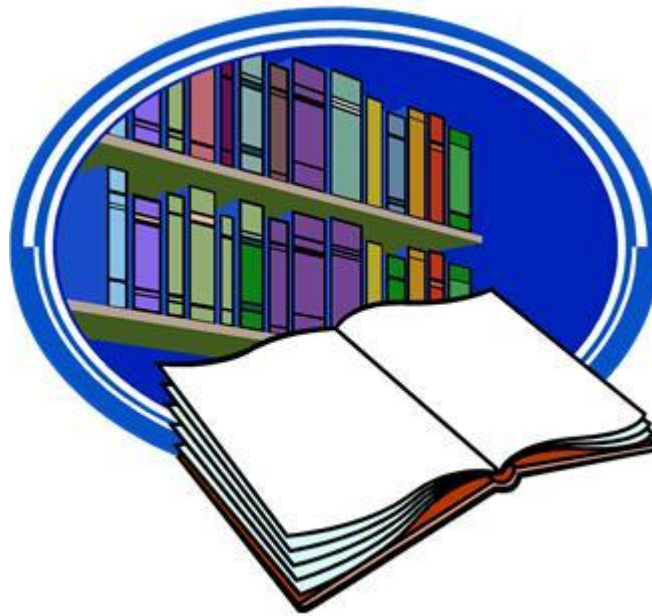


NEW BELIEVER'S TRAINING MANUAL

(To help all Christians to establish a firm foundation for their faith)



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INTRODUCTION:

This manual has been put together with the purpose of helping all new (and also) older Christians to establish a firm foundation for their faith. God has much in store for every believer's life. We must never limit what God can do through our lives. It is important that every believer grows strong in their faith, so that they will be overcomers and fulfill all that God has planned and purposed for their life.

When we fulfill God's plan and purpose for our life, others will also become believers and fulfill God's plan for their life. We all have an important part to play within the Body of Christ and we all need one another. When all believers flow in their gifts and callings the church makes a great impact on the world.

God has a good plan and purpose for every believer. The Apostle Paul wrote:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." (Ephesians 3:20)

We pray that this book will be a blessing to all who read it. Just believe that your life can make a big impact in this world for Jesus and for eternity.

Please refer to our Church of Hope website www.coh.org.au for more teachings and **our Doctrinal beliefs** to help you to grow further in your faith. These teachings can be downloaded from our website and used for bible studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The major source of information for the study of the six doctrines of the Christian faith came from "The Spirit Filled Believer's Handbook" by Derek Prince* and from studies compiled by Michael Zombos.

***Prince D. L., *The Spirit Filled Believers Handbook (Foundations for Christian Living From the Bible)*, Creation House, 1995.**

All other teachings were put together by Conrad Fenton from Church of Hope Inc.

All Scriptures quoted came from the New King James Bible.

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THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

- God's desire is that every person would be saved and have a personal relationship with Him forever (1 Timothy 2:3-4) (2 Peter 3:9)
- No matter how bad a past we may have had, no matter how many mistakes we may have made in life, God wants to have a relationship with every person (1 Timothy 1:15) (John 3:16)
- Because Jesus Christ chose to come into this world to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, we can all be forgiven of our sins and have access to God's presence forever. This happens the moment we repent of our sins and put our faith and trust in Christ alone for our salvation. In the book of Acts we read, "Repent therefore and be converted, *that your sins may be blotted out*, so that *times of refreshing* may come from the *presence of the Lord*." (Acts 3:19)
- Because Jesus Christ conquered the grave and arose from the dead three days later, we have a living hope and we can experience the resurrection life that is found in Christ the moment we become a believer. (Romans 8:11) (Ephesians 3:20)
- All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved (Acts 2:21) (John 1:12)
- This teaching simply explains the gospel message, (the gospel of grace) and helps to clarify what you have done in praying the sinner's prayer.

BELOW IS ONE SUGGESTED PRAYER TO HELP YOU TO GIVE YOUR LIFE TO JESUS CHRIST IN RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE, IF YOU HAVE NOT YET DONE SO. (It is this prayer coming from your heart that makes this commitment to Jesus Christ real in your own life, no matter what words you may use in expressing this prayer) Today Jesus stands knocking at the door of your heart.

Father God today I confess that I have sinned against You, but today I choose to repent of my sins and turn to You to follow Your plan for My life. I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for all of my sins and that He arose from the dead three days later. Today I invite You Jesus to come into my heart and life to be my Lord and Saviour and best friend from this day on. Amen

WE WILL NOW LOOK AT THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

ETERNAL LIFE IS A FREE GIFT

“The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23b)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

BECAUSE ETERNAL LIFE IS A GIFT WE CANNOT EARN IT NOR DO WE DESERVE IT

The bible says that no amount of personal effort, doing good things, or even being religious, can earn eternal life:

“It is the gift of God, NOT OF WORKS, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8c-9)

IF GOD DID NOT OFFER EACH OF US A PLACE IN HEAVEN AS A GIFT, NO-ONE WOULD GET THERE, BECAUSE

EVERYONE HAS SINNED

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

“There is none righteous, no, not one;” (Romans 3:10a)

“But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;” (Isaiah 64:6a)

“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked;...” (Jer. 17:9)

“All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6)

We all have our own standards for what sin is. But when it comes to heaven, only God’s standard is relevant. To God, **hate and lust** are sins just as much as murder or adultery, because both express selfishness and ignorance of His Law.

The greatest commandments are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to care for others as much as we care for ourselves. Every time we fail to love in this manner, we are sinning. That is why the Bible says: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” **(Romans 3:23)**

WE CAN DO NOTHING TO SAVE OURSELVES

The reason we cannot save ourselves is because we all miss the mark and fall short of God's standard of absolute perfection.

"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

No matter how good we are, any sin, no matter how trivial it may appear to be, spoils the perfection that God requires.

"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all." (James 2:10)

Whilst some people are better than others, being better is not good enough. It is like two people trying to jump across a deep chasm. If one falls only a couple of feet short of the other side, he is no better off than the other who only makes it half way.

BECAUSE WE HAVE ALL SINNED, NONE OF US ARE ABLE TO SAVE OURSELVES. NO ONE WOULD BE GOOD ENOUGH TO GET TO HEAVEN. HOWEVER IN CHRIST, GOD OFFERS US ETERNAL LIFE AS A FREE GIFT.

Why should God offer anyone the gift of eternal life?

BECAUSE GOD IS LOVING AND MERCIFUL, HE DOES NOT WANT TO PUNISH US

"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works." (Psalm 145:8-9)

"For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations." (Psalm 100:5)

"For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm." (Joel 2:13c)

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6-8)

In fact the bible says, "... for God is love" (1 John 4:8)

**HOWEVER, BECAUSE GOD IS PERFECTLY JUST, HE
MUST ALSO PUNISH SIN**

God's love does not overrule His justice.

**"Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He."
(Deuteronomy 32:3b-4)**

"For I will not justify the wicked." (Exodus 23:7c)

"I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity;" (Isaiah 13:11)

**"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."
(Hebrews 9:27)**

**IF GOD WAS TO OVERLOOK OUR SIN BECAUSE OF HIS LOVE, HE
WOULD NO LONGER BE JUST. HIS LAW IS PERFECT AND HIS
SENTENCE HAS BEEN PASSED... *"THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH"*
(Romans 6:23a)**

**HOWEVER GOD HAS BROUGHT HIS LOVE AND
HIS JUSTICE TOGETHER IN THE PERSON OF
JESUS CHRIST**

**THE BIBLE MAKES IT CLEAR THAT JESUS IS GOD
JESUS WAS FULLY GOD YET ALSO FULLY MAN**

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1&14)

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." (Matthew 1:23)

JESUS CHRIST CAME INTO THE WORLD TO PAY THE PENALTY FOR OUR SINS AND TO FULFIL GOD'S JUSTICE

WITHOUT CHRIST, EACH ONE OF US WOULD STAND CONDEMNED BEFORE GOD BECAUSE OF OUR SINS. HOWEVER BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR US, HE HAS PUT OUR SINS ONTO JESUS.

- **Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and to fulfil God's justice**
- **On the third day He arose from the dead and is alive forevermore**
- **Jesus gives the gift of eternal life to all those who RECEIVE Him (believe in Him)**
- **This is why we celebrate Easter**

This is the simple gospel message which must be preached to the unbelievers. (Refer to Rom. 1:16-17, 1 Cor. 1:17-24, 1 Cor. 2:1-5, 1 Cor. 4:20 and Acts 8:4-8) “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” **(Romans 5:8)**

THE DEATH OF JESUS ON THE CROSS HAS REPAIRED OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. WE ALL NOW HAVE A WAY OF COMING INTO HIS PRESENCE, HOLY, PURE AND FAULTLESS

Jesus Himself said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE IS FOR **WHOEVER** BELIEVES IN HIM. **WHOEVER INCLUDES YOU!**

YOU CAN RECEIVE THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH FAITH

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” **(Ephesians 2:8-9)**

Relying on your own efforts or even human logic, or even religious activity, cannot save you. Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to be forgiven by God and to receive the gift of eternal life.

HOW DO WE RECEIVE THIS GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE BY FAITH?

WE MUST TRANSFER OUR TOTAL TRUST TO JESUS CHRIST ALONE

We must simply **BELIEVE** what God has done for us, and **ACCEPT** His offer of eternal life and **TRUST** Jesus Christ alone. There is no other way.

WE NEED TO REPENT OF ALL OF OUR SINS

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.” **(Acts 3:19)**

REPENTANCE IS LIKE DOING A U-TURN

- 1) It is recognising that we are going in the wrong direction***
- 2) It is owning up to God and asking for His forgiveness, and***
- 3) Choosing to go in the opposite direction – HIS WAY***

TURNING FROM OUR OWN WAY TO GOD’S WAY IS ACKNOWLEDGING THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD OF OUR LIFE

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” **(Galatians 2:20)**

GOD KNOWS WHAT IS BEST FOR US. WE CAN TRUST HIM TO LEAD US INTO THE FULLNESS OF LIFE THAT HE WANTS US TO EXPERIENCE.

Jesus said, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” **(John 10:10)**

FULLNESS OF LIFE ONLY COMES WHEN WE LIVE OUR LIFE HIS WAY.

Jesus said, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; ...” **(John 14:23)**

GOD’S SPIRIT (THE HOLY SPIRIT) GIVES EVERY BELIEVER THE POWER TO LIVE AN OVERCOMING LIFE

OBEYING GOD INCLUDES DOING SOME NEW THINGS IN OUR LIFE AND DOING SOME THINGS DIFFERENTLY. THE BIBLE IS FULL OF WISDOM AND AS WE READ IT, GOD WILL SPEAK THROUGH IT (Psalm 119:133) TO ENCOURAGE US (Psalm 119:107) AND TO GIVE US CLEAR DIRECTION IN LIFE. (Psalm 119:105) (The bible is God's love letter to us) (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." **(John 8:31a-32)**

ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT SAVED BY DOING GOOD WORKS, (ETERNAL LIFE IS A FREE GIFT), **LIVING IN A WAY THAT IS PLEASING TO GOD WILL BE EVIDENCE OF YOUR NEW LIFE AS A BELIEVER, AND WILL CONFIRM THAT JESUS CHRIST IS TRULY LORD OF YOUR LIFE**

THE HOLY SPIRIT GIVES NEW LIFE TO ALL BELIEVERS

THE HOLY SPIRIT ALSO ENABLES AND EMPOWERS BELIEVERS TO WALK IN VICTORY. BEING LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FOLLOWING GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR LIFE, IS THE KEY TO EXPERIENCING ABUNDANT LIFE AS A BELIEVER.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." **(John 3:6)**

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." **(Romans 8:11)**

THE NEW LIFE THAT WE RECEIVE THROUGH GOD'S SPIRIT MEANS THAT WE ARE NOW PART OF A NEW FAMILY

ALL BELIEVERS BECOME PART OF GOD'S FAMILY

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name;" (John 1:12)

Reading the bible, praying to God and finding a church home are all keys to help you to live a victorious life as a believer (Christian). Being part of a vibrant church fellowship will help you to become established in your faith.

"Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing," **(Psalm. 92:13-14)**

TWELVE PROMISES OF GOD FROM THE BIBLE FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

(With supporting Scriptures from the NKJV Bible)

1) THE LORD WILL NEVER LEAVE NOR FORSAKE ANY BELIEVER

“...For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”
(Hebrew 13:5-6)

“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)

2) WE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE (Death no longer has any sting)

Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:1-3)

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And **whoever** lives and believes in Me shall never die...” (John 11:25-26)

3) WHEN WE COME TO CHRIST ALL OF OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN AND FORGOTTEN (No more shame or guilt)

King David wrote, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, And **forget not all His benefits**; Who forgives all your iniquities...” (Psalm 103:2)

“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.” (Isaiah 43:25)

4) GOD PROMISES TO MEET OUR EVERY NEED

Jesus said, Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ Or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”
(Matthew 6:31-33)

The Apostle Paul wrote, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)

In the book of Malachi we see one of the promises of God, “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,” Says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.” “And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” Says the LORD of hosts;” (Malachi 3:10-11)

5) ALL OF THE PROMISES IN THE BIBLE ARE AVAILABLE TO ALL BELIEVERS

The Apostle Paul wrote, “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.” **(2 Corinthians 1:20)**

6) WE HAVE A HOPE FOR THE FUTURE – GOD IS FOR YOU

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” **(Jeremiah 29:11)**

Jesus Himself said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” **(John 10:10)**

King David wrote, “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvellous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth **(that is your mother’s womb)**. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You.” **(Psalm 139:13-18)**

The Apostle Paul wrote, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” **(Romans 8:31)**

7) GOD HEARS AND ANSWERS ALL OF OUR PRAYERS THAT ARE IN LINE WITH HIS WILL FOR OUR LIFE – NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD

“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. **(1 John 5:14-15)**

Jesus Himself said, “Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” **(Mark 11:22-24)**

“Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” **(Mark 9:23)**

8) WE CAN WALK IN DIVINE HEALTH – JESUS CAN HEAL OUR INFIRMITIES

“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and **by His stripes we are healed.** **(Isaiah 53:5)**

Jesus said, “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My Name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” **(Mark 16:17-18)**

The Apostle Peter wrote, “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness-by whose stripes you were healed.” **(1 Peter 2:24)**

9) GOD’S STRENGTH IS MADE PERFECT IN OUR WEAKNESS

“The Lord said to the apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” **(2 Corinthians 12:9)**

The Apostle Paul wrote, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” **(Philippians 4:13)** **The Apostle Paul also emphasised that though we will all go through trials as believers**, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” **(Romans 8:37)**

In the book of Isaiah we read, “He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint. **(Isaiah 40:29-31)**

King David wrote, “Wait on the Lord; Be of **good courage**, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord.” **(Psalm 27:14)**

10) GOD CAN OPEN UP DOORS THAT NO MAN CAN CLOSE

“These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”: I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” **(Revelation 3:7-8)**

Jesus Himself said, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” **(Matthew 7:7-8)**

11) GOD IS SOVEREIGN IN ALL OF OUR CIRCUMSTANCES – NOTHING CAN HAPPEN TO US UNLESS GOD ALLOWS IT

Jesus said, “And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. **For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.**” **(Matthew 6:7-8)**

Jesus said also said, “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will...Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” **(Matthew 10:29 & 31)**

In the book of Isaiah we read, “No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is from Me,” says the LORD.” **(Isaiah 54:17)**

The Apostle John wrote, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater that he who is in the world.” **(1 John 4:4)**

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.” **(Philippians 1:6)**

12) GOD IS ABLE TO TURN AROUND IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS – HE CAN REDEEM LIVES FROM DESTRUCTION

Jesus said, “...I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” **(Matthew 17:20)**

King David wrote, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, And **forget not all His benefits**; Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, **who redeems your life from destruction**, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” **(Psalm 103:2-5)**

The Lord spoke to the Prophet Jeremiah when he was in prison, “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.” **(Jeremiah 33:3)**

THE BIBLE IS FULL OF EXAMPLES OF HOW GOD TURNED AROUND IMPOSSIBLE CIRCUMSTANCES. JUST FOUR OF THESE INCLUDE:

- **The Red sea parting to allow the children of Israel to escape the Egyptian army (Exodus Chapter 14)**
- **The walls of Jericho falling down after Joshua and his army had marched around the city (Joshua 6:1-20)**
- **Water being turned into wine at a wedding that Jesus attended (John 2:1-11), and**
Lazarus being raised from the dead (John 11:1-44)

THE SIX DOCTRINES OF OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH

The Apostle Paul wrote, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” **(1 Corinthians 3:11)**

Our right standing with God (being justified) comes only out of being in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. **(1 Timothy 2:5) (John 14:6) (John 3:3 & 5) (Acts 4:12)**

The Apostle Paul also wrote, “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” **(2 Corinthians 5:21)**

Only through believing in Jesus Christ can we be saved from our sins. Jesus Himself said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” **(John 3:16-18)**

Salvation (Eternal life) is a free gift. We cannot earn it, nor do we deserve it. We can do nothing to save ourselves as we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) We must all just simply receive the gift of eternal life by faith, by coming to Jesus Christ and accepting His offer of eternal life through repentance and faith in Him. **(Acts 20:21)** The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

In the book of Hebrews we see listed the six doctrines of our faith. “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)**

In this passage of Scripture six doctrines of our faith are identified:

1) Repentance from dead works, 2) Faith toward God, 3) The doctrine of baptisms, 4) Laying on of hands, 5) Resurrection of the dead, and 6) Eternal Judgment.

These six doctrines of our faith will now be discussed in turn.

i) REPENTANCE FROM DEAD WORKS

True repentance must always precede true faith. Without such repentance, faith alone is an empty profession. Christ and His apostles preached “Repent and believe.” Any preacher who leaves out the call to repentance is misleading sinners and misrepresenting God. Jesus Himself made it clear to those who told Him about the Galileans who had been killed by Pilate, “...unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (**Luke 13:3**)

WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT

- **Repentance is not the conviction of sin.** Conviction brings people to repentance. However many people go to the altar feeling guilty of their sin, but are not willing to let go of their sin.
- **Repentance is not remorse.** A person may have remorse over what they have done, but not wish to repent of what they have done. A person can stand before a judge with tears in his eyes, feeling sorry for himself, not wanting to go to jail, yet not sorry for breaking the law.
- **Repentance is not just a determination to do better (Reformation).** Many people make New Years resolutions, however they do not last long. Whilst repentance does involve reformation, if God is not involved in the reformation, if it is not based on the work of the cross, then it is not repentance and it will ultimately fail. Unrepentant Christians are most likely to be caught up in religious works.
- **Repentance is not just being religious.** People can even serve in a church and raise their hand and even shout “Hallelujah” but still not repent.
- **Repentance is not “just believism.”** Repentance is not just an emotional feeling.

WHY WE NEED TO REPENT

Repentance is necessary because we have all sinned. “For all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.” (**Romans 3:23**) There are around 103 sins defined in the Bible in every category imaginable, however the root of all these sins is the same. This root is the rejection of the rule and ways of God, due to unbelief. This root of unbelief must be dealt with through repentance.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” **(John 3:16)** The need for repentance must be focused on the condition of a person’s heart before a Holy God. The Prophet Jeremiah said, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?” **(Jeremiah 17:9)**

A person who has not repented is simply committed to going his own way and doing his own thing apart from God.

WHAT IS TRUE REPENTANCE

TRUE repentance has two compulsory components:

- 1) **TRUE REPENTANCE** is based on a recognition that we have sinned. It is the supernatural power of God that has been placed in the gospel, which enables a person to repent. **(God’s saving Grace)**

- 2) **TRUE REPENTANCE** also involves a recognition that we are responsible to turn from our sins to God. Repentance is an inner change of mind resulting in an outward turning back, or turning around, to face and to move in a completely new direction. ***This turning around has three elements. A turning from sin and dead works, a turning to God, and an intent to serve Him and to obey His commands.***

ii) FAITH TOWARD GOD

After a person repents, he must then make a personal response to the gospel.

THE BASIC FACTS OF THE GOSPEL ARE:

- 1) *Christ was delivered by God the Father to the punishment of death on account of our sins*
- 2) *Christ was buried*
- 3) *God raised Him from the dead on the third day, and*
- 4) *Righteousness is received from God through **believing** these facts*

To receive salvation and the gift of eternal life, each individual soul must make a **direct personal response to Christ.**

THIS PERSONAL RESPONSE TO CHRIST CAN BE DESCRIBED IN MANY WAYS:

i) Calling upon the Name of Christ as Lord

"For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Romans 10:13)

ii) Coming to Christ

Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matt. 11:28) "...and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." (John 6:37b)

iii) Personally receiving Christ

"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:11-13)

iv) Drinking of the water of life, which Christ alone can give

Jesus said, "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14)

Each individual soul must make a direct personal response to Christ from the heart. Jesus said, "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him and he with Me." (Revelations 3:20)

iii) THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISMS

“There are two Christian Baptisms. One is the Water Baptism and the other is being Baptised in the Holy Spirit by Jesus. They will now be discussed in turn.

WATER BAPTISM

“The bible makes it clear that water baptism is not an optional extra. Jesus Himself was baptized, even though He had no need to repent of sin. **(Mark 1:9)** Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize new believers. **(Matthew 28:19)** Water baptism is for all believers. **(Mark 16:16)** *Water Baptism is an outward expression of what has already taken place in the heart of the new believer.*

Before a person is baptized he must have first repented of his sins and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. **(Acts 16:30-33)** Water Baptism, or baptism by full immersion, is also called the “Believers Baptism”

Baptism speaks of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we follow the Lord’s command to be baptized, we identify with Him in this way. When you accepted Christ as your Saviour, your sins were forgiven – you became “dead” to your past life.

(2 Corinthians. 5:17) Baptism signifies this death. The water into which you are immersed is like a “grave” and indicates that you were buried with Christ. As you rise from the water you testify that you are now a new creation, rising to newness of life (resurrection power) in Christ Jesus. **(Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12)**

In Water Baptism we identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” **(Galatians 2:20)** Water Baptism also helps to enable a new believer to separate themselves from their ‘old man’, which was dead in sin, whilst reinforcing their commitment to walk in the newness of life in Christ Jesus. **(Romans 6:1-14)**

BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Once a person becomes a Christian, God has another wonderful gift for them - the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift is known as the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Bible speaks much about this experience. John the Baptist spoke of it, and revealed that Jesus is the Baptiser with the Holy Spirit. **(Mark 1:8)** The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is described in a number of different ways, each way referring to an aspect of this wonderful act:

- i) **Baptism in the Holy Spirit** (John 1:33) – which means immersion into the Spirit
- ii) **Gifts of the Spirit** (1 Corinthians 12) – emphasizing the gift aspect
- iii) **Receiving the Spirit** (Acts 19:2) – referring to the actual moment of reception
- iv) **Filled with the Spirit** (Acts 2:4) – suggesting something poured into a person

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is also spoken of as the promise from the Father, which the disciples were to wait for (**Luke 24:29**), and which they received on the day of Pentecost. (**Acts 2:33**)

Before a person can receive the Holy Spirit, they must be saved (Born Again). (**Acts 19:2a**)

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the submerging of the whole being into the Spirit of God. It is being filled with the Holy Spirit Who Himself is a living person.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to minister to others. Jesus promised His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came upon them they would receive power to be His witnesses. (**Act 1:8**) After receiving the Holy Spirit, all the disciples become powerful preachers. Being Baptised in the Holy Spirit enables all believers to witness with greater joy and freedom, and with much more boldness when sharing with others who Jesus is, and what He has done for them. It also helps believers to enter into a richer spiritual awareness of the Lord.

God has given a lasting sign as evidence that we have been baptised in the Holy Spirit. That sign is speaking in tongues, or praying in the Spirit. (**Mark 16:17 and Acts 2:4**) The language that you receive when baptised in the Holy Spirit, is not one that you have learnt with the mind. However, you must use your own mouth and tongue to speak the words that God will give you.

The bible says that God gives good gifts. (**James 1:17a**) The Holy Spirit is one such good and perfect gift from God. **The baptism of the Holy Spirit is available to all believers.** Jesus said, "If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." (**Luke 11:13**) When Jesus baptises us with the Holy Spirit, He does so in a very personal way, a way that seems to suit our individual lives and personalities.

For some it is at home alone and for others after being prayed for by other Christians. This was very common in the early house churches, (**Acts 8:17, Acts 19:6**), but not always so. (**Acts 10:44-46**) The basic requirement for receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit is defined by the Apostle Paul as the hearing of faith. Six steps of faith and obedience, which help a person to be Baptised in the Holy Spirit, are:

- 1) Repentance** (Acts 3:19) **and 2) Water Baptism** (Acts 2:38)
- 3) Being Thirsty and Hungry for more of the Spirit** (John 7:37-38, Matt. 5:6)
- 4) Asking for the Holy Spirit** (Luke 11:13)
- 5) Drinking (Active process of receiving)** (John 7:37 and Psalm 81:10), and
- 6) Yielding (Surrender of will, physical members and intellect)** (Rom. 6:13)

4) LAYING ON OF HANDS

The fourth foundational doctrine of the Christian Faith is that which is called “Laying on of hands” The laying on of hands is used on a number of occasions for specific purposes. These include:

i) **Transmitting a spiritual blessing or authority to the one upon whom hands are laid:**

In the Old Testament, Joseph brought his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh to his father Jacob, and Jacob blessed them by laying his hands on them. **(Gen. 48:14)**

Believers can also lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. **(Mark 16:17-18)**

Christians can also lay hands on other believers who are seeking the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This was common in the early church. **(Acts 8:18)**

HOWEVER, THE SCRIPTURE ALSO WARNS US THAT THIS ORDINANCE OF LAYING HANDS UPON BELIEVERS IS NOT TO BE PRACTICED LIGHTLY OR CARELESSLY.

Paul told Timothy, “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.” (1 Timothy 5:22)

The next purpose for laying on of hands is the imparting of spiritual gifts (Especially the gift of prophecy). The Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome saying,

“For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established – that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” **(Romans 1:11-12)**

The Apostle Paul told Timothy, “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.” **(2 Timothy 1:6)**

ii) Acknowledging publicly some spiritual blessing or authority already received from God by the one upon whom hands are laid:

The Lord told Moses to lay hands on Joshua to inaugurate him in the sight of the congregation and to give some of his authority to him. **(Numbers 27:18-20)**

This action produced a tremendous result in Joshua. Now Joshua was full of the spirit of wisdom, and the children of Israel heeded him. **(Deuteronomy 34:9)**

iii) Publicly committing to God for some special task or ministry the one upon whom hands are laid:

When the Holy Spirit said for Barnabas and Saul to be separated for the work to which He had called them, the Church Elders at Antioch laid hands on them and sent them away.

The Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” **(Acts 13:2)**

“Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” **(Acts 13:3)**

THE APPOINTMENT OF DEACONS AND ELDERS IS ANOTHER NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLE OF WHERE THE ORDINANCE OF LAYING ON OF HANDS IS USED.

(Acts 6:1-6 {deacons} and Acts 14:21-23 {Elders most likely})

5) RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

The fifth of the foundational doctrines that are listed in Hebrews 6:1-2 is 'Resurrection of the dead.' The first four doctrines relate to this present time, *however this and the last doctrine* relate to the realm of eternity. There are two universal, irrevocable appointments of God: resurrection and judgment. To this universal appointment of resurrection from the dead, the Bible admits only one class of exceptions, those who never die. (These include those Christians who will be raptured, Enoch, Elijah and those who become righteous during the millennium rule of Christ and never die).

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10) **Judgment concerns the things done in the body while on earth. As it is for the things done in the body that man must answer, God has ordained that man should appear in his body before Him to answer for those things.**

Therefore resurrection of the body must precede eternal judgment.

There are two diverging destinies for those who die as believers and those who die having rejected Christ. After death there is a complete and permanent separation between the departed spirits of the righteous and the wicked. Prior to Christ's resurrection, the departed spirits of the righteous were consigned to a certain area of Sheol, the netherworld, which was called "Paradise". Since Christ's death and resurrection, the spirits of all believers who die, ascend immediately and directly into heaven and into the presence of God Himself. **(2 Corinthians 5:6, 8)**

For those who die as unbelievers, the dark angel of Death who is a minister of Satan's infernal kingdom, claims their spirit and gives it to another of Satan's dark angels called Hades. Hades takes charge of all the spirits of the unrighteous that he receives from the angel of Death and then conducts them to their appointed place of imprisonment.

However for all believers we can be comforted by the words of Jesus,

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die..." (John 11:25-26)

"Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." (John 8:51) AND

"that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:15)

The believer's resurrection body will be incorruptible, immortal (incapable of death), a body of beauty and glory (free from all of man's present limitations), and it will be raised up from the grave by the power of the almighty God.

This contrasts with our earthly bodies which are corruptible and subject to sickness, decay, old age and death, and which are a continual source of humiliation as we struggle with sin, physical needs and limitations, and finally which is committed to the grave in weakness.

The total resurrection of the righteous, from the moment of Christ's own resurrection down to the resurrection of the tribulation martyrs, (just prior to the millennium), is called by the apostle John, "The First Resurrection." All those who take part in this resurrection are "blessed and holy," that is, they are all righteous believers:

They include, **i)** Christ Himself, and those of the Old Testament saints who were resurrected at the time that He was resurrected, **ii)** "those who are Christ's at His coming" (being those who died in the faith), **iii)** the two witnesses of the tribulation period, and **iv)** the remainder of the tribulation martyrs, who are resurrected at the close of the tribulation period, and who will share with Christ and the other saints the privilege of ruling and judging the nations on earth.

The "Final Resurrection" will be mainly for "the spiritually dead" (Those who died in sin and unbelief) and who were not written in the Book of Life. They will be cast into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:11-15) However, there are two categories of people in the "Final Resurrection" who will be delivered from condemnation. These are the righteous who died during Christ's millennial reign on earth, and the queen of the South (Sheba) and the men of Nineveh referred to by Jesus, who were never granted a revelation of Christ's atoning sacrifice. (Luke 11:31-32)

6) ETERNAL JUDGMENT

The sixth and last of the foundational doctrines is Eternal Judgment. Every person will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Several scriptures make this very clear.

“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.” (Romans 14:10a)

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, ...” (2 Corin. 5:10a)

Each person will be judged according to the things that he did in the body here on earth. God’s judgment is tempered by His mercy and grace, which was manifested in the mediatorial office and the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The blood of Jesus pleads for mercy and forgiveness for the sinner.

“For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” **(Romans 5:6-9)**

In the first instance and by sovereign eternal right, judgment belongs to God the Father. The Apostle Peter speaks of “the Father who without partiality judges according to each one’s work” **(1 Peter 1:17)** Here judgment of all men is declared to be the office of God the Father. However in chapter five of John, Christ reveals that the Father has chosen in His sovereign wisdom to commit all judgment to the Son.

“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him.” **(John 5:22-23)** “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.” **(John 5:26-27)**

Because Christ is also the Son of man as well as the Son of God, (Having both a human and divine nature whilst here on earth), in His judgment He is able to make allowance, from His own experience, for all the infirmities and temptations of human flesh. So gracious and merciful, however, is the divine nature in the Son, as like the Father, Christ, too, is unwilling to administer judgment. For this reason He has, in turn transferred the final authority from His own person to the Word of God. Jesus Himself said,

“And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” **(John 12:47-48)**

The final authority of all judgment is vested in the Word of God.

This is the impartial, unchanging standard to which all men must one day answer. This same revelation concerning God’s Word is given in the Old Testament, for David says to God: “The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of your righteous judgments endures forever.” **(Psalm 119:160)** Therefore all the standards and principles of God’s judgment are contained within His Word and endure unchanged forever.

FOUR MAIN PRINCIPLES OF DIVINE JUDGMENT REVEALED IN GOD'S WORD:

1) THAT GOD'S JUDGMENT IS ACCORDING TO TRUTH

"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things." (**Rom. 2:1-2**) Jesus Himself says to the Father, "Your word is truth" (**John 17:17b**)

God's standard does not vary. It is always the truth – the revealed truth of God's Word and it applies just as much to the one who judges as to the one who is judged. (We must all ensure that we apply the truth to ourselves and to our own lives).

2) THAT JUDGMENT WILL BE RENDERED TO EACH ONE ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS

God's judgment is according to our "deeds" In heaven God preserves a complete and flawless record of the entire life of every person. According to this record of his deeds preserved on a heavenly scroll or "book", each person will one day be judged. In the account of the final judgment we read that:

"Books were opened...And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books." (**Revelation 20:12**)

The whole bible makes it plain that God in His judgment of man, takes into account not merely external actions, but also the deepest and most secret thoughts, impulses and motives of the heart.

"In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel" (**Romans 2:16**)

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God." (**1 Corinthians 4:5**)

3) THAT GOD'S JUDGMENT IS WITHOUT PARTIALITY (OR RESPECT OF PERSONS)

Men are often influenced in forming their judgments by such external appearances as race, religion, profession, social position, physical appearance, wealth and education. However God's judgment is not influenced or diverted by any of these things. (God also expects that all those who are charged with judging human affairs should never yield to this influence either).

"For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (**1 Samuel 16:7**)

4) THAT JUDGMENT IS ACCORDING TO THE LIGHT AVAILABLE TO THOSE BEING JUDGED

Each person will be judged according to measure of moral light and understanding which has been made available him. Those who have had the full knowledge of God's moral standards revealed to them through the law of Moses will be judged by that law.

“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law.” **(Romans 2:12)**

But those who have not had the fuller revelation of the law of Moses, will not be judged by the law, but in accordance with the general revelation of God granted to the human race as a whole through the wonders of creation.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so they are without excuse. **(Romans 1:20)**

Whoever receives an additional and special revelation through God's Word however, will be judged by the higher standard of moral knowledge granted to them. Therefore judgment is according to light – according to the measure of moral knowledge granted to each person.

THREE FINAL JUDGMENTS

1) The judgment of Christian believers before the judgment seat of Christ

All true Christians will be judged first and will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. This is made clear in Scripture.

“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now if the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?”
(1 Peter 4:17-18)

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”
(2 Corinthians 5:10)

The judgment of Christians will not be a judgment of condemnation.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” **(Romans 8:1)**

The true believer in Christ will never need to be judged at all for the sins he has committed. When a person comes as a sinner in faith to Christ, receiving Him as Saviour and confessing Him as Lord, the whole record of that person’s past sins is immediately and eternally blotted out by God, never to be remembered anymore.

“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.” **(Isaiah 43:25)**

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” **(1 John 1:9)** “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” **(1 John 2:1-2)**

These two passages teach that if a believer in Christ sins, and thereafter repents and confesses his sin, the record of his sin is erased, and he himself is cleansed from all unrighteousness.

The judgment of Christians will not be in relation to their righteousness, but with their service rendered to Christ. The purpose of the judgment will not be to decide upon either acquittal or condemnation, but rather to assess the reward due to each believer for his service to Christ while on earth.

THE JUDGMENT OF BELIEVERS IS TO DETERMINE THEIR REWARDS

“For no other foundation can anyone lay that that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” **(1 Corinthians 3:11-15)**

2) The judgment of the Gentile nations at the close of the great tribulation – Carried out before the throne of Christ’s glory

After Israel has passed through the fires of the great tribulation and been reconciled again to God through Jesus Christ, there will be no further need for God to judge them. Thereafter, when Christ sets up His earthly Kingdom and takes His seat upon the throne of His Glory, He will need only to judge the Gentile nations remaining alive on earth at the close of the great tribulation.

“When the Son of Man comes in His Glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.” (Matthew 25:31-33)

The purpose of the judgment that follows is to separate the sheep (those whom God accepts) from the goats (those whom God rejects) The sheep will be received into the Kingdom God has prepared for them – that is, Christ’s millennial kingdom. *The goats will have final, irrevocable judgment pronounced upon them, by which they will be banished into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

These rejected Gentiles will not be sent forth to Sheol or Hades but directly to the place of final punishment of all rebels – the lake of fire. Into this lake the beast – the Antichrist – and his false prophet already will have been cast. **The separation between sheep and goats is based upon one decisive issue: the way in which those people being judged have treated the brothers of Jesus; that is, the Jewish people.** The intervention of the Lord against the Gentile nations persecuting the Jews and His final reconciliation with Israel are described in Zechariah.

“It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” (Zechariah 12:9-10)

Once the sheep have been separated from the Goats, the judgment of the Gentile nations will be complete. All those who are accounted worthy to enter into the period of Christ’s millennial kingdom will have passed through the refining judgments of God. Israel will have been purged in the fires of the great tribulation, whilst at the close of the tribulation; the Gentiles will be purged by Christ’s own direct intervention and judgment.

After these purging judgments upon both Jews and Gentiles, there will ensue a thousand years of peace and prosperity, with Christ ruling as King over all the earth. At the close of this period of one thousand years, Satan will make one final attempt to organize the Gentile nations in rebellion against Christ and His Kingdom, but this rebellion will be brought to nought by the direct intervention of God. **At this time Satan himself will at last be banished forever from earth and will be cast into the lake of fire, to join the Antichrist and the false prophet who will already be there. All the rebellious among those living at that time will be purged out.**

“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:7-10)

After this the third of the final judgments will commence.

3) The judgment of all the remaining dead at the close of the millennium – Carried out before a great white throne

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” **(Revelations 20:11-15)**

Here is the ultimate end for those who have sinned and rebelled against the authority and holiness of God: to be cast forever into the lake of everlasting fire. Only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will escape this final judgment. The names recorded in this book are those who during their life on earth availed themselves through repentance and faith, of God’s mercy and grace.

As those who put their faith in Christ’s atoning sacrifice will have been resurrected at the commencement of the millennium, and already appeared before the judgment seat of Christ – not for condemnation, but to assess their reward, it seems that the majority of those who appear before the great white throne will **not** have fulfilled the conditions for receiving God’s mercy and will therefore be condemned to the lake of fire.

However there will definitely be at least two categories of people before the great white throne who will escape condemnation and enter into eternal life.

The first category will consist of people such as the queen of the South and the men of Nineveh, who availed themselves of the mercy, which God offered to them in one brief but decisive revelation of Himself.

Jesus Himself said, “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here.” **(Matthew 12:41-42)**

A second category will consist of all those who died in faith during the millennium.

This study of Hebrews has laid the scriptural foundation of doctrine upon which the faith of every Christian can be firmly built. With these foundations in place, it becomes possible to obey the further exhortation of Hebrews 6:1, “Let us go on to perfection.”

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 1 - HAVING A CLEAR GOD GIVEN VISION FOR OUR LIFE

INTRODUCTION:

This is the first of a series of one page teachings which will give keys to leading a fruitful and overcoming Christian life. Each teaching will include one key with seven points to reflect on (one per day). Each point will also contain one or more scriptures to meditate on, to help people to implement these keys in their own life. The first key is having a clear God given vision for our life. (All Scriptures come from the New King James Bible.)

WHY DO WE NEED A CLEAR GOD GIVEN VISION FOR OUR LIFE?

- 1) IT GIVES US A CLEAR FOCUS IN LIFE** (We have one life to store up treasures for eternity. Having a clear God given vision for our life helps us to make the most of our life. Having a clear vision for our life helps us to number our days. Each day once lived can never be regained. Each day of our life is a gift from God. Knowing and following God's will for our life, enables us to make the most of every day of our life here on earth.)

The Lord said to the Prophet Habakkuk, "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it." **(Habakkuk 2:2a)**

- 2) WE ARE BETTER ABLE TO MAKE RIGHT CHOICES IN LIFE** (Our future is determined by the choices that we make today. Having a clear vision helps us to make wise choices in life each day. We cannot change our past but we can make wise choices in the future. Having a clear Kingdom focus for our life helps us to be disciplined when we face temptations and trials.)

In the book of Proverbs we read, "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law." **(Proverbs 29:18)**

- 3) WE CAN PRAYERFULLY MAKE PLANS TO SEE THE VISION COME TO PASS** (With a clear vision for our life we can make plans to see the vision come to pass. As we continually commit our plans to the Lord He will guide and direct our every step in life. As we are faithful in the little things God begins to enlarge His vision for our life. A clear vision for our life helps us to make plans and to take steps of action to see the vision come to pass.)

In the book of Proverbs we read, "The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty." **(Proverbs 21:5) and**

"Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established." **(Proverbs 16:3)**

- 4) GOD HAS A UNIQUE PLAN FOR EVERY BELIEVER'S LIFE** (His plan leads to abundant life. The moment a person enters into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ they also enter into God's plan for their life. As believers we must continually maintain a close and intimate walk with the Lord, so as to ensure that we stay on course with what God has planned for our life. Given the times that we are now living in, it is imperative that every believer knows God's will for their life. Jesus Himself warned that in the last days many would be offended and betray one another and because of lawlessness, the love of many would grow cold. **(Matthew 24:10 & 13)** God's unique plan for every believer's life is full of purpose and meaning, but not exempt of problems.)

Maintaining an intimate walk with the Lord is crucial in the times that we are living in and is the key to continually knowing the will of God for our life.

The Apostle Paul 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**)

The Apostle Paul also wrote, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (**Ephesians 2:10**)

Jesus Himself said, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (**John 10:10**)

- 5) GOD’S PLAN FOR OUR LIFE IS FAR GREATER THAN WHAT WE COULD EVER IMAGINE** (God is never limited by our ability but only by our availability. If we wholeheartedly follow God’s plan for our life we will see Him performing great things in and through our life. God’s strength is made perfect in our weakness and He empowers us to do great tasks for His glory. He is also able to redeem our lives from the deepest of pits and to turn around the circumstances in our life for our good.)

Jesus said, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” (**Mark 9:23**)

In the book of Isaiah we read, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.” (**Isaiah 55:8-9**)

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” (**Ephesians 3:20**)

- 6) IF WE TRUST IN THE LORD AND COMMIT OUR PLANS TO HIM HE WILL DIRECT OUR STEPS**

In the book of Proverbs we read, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” (**Proverbs 3:5-6**)

- 7) WHEN WE PUT JESUS CHRIST FIRST IN OUR LIFE HE PROMISES TO MEET OUR EVERY NEED** (As we seek and follow God’s plan for our life all that we need in life will be added to us)

Jesus Himself said, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?”

So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (**Matthew 6:25-33**)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 2 - HAVING A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER

In the second of our Christian Growth studies we are looking at the importance of leading a lifestyle of pray. It is so important that we involve God in all of our life and that we do not only wait until we have problems or great needs before we begin to pray. God has a unique plan for every believer's life (**Ephesians 2:10**) and it is so important that we allow Him to guide and direct our steps in life. Prayer must always be relational and never just develop into a daily religious routine. I will now share 7 points in relation to why we need to make prayer an important part of our daily lifestyle (**Points 1-3**) AND how we should pray (**Points 4-7**) To assist Christians in growing in their prayer life, the following points can be studied and meditated upon one at a time on a daily basis over the period of a week. (**One point each day**)

- 1) IT HELPS TO INVOLVE GOD IN ALL THAT WE ARE DOING IN LIFE** (God wants to see every person leading a life that is full of purpose and meaning. God knows what is best for us in every area of our life and His plan for our life. Having a dependence on God is the key to being blessed and prosperous in life). (**Jeremiah 17:7-8**)

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (**1 Thessalonians 5:16-18**)

In the book of Proverbs we read, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths." (**Proverbs 3:5-6**)

- 2) IT HELPS US NOT TO BE ANXIOUS IN LIFE**

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (**Philippians 4:6-7**)

- 3) IT HELPS US TO REMAIN STRONG WHEN GOING THROUGH TEMPTATIONS AND TRIALS** (At times we are confronted with temptations in life as the devil tries to destroy our lives and prevent us from fulfilling God's plan for our life. (**1 Peter 5:8-9**) During these times we need to ask God for His help and strength to overcome the trials and temptations that are coming our way).

Jesus Himself said to His disciples, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (**Matthew 26:41**)

The Apostle Paul wrote, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;" (**Romans 12:12**)

- 4) **WE MUST LEARN TO STAND ON GOD'S PROMISE THAT HE WILL ANSWER ALL OF OUR PRAYERS THAT ARE IN LINE WITH HIS WILL FOR OUR LIFE.** IF WE PRAY IN LINE WITH WHAT GOD IS PUTTING ON OUR HEART TO PRAY (BEING LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT), WE WILL PRAY ACCORDING TO HIS WILL FOR OUR LIFE.

The Apostle John wrote, “*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him*, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, *we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.* (1 John 5:14-15)

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Romans 8:26-27)

- 5) **HAVING THE BIBLE OPEN WHEN SEEKING GOD FOR ANSWERS AND DIRECTION**

(Every day we have needs and decisions to make in life. The choices that we make each day will ultimately determine our destiny in life. Each day we face new challenges which require God's wisdom and direction. God speaks to us through His Word. Praying with God's Word in front of us enables God to speak to us through His Word to give us clear direction in life and to prevent us from stumbling in our Christian walk).

In the book of Psalms we read, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

- 6) **PRAYING IN FAITH BELIEVING FOR THE ANSWERED PRAYER** (Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (**Hebrews 11:1**) Without faith it is impossible to please God ... but He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. (**Hebrews 11:6**) The bible makes it clear that God is able to do the impossible in our life. It is important that we always pray in faith believing for the answered prayer as we pray)

Jesus said, “Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.” ***“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”*** (Mark 11:22-24)

- 7) **BE PERSISTENT IN YOUR PRAYER LIFE.** (Keep praying until you experience the breakthrough in your circumstances. God's timing is always perfect and He knows what is best for us. God's delays and even denials are always for our own good when our lives are totally surrendered to him.) **STUDY Luke 18:1-8, James 5:16-18 and Luke 11:9-13**

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 3 - PUTTING THE PAST BEHIND

We have all made mistakes in life. We all could live with some regrets. We have all been hurt by others in life. However no amount of reflecting on our past failures or hurts will ever change what has happened in the past. It is so important that we learn to put our past behind so that we can move on into the future that God has planned for our life. Even reflecting on our past successes can prevent us from moving on into new and bigger things that God has planned for our life. The Apostle Paul made many mistakes in life but he knew the importance of not allowing his past to stop him from entering into all that God had planned for his life. In the book of Philippians the Apostle Paul wrote,

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12-14)

I WILL NOW SHARE ON 7 AREAS IN RELATION TO PUTTING OUR PAST BEHIND

1) OUR PAST DOES NOT HAVE TO DETERMINE OUR FUTURE

When we come to Christ we have a fresh start to life and a God given future (*Jeremiah 29:11*)

- God is a God of second chances who is able turn our circumstances around in life
- God has often chosen very ordinary people to do great tasks for Him (**Acts 4:13**) and people who made many mistakes to become great leaders. (*The Apostle Paul persecuted the Christians before he became a great apostle of the faith*)
- God has a unique plan for every believer's life (**Ephesians 2:10**), a plan that leads to abundant life (**John 10:10**)
- God is even able to use the bad experiences in our life for His glory when we simply choose to follow His plan for our life. When the prophet Jeremiah was sitting in jail, the word of the Lord came to him, **“Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”** (Jeremiah 33:3)

2) DWELLING ON OUR PAST MISTAKES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS WILL ONLY HOLD US BACK FROM ENTERING INTO THE FUTURE THAT GOD HAS PLANNED FOR OUR LIFE

- Reflecting on our past mistakes and rejection will only discourage us
- Living in the past stops us from enjoying the present and will prevent us from seizing the God given opportunities that come our way today and in the future. This is why the Apostle Paul wrote, **“But one thing I do, *forgetting* those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,”** (Phil 3:13)

3) WE CANNOT CHANGE OUR PAST. WE CAN ONLY LEARN FROM IT

- We can always learn from our past mistakes to help us to make wiser choices in the future. We can never however change what has happened in the past

- Our energies and focus must always be directed to our future and what God has planned for our life. We must simply trust God to give us the wisdom and grace to move on from our past wrong choices and hurtful experiences. King David wrote,
“Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits; Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Psalm 103:2-5)

4) FORGIVING OTHERS AND YOURSELF IS A KEY TO MOVING ON INTO THE FUTURE THAT GOD HAS PLANNED FOR YOUR LIFE

- Not forgiving those who have hurt us in the past will invariably chain us to the past. Often the hardest person to forgive is our selves.
- We are the ones who are freed when we forgive those who have hurt us in the past. Jesus Himself emphasized the importance of forgiving others,
“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.” (Mark 11:25-26)

5) HAVING A CLEAR VISION FOR THE FUTURE HELPS US TO STOP DWELLING ON THE PAST

Having a clear God given vision for our life helps us to not look back at our past failures and to stay focused on the future. The Lord emphasized to the prophet Habakkuk the importance of having a clear vision for His life. The Lord said to him,

“Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it.” (Habakkuk 2:2a)

6) WE MUST NOT ALLOW OUR PAST FAILURES TO STOP US FROM STEPPING OUT AGAIN INTO THE NEW THINGS THAT GOD HAS PLANNED FOR OUR LIFE

- We have all failed at things in our life in the past. Many people have had broken relationships. The fact is that we have all made mistakes in the past
- We are never a failure unless we fail and give up. Thomas Edison failed his way to success because he never gave up. After many failed attempts, he finally succeeded in inventing the light bulb which has brightened the lives of countless millions over the years.

7) REALISE THAT WITH CHRIST (WALKING WITH HIM) YOU WILL BE ABLE TO DO THINGS THAT YOU COULD NEVER HAVE DONE IN YOUR OWN ABILITY IN THE PAST

- When we become a Christian we have God’s enabling power to do those things that He has called us to do. When we are weak, His strength is made perfect in our lives
- With God all things are possible. He will enable you to succeed in the future as you put your faith and trust in Christ alone. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” (Ephesians 3:20)**
- **In conclusion**, we must never allow our past failures to stop us from entering into the glorious future that God has planned for our life. He will strengthen us to do all that He has called us to do in life.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 4 - THE FUTILITY OF WORRYING (Gaining freedom from worry)

INTRODUCTION:

As Christians we do not have to live a life continually worrying about the things of this world, as we can all tap into God's Kingdom promises and resources. Worrying about things will never achieve anything. We need to learn to take our problems to the Lord in prayer. In this teaching I will be sharing 7 principles from the bible and scriptures that relate to these areas to help people to gain freedom from worry. Jesus said, ***"If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed, And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*** (John 8:31-32) I will begin by looking at the words of Jesus in relation to not worrying, before sharing these 7 biblical truths that can help people to be liberated from the habit of worrying.

Jesus said, "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature" (Matthew 6:25-27)

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' Or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:31-33)

SEVEN PRINCIPLES (TRUTHS) FROM THE BIBLE TO HELP SET US FREE FROM WORRY

1) GOD DOES NOT WANT US TO WORRY CONTINUALLY ABOUT THE THINGS OF THIS LIFE

The Apostle Peter wrote, "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

Jesus Himself said, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

2) WORRYING ABOUT THINGS ACHIEVES NOTHING (Worry is like a down payment on tomorrows problems. God will always give us the grace to meet the challenges of "today")

Jesus said, "Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" (Matthew 6:27)

King David wrote, "I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendents begging bread." (Psalm 37:25)

In the book of Proverbs we read, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

3) GOD CARES FOR US AND WANTS TO HELP US (When we walk with the Lord nothing can happen to us apart from the will of God. He truly is sovereign in the affairs of our life)

King David wrote, "How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You." (Psalm 139:17-18)

Jesus Himself said, "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will." (Matthew 10:29)

- 4) **GOD IS ABLE TO MEET OUR EVERY NEED AND IS ABLE TO MAKE A WAY WHERE THERE SEEMS NO WAY** (*God parted the Red Sea to make a way of escape for the Children of Israel. Nothing is impossible for God when we put our faith and trust in Him*)

The Apostle Paul wrote, "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19)

The LORD spoke to the Prophet Jeremiah a second time when he was in jail and said to him, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know." (Jeremiah 33:3)

- 5) **WHEN WE FOCUS ON THE BIGNESS OF OUR GOD OUR PROBLEMS APPEAR SMALLER** (*The bible is full of promises for all believers. When we meditate on the promises contained in God's word, we begin to gain the faith to believe for miracles in our own life*)

The Apostle Paul wrote, "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." (2 Corinthians 1:20)

The Lord emphasized to Joshua, just before He was about to lead the Children of Israel into the promised land, the importance of meditating on the Word of God, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Joshua 1:8) "... Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)

Jesus also said, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." (Mark 9:23 and "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. *"Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."* (Mark 11:22-24)

- 6) **WE MUST LEARN TO SIMPLY TAKE OUR PROBLEMS AND NEEDS TO THE LORD IN PRAYER** (*God promises to answer all of our prayers which are in line with His will for our life*)

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

The Apostle John wrote, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. (1 John 5:14-15) AND

- 7) **WHEN WE PUT OUR FAITH AND TRUST IN JESUS CHRIST (PUT HIM FIRST PLACE IN OUR LIFE) GOD PROMISES TO MEET OUR EVERY NEED. GOD IS ABSOLUTELY FAITHFUL**

Jesus Himself said, Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' Or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:31-33) **Today you can give all of your cares to Jesus Christ.**

Father God today forgive me of all my sins. Today I turn to You and I open up my heart to You Jesus. Come into my heart and life today to be my Lord and Saviour and best friend from this day on, Amen.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 5 - HAVING COURAGE TO MAKE YOUR LIFE COUNT

We all need courage at times in life when we are going through great trials and challenges. God has a unique plan for every Believer's life. However in this life we have a very real adversary, the Devil, who is out to discourage us and prevent us from fulfilling our God given destiny. Joshua when he took over from Moses to lead the children of Israel into the Promised Land was told three times by the Lord to be strong and courageous. **(Joshua 1:6-7 & 9)**

It is fear that often prevents people from stepping out into new ventures, new relationships and from fulfilling their full potential in God. There are many types of fears that can rob us from all that God has planned for life such as a fear of being rejected, fear of man, fear of the unknown and a fear of failure. Fear is the opposite of faith. FEAR is False Evidence Appearing Real. In reality most of what we fear and worry about never comes to pass. We must learn to overcome the worm of fear so that we can fulfill our God given destiny. In this teaching I will be sharing 7 keys to help all Christians to remain strong and courageous in their Christian walk and to appropriate all that God has planned for their life.

- 1) BEING FULL OF GOD'S LOVE (INTIMACY WITH THE LORD) Spending time with the Lord helps us to grow in our love for others and to have a greater boldness in reaching out to others. Being filled with the Holy Spirit and walking in love towards others helps us to overcome the fear of being rejected.**

The Apostle Paul wrote, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." **(2 Timothy 1:7)**

The Apostle John also wrote, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." **(1 John 4:18)**

In the book of Acts we read, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." **(Acts 4:13)**

- 2) MEDITATING ON THE WORD OF GOD (Meditating on the Word of God helps us to grow in our faith and to overcome our fears as we learn to build our lives on the promises of God. As Christians it is so important that we renew our minds with God's Kingdom principles and promises. As Christians we have been called to reign here on earth. Speaking out God's word helps to fill our hearts with faith and to overcome fear)**

The Apostle Paul wrote, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." **(Romans 12:2) and**

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17)

The Lord emphasized to Joshua the importance of meditating on the word of God,

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Joshua 1:8)

- 3) BEING CAREFUL TO GUARD OUR THOUGHT LIFE** (What we think on and what we dwell on will have a great impact on our life. We must be careful what we look at and listen to. We must guard our thought life. The battlefield is the mind and we must learn to be disciplined in replacing our wrong and negative thoughts with Godly thoughts. What we achieve and become in life is greatly influenced by our thought life. Constantly focusing on our fears can prevent us from fulfilling God's plan for our life)

The Apostle Paul emphasized what we should meditate on, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-meditate on these things." (Philippians 4:8)

- 4) OUR CHOICE OF FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES IS VERY IMPORTANT** (If we spend a lot of time with people who are full of fear and unbelief it will negatively impact our lives and potentially stop us from stepping out into the plans that God has for our life. Having encouraging friends and people in your life who are full of vision and purpose, will help you to reach a higher level in life. To encourage others means to give courage to them. We need good friends in our life who will encourage us to fulfill our full potential in God)

In the book of Proverbs we read, "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray." (Proverbs 12:26)

- 5) THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER IN WHICH WE LEARN TO CAST OUR CARES TO THE LORD** (Learning to commit our cares to the Lord stops us from being overwhelmed by the problems of life. The more we focus on the problems in our life, the more anxious and fearful we become. We need to learn to commit all of our cares and problems to the Lord in prayer, "casting all your care upon Him, for he cares for you" {1 Peter 5:7})

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

- 6) CHOOSING TO HAVE A CHILDLIKE FAITH AND TRUST IN THE LORD** (Nothing is impossible for God. God can make a way where there seems no way. Choosing to trust God in all circumstances helps us to have the courage to overcome the challenges that we will all experience in life)

Jesus said "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." (Mark 11:22-24)

- 7) WE MUST LEARN TO SPEAK WORDS OF LIFE (FAITH FILLED WORDS).** Our words have the ability to both inspire faith in our lives and the lives of others, or to sow fear into our lives. We must learn to speak out God's promises over our lives, to see the glass as half full and not always half empty. A whole generation of the Children of Israel failed to enter into the Promised Land because of the negative and unbelieving report of ten of the twelve spies, who had been sent out by Moses to spy out the Promised Land. {Numbers Chapters 13 and 14} In the book of Proverbs we read, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue ..." (Proverbs 18:21)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 6 - THE IMPORTANCE OF MEETING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

God has a unique plan for every Believer's life. **(Ephesians 2:10)** However for a Believer to fulfill God's plan for their life and to appropriate all that God has planned for their life, they must continue to remain strong in their faith. The moment we become a Christian we enter into a spiritual war in which the enemy (the Devil) will do everything he can to try and discourage us and distract us from fulfilling God's plan and purpose for our life. When we grow in our faith and follow God's plan for our life, many others will invariably come to faith and in turn help others to come to Christ.

God wants all believers to walk in victory and to enter into the abundant life that Jesus spoke of. In the gospel of John we see Jesus clearly emphasizing the ongoing warfare that we go through in life. Jesus said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." **(John 10:10)** Being in fellowship and meeting with other committed believers is one major key to remaining strong in our faith and fulfilling God's destiny for our life. In the book of Hebrews we read,

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." *(Hebrews 10:23-25)*

I will now share 7 reasons why having fellowship with other Believers is so important.

1) WE WILL REMAIN STRONG IN OUR FAITH AND OUR LIVES WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT

It is within the context of connecting with other believers that we will fulfill God's plan and purpose for our life. The church was God's idea and it is by connecting with other Christians that God brings into our life that we will see God's plan for our life unfold. As an individual we can achieve little but as a team we can achieve much. God has a church home (fellowship) for every Believer in which they can develop and grow in their faith and bear much fruit

In the book of Psalms we read; "Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing." **(Psalm 92:13-14)**

2) WE HAVE ACCOUNTABILITY TO OTHERS WHICH HELPS US TO MAKE RIGHT CHOICES IN LIFE

Being connected and accountable to other mature Christians helps us to avoid making unnecessary mistakes in life. Having a teachable and humble spirit is a key to promotion in God's kingdom. Being accountable to others helps us to grow in humility and to be more willing to receive correction and advice from others. Having a teachable spirit helps us to be better equipped to make right choices in life

In the book of Proverbs we read, "Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety." **(Proverbs 11:14)**

3) WE CAN RECEIVE ENCOURAGEMENT AND SUPPORT FROM OTHERS DURING TOUGH TIMES

The bible makes it clear that "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22) and that "... all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12) When we make a choice to live whole heartedly for Christ we will at times experience rejection, even sometimes from our own family members. For this reason it is so important that we have other Christians in our life who can encourage and support us in our walk with the Lord.

In the book of Hebrews we read, “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; *but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,”* lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,” (Hebrews 3:12-14)

4) WE WILL GROW IN OUR CHRISTIAN WALK AND BE EQUIPPED FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY

Every Believer has a unique God given plan and destiny for their life. It is within the context of a local church fellowship that believers can be strengthened in their faith and equipped for the ministry that God has given them. Every Believer has a ministry and mission field. God Himself appoints certain believers into the five-fold ministry to help strengthen and equip all Christians for the work of ministry

The Apostle Paul wrote, “And He (Jesus) Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the **EQUIPPING** of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” (Ephesians 4:11-13)

5) WE WILL BE GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO USE OUR MINISTRY GIFTS TO HELP SEE THE CHURCH GROW (USING OUR GOD GIVEN GIFTS IS A KEY TO EXPERIENCING ABUNDANT LIFE)

When we are a part of a local church fellowship, we are given the opportunity to use our spiritual gifts to help see the entire Body of Christ being built up and strengthened. As we use our spiritual gifts we also help others to come to faith and to fulfill God’s plan and purpose for their life. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:6-8) and

“from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself IN LOVE.” (Ephesians 4:16)

WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A LOCAL CHURCH SETTING WE CAN BEST USE OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

6) WE WILL EXPERIENCE THE BLESSINGS FROM BEING CONNECTED TO A CHURCH FAMILY

Being part of a local church fellowship helps to give believers a sense of belonging and connectedness to God’s family. For many people, especially those who have come from broken homes, the church family will often provide them with a greater degree of love and acceptance than that which they receive from their own family members. Loving church communities were a prominent feature of the early church

In the book of Acts we read,

“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:32-33)

7) WE CAN DEVELOP GODLY FRIENDSHIPS WHICH WILL HELP US TO GROW IN OUR FAITH

When we commit to a local church it is possible to develop good Godly friendships which is also a key to experiencing the abundant life that Jesus spoke of in John 10:10. Having Godly friendships and associations is a key to growing in our faith and fulfilling God’s plan for our life

In the book of Proverbs we read, “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.” (Proverbs 12:26)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 7 – THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMITMENT IN LIFE

Being a person of commitment is crucial if we are going to succeed in fulfilling God's best plan and purpose for our life. There are many things in life that can pull us away from God's best for our life. There are several reasons why we must be committed in our Christian walk. Firstly the bible makes it clear that the enemy is always looking at any opportunity to steal our faith and to destroy our lives. The Apostle Peter wrote, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."* **(1 Peter 5:8)**

Jesus Himself in His explanation of the Parable of the Sower said, *"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away."* **(Luke 8:11-13)**

Secondly we live in a world full of temptations and distractions which can so easily cause us to deviate off track and to live a life far beneath the potential that we have as a Born Again Believer. We must remain committed to following God's plan for our life and to finishing our Christian walk strongly. The Apostle Paul at the end of His life wrote, *"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 4:8-9)**

Thirdly, we must always live life with an eternal perspective, redeeming the time and understanding what the will of the Lord is for our life. We have all been given one life in which to get to know Jesus Christ and to store up treasures for eternity. Being committed to seeing life from the eternal perspective will help us to use our time wisely so that our lives bear much fruit. **(Ephesians 5:15-17)**

Fourthly, if we continue to be faithful in the little things and remain committed to Him, God will entrust to us greater responsibilities in due course. **(See Matthew 25:14-30)**

Finally, things often are the toughest on the point of a breakthrough in life. All great achievements in life come out of a commitment to succeed and to never give up. Thomas Edison was committed to inventing the light bulb. As Christians if we are committed to fulfilling God's plan for our life, our lives will bear much fruit for all eternity. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."* **(Ephesians 3:20)**

GOD HAS A GREAT PLAN FOR EVERY BELIEVER'S LIFE BUT COMMITMENT AND FAITH ARE REQUIRED TO SEE IT COME TO PASS. I will now share seven keys to help all believers to remain committed in their Christian walk.

- 1) **HAVING A CLEAR WRITTEN DOWN GOD GIVEN VISION FOR OUR LIFE (We need to keep this vision continually in front of us to help us to stay focused and committed in life)**
The LORD said to the Prophet Habakkuk, *"Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it."* **(Habakkuk 2:2a)** **In the book of Proverbs we read,** *"Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law."* **(Proverbs 29:18)**
- 2) **WE NEED TO MAKE PLANS TO SEE GOD'S VISION FOR OUR LIFE COME TO PASS**
Prayerfully making plans and setting goals, (daily, weekly and monthly) helps to see God's vision for our life come to pass. In Proverbs we read, *"The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty."* **(Proverbs 21:5)**

- 3) **MAINTAINING A CLOSE AND INTIMATE WALK WITH THE LORD (A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER AND COMMUNION WITH GOD)** We must never get too busy in life so that we miss out on our times of fellowship with the Lord. Our strength and ministry flow out of a close and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. We must learn to be still and to be led by the Holy Spirit. As we spend time with the Lord we are strengthened, we receive direction, we grow in boldness and we gain His heart and perspective for our life. In Psalm 37 we read, “Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.” (Psalm 37:4-5) **HAVING INTIMACY WITH THE LORD HELPS US TO STAY FOCUSED AND COMMITTED TO FOLLOWING GOD’S PLAN FOR OUR LIFE**

- 4) **WE MUST CONTINUALLY TRUST IN GOD’S FAITHFULNESS (TRUST AND OBEDIENCE ARE KEYS TO A LIFE OF BLESSING AND FRUITFULNESS)** The Bible makes it clear that His ways are higher than our ways, that He is the God of the impossible and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. The Bible also makes it clear that our labour for the Lord is never in vain and that God honours those who serve Him. **BECAUSE WE CAN IMPLICITLY TRUST GOD WE CAN CONFIDENTLY COMMIT TO HIS PLAN FOR OUR LIFE.** In the book of Proverbs we read, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

- 5) **THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING ONE DAY AT A TIME WITH AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE**
 Learning to live one day at a time helps us not to be overwhelmed by tomorrow’s problems. We must not be continually sidetracked by the cares of the world but we must keep our eyes focused on the things of the kingdom, the things that matter for eternity. Keeping our focus on God’s eternal plan for our life, helps us to stay committed and focused even when we experience trials and problems in life. Keeping this focus helps us not to become jaded and discouraged in life.
 Jesus said, “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ Or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” (Matthew 6:31-34)

- 6) **LIVING A BALANCED LIFE (WE ARE IN A MARATHON).** We will only ever rise to our lowest ceiling in life. Our ability to commit to finishing God’s plan for our life depends on us being balanced and strong in all of the following areas of life: **PHYSICAL** (Diet, Rest, Sleep, Exercise, Health) – **EMOTIONAL** (Healthy relationships, ability to deal with negative emotions) – **MENTAL** (Ability to deal with stress, ability to prioritize things in life) **SPIRITUAL** – (Prayer life, Faith/Resting in God, Worship Life and Knowledge of the Word) 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)

- 7) **THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING OUR LIFE ON THE WORD OF GOD** When we are committed to being both hearers and doers of the Word we build our lives on a firm foundation. Obedience to the Word of God is a key to being blessed and empowered in life. (See Joshua 1:7-8, Psalm 1) Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17) The Apostle Paul wrote, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:2)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 8 – THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING WORDS OF LIFE

INTRODUCTION:

There is great power in the words that we speak. In the book of Proverbs we read, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.” (**Proverbs 18:21**) With our words we can build up and encourage others and enrich our relationships and friendships. With our words we can also inspire others to reach their full potential in life and to fulfill God’s plan and destiny for their life. However with our words we can also pull down and discourage others. Negative and critical words have the potential of destroying even the best of friendships, whilst words of gossip have the potential to destroy the lives and reputations of others.

With our mouths we have the ability to speak words of blessing or cursing. In the book of James we read, *“But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.”* (**James 3:8-10**)

I will now share seven biblical truths and keys that can help us to consistently speak words of life. These can be studied one per day. Meditating on the accompanying scriptures will help in renewing the mind and developing right heart attitudes, a key to consistently speaking words of life.

1) OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF THE HEART THE MOUTH SPEAKS

Whatever is in our hearts will ultimately come out of our mouth when we speak. If we have unforgiving and critical attitudes in our heart, it will become apparent in the words that we speak. In the book of Proverbs we read, *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”* (**Proverbs 23:7**) Jesus Himself said,

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” (**Luke 6:45**)

2) WE NEED TO FRAME OUR FUTURE WITH FAITH FILLED WORDS OF LIFE AND HOPE

The words that we speak have the ability to build an atmosphere of faith in our homes and workplaces or to create an atmosphere of anxiety and negativity. It is so important to speak words of life and faith over our circumstances rather than natural words of despair and defeat. Learning to speak out God’s promises over our lives and circumstances will help to create an atmosphere of faith in our homes, churches and workplaces. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.”* (**2 Corinthians 1:20**) Meditating on the Word of God and speaking out and praying out the promises of God over our life, is a key to building faith in our hearts and speaking words of life. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”* (**Romans 10:17**)

Before Joshua led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land, the Lord said to him.

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” (**Joshua 1:8**)

3) OUR WORDS HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO GREATLY ENCOURAGE OTHERS

The Bible makes it clear how important it is to encourage others especially in the times that we are living in. (Hebrews 3:13) (Hebrews 10:24-25) Words of encouragement give us courage to keep going on in our walk with the Lord when we are experiencing trials and challenges. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith, who had a great gift of encouragement. When he visited the church in Antioch he “encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.” (**Acts 11:23**) Because of this encouragement a great many were added to the Lord at the church in Antioch. In the book of Proverbs we see the positive effect of speaking out words of encouragement,

“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!” (Proverbs 15:23) and “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.” (Proverbs 16:24)

4) THE IMPORTANCE OF GUARDING OUR HEARTS FROM DEVELOPING WRONG ATTITUDES

As what is in our heart will invariably come out of our mouth, we need to guard our heart by preventing negative, critical, judgmental or unforgiving attitudes from entering into our heart. Leading a disciplined thought life in which we discard every wrong thought that is contrary to God’s word helps us to maintain a right heart. In the Bible we read,

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” (**2 Corinthians 10:4-5**)

5) THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING A LIFE UNDER THE CONTROLLING INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (WALKING IN THE SPIRIT HELPS US TO SPEAK WORDS OF LIFE AND LOVE)

Being slow to speak and quick to listen is a major key to effective communication. Learning to walk in the Spirit helps us not to react in situations and to say things that we later regret. In the book of Proverbs we read, *“In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise.”* (**Proverbs 10:19**) In the book of James we read, *“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”* (**James 1:19**) The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” (**Galatians 5:14-16**)

6) MAINTAINING AN INTIMATE WALK WITH THE LORD

Having an intimate relationship with the Lord is the key to us growing in the fruit of the Spirit (**John 15:4-5**) and having a heart full of God’s love which helps us to speak words of life. In the book of Psalms we read, ***“Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.”*** (**Psalms 37:4**)

7) EXERCISING WISDOM IN THE CHOICE OF OUR FRIENDS

Having negative and judgmental friends in our life who constantly find fault with others has the potential to negatively impact the way in which we ourselves speak to others. We become like the company we keep. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits.”** (**1 Corinthians 15:33**)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 9 – BUILDING OUR LIFE ON THE WORD OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

In this life we will all experience trials and challenges from time to time. As Christians we will often even experience persecution for our faith. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” **(2 Timothy 3:12)** Every day we face different situations and circumstances that require God’s wisdom and direction. When we build our lives on the Word of God we can be assured that we will remain strong in our Christian walk and prosper in those things that God has called us to do in life. **(See Joshua 1:7-8 and Psalm 1:1-3)**

The Bible is also full of promises for all believers. As Christians we must learn to build our lives on these promises so that we fulfill our full potential in Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” **(Ephesians 1:3)** As Christians we can tap into God’s Kingdom resources and privileges as we step out to follow His plan for our life. Building our life on the word of God also helps to give us stability in a world which is continually changing and in which there is now much instability and uncertainty. The Bible also makes it clear that God has a great love for all people and that He is absolutely faithful. When we give our life to Jesus Christ He promises to never leave nor forsake us. **(Hebrews 13:5)**

I will now share 7 keys in relation to reading the Word of God that will help to see your life being transformed more and more into the image of Christ (your light so shining before men) so that many others will be encouraged to come to Christ through your changed life. For some our life may be the only bible that they ever read.

1) THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSISTENTLY MEDITATING ON THE WORD OF GOD

As Christians we are meant to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world so that through our lives people are drawn to Jesus Christ. **(See Matthew 5:13-16)** In a world full of negativity and ungodly values however, it is often possible for those in the world to have a greater effect on our lives than us on their lives if we do not continually meditate on the Word of God. The Apostle Paul wrote, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” **(Romans 12:2)** Continually meditating on the Word of God is the key to maintaining Godly attitudes and mindsets in our life and in prospering in all that we do in life. Jesus Himself said, “*If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*” **(John 8:31-32)** In the Book of Psalms we read,

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” (Psalm 1:1-3)

2) SPENDING TIME IN STUDYING THE WORD OF GOD

Studying the Word of God helps us to get a good foundation in our faith and to give us a clear understanding of our position in Christ. (That we have come into a right relationship with God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ) “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” **(Ephesians 2:8-9)** Studying the Word of God helps us to not deviate off track in our Christian walk and keeps us sound in our doctrinal beliefs as well as equipping us to be effective in ministering to others. Studying and meditating on Scriptures that relate to specific areas of weakness in our life such as worrying, also helps us to gain victory in these areas. The Apostle Paul wrote, “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*” **(2 Timothy 2:15)** The Apostle Paul also wrote to the young pastor Timothy,

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

3) ALLOWING THE WORD OF GOD TO SPEAK TO YOU

As we read the Word of God we must be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit so that God can speak to us through the Scriptures. We all need God's wisdom for life. God speaks to us through His Word by emphasizing certain passages of Scripture that relate to our current circumstances. (A Rhema Word) We must be careful to never get into a daily religious routine of reading the Bible, but always read it with an expectation of God speaking to us. Whilst studying the bible is very important, we must always be open to what God may be trying to speak to us about when we read His Word. As we do this, God will address areas in our life which may need changing and also affirm and encourage us during those times when we are experiencing trials in life. The Apostle John wrote, *"But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him."* (1 John 2:27) In the book of Hebrews we also read about the power of the Word of God to discern our heart motives, *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* (Hebrews 4:12)

4) BUILDING OUR LIVES ON THE PROMISES OF GOD

The Bible is full of promises for all believers in every area of life. In the book of Psalms we read, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, And **forget not all His benefits**; Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, **who redeems your life from destruction**, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Psalm 103:2-5) As all Scripture has been given by inspiration of God, (2 Timothy 3:16) we can confidently put our faith and trust in all of the promises that are contained in His Word (The Bible). All of God's promises are available for every believer. We must simply claim and appropriate these promises by faith. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."* (2 Corinthians 1:20)

5) BEING BOTH HEARERS AND DOERS OF THE WORD OF GOD

Though we may have a good knowledge of God's Word, if we do not also apply it to our lives and become doers of the Word we will miss out on God's best for our life and potentially stumble during times of trials and temptations. Jesus Himself said, "... blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28) Being both hearers and doers of God's Word helps us to remain strong in the midst of the trials that we will all go through in life. Jesus Himself said, *"Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."* (Matthew 7:24-27)

6) THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING OUT THE WORD OF GOD

The Apostle Paul wrote, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17) Speaking out God's promises in His Word over our life and future helps to build up our faith to receive miracles from God and to appropriate all that God has planned for our life. Because of fear and unbelief a whole generation of the children of Israel failed to enter into all that God had planned for their lives. (See Numbers Chapters 13 & 14) Including scriptural promises in our prayers helps us to have faith for answered prayers when we pray. When ministering the Word of God to others we should also always endeavour to do so in the power of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:4-5) Before leading the Children of Israel into the Promised Land, the LORD said to Joshua, *"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."* (Joshua 1:8)

7) ALLOWING THE WORD OF GOD TO GIVE US CLARITY AND DIRECTION FOR OUR LIFE

When we have need for direction or clarity in our life, it is good to pray and seek the Lord with an open bible. God is able to give us clear direction for our life through His Word as we seek His face. In the book of Psalms we read, *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."* (Psalm 119:105)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 10 – THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING INTIMACY WITH THE LORD

INTRODUCTION

Having intimacy with the LORD is a key to fulfilling all that God has planned for our life and growing in Christ-like character. The more time that we spend with the Lord, the more we become like Him and the more we gain His heart and love for people. Jesus Himself emphasized the importance of abiding in Him.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5)

Spending time in the presence of the LORD is crucial to knowing Him. When we spend time with the LORD we get to know Him and His desires become more and more our desires. In Psalm 37:4 we read the words of King David, **“Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4)**

The Apostle Paul wrote around one third of the New Testament and went on three major missionary journeys. His life was characterized by a great passion to know Christ and to make him known to others. In the book of Philippians the Apostle Paul wrote, **“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” (Philippians 3:7-8)**

To be truly effective in ministering the Word of God to others, we must communicate it to others out of our own revelation knowledge of Christ. Moses knew the LORD intimately. In the book of Exodus we read, **“...the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11)** The Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of all Christians knowing Christ intimately,

“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)

Jesus Himself said, **“And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” This is the first commandment.” (Mark 12:30)**

In this Christian Growth Key Study I will be looking at 7 areas in relation to having intimacy with God.

1) THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING STILL BEFORE GOD (MAKING TIME TO GET ALONE WITH THE LORD)

King David was a man after God’s own heart (**Acts 13:22**) who knew the importance of getting alone to spend time with God. Spending time with the Lord first thing in the morning helps to strengthen us and to give us a clearer perspective of the day to come. King David, when writing about the joy of being in fellowship with God, emphasized the importance of starting the day with the Lord,

“O GOD, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.” (Psalm 63:1) King David also wrote, **“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (Psalm 46:10)**

2) THE NEED TO HAVE REGULAR TIMES OF COMMUNION (PRAYER AND WORSHIP) WITH THE LORD

Even Jesus Himself after periods of long ministry frequently withdrew to pray to His Father. Jesus only ever did what His Father in Heaven told Him to do. (**John 8:28-29**) **In the gospel of Luke we read,** **“So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.” (Luke 5:16)** With many decisions to make in life and with many challenges to overcome, how we must learn to take our cares to the Lord in prayer and to seek His wisdom and direction continually. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:1)**

Living a lifestyle of worship helps us to stay close to the Lord. King David was a great worshiper. In Psalm 34 he wrote, **“I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” (Psalm 34:1)** Jesus Himself emphasized the importance of true worship, **“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24)**

3) INVOLVING GOD IN ALL AREAS OF OUR LIFE (CONTINUALLY KEEPING OUR EYES ON JESUS)

In the book of Proverbs we read, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Involving the Lord in all that we do is a key to fulfilling our full potential in Christ. It is only when we take our eyes off the Lord and start looking at all the problems in our life that we become discouraged. The Apostle Peter, after Jesus called him to come to Him, walked on the water towards Jesus. However, the moment he took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the circumstances around him, he began to sink. (Matthew 15:25-31)

As we continually involve the Lord in all that we do and in the choices that we make, we will experience the abundant life that Jesus spoke of in John 10:10 and ultimately end up fulfilling our God given destiny.

4) THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING TO REST IN THE LORD (TO CONTINUALLY RENEW OUR STRENGTH)

Learning to rest in the Lord, even during the busyness of everyday life, helps us to maintain our strength. In His presence is fullness of joy. (Psalm 16:11) The joy of the Lord helps to give us strength. In Isaiah we read,

“He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:29-31) In Psalm 27 King David wrote, “Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!” (Psalm 27:14) WE MUST ALL LEARN TO REST IN THE LORD.

5) BEING CONTINUALLY FILLED AND LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (KNOWING THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT)

Being *continually filled* with the Holy Spirit is the key to being **empowered** for ministry. As we give out to others we must also be continually built up ourselves. The Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,” (Ephesians 5:18) In the book of Jude we also read, “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” (Jude 20 and 21)

Being *led* by the Holy Spirit is the key to **staying in the centre of God’s will for our life**. The Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of knowing and following God’s will and plan for our life,

“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)

The Holy Spirit generally speaks to us in a still small voice. As we spend time in God’s presence we get to know the voice of the Holy Spirit. If we allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct our steps in life we will invariably fulfill all that God has planned for our life. (Philippians 1:6) Jesus Himself said,

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” (John 14:26) and “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” (John 16:13)

6) HAVING A HEALTHY FEAR OF THE LORD IS A KEY TO MAINTAINING INTIMACY WITH GOD

Having a healthy fear of the Lord stops us from moving too far away from the will of God for our life. Having a healthy fear of God is to not want to lose the presence of God in our life. It helps us to stay on the narrow path that God has planned for our life and helps us to remain in an intimate relationship with the LORD. King David wrote, **“The secret of the LORD is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant.”** (Psalm 25:14)

7) THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUALLY MEDITATING ON THE WORD OF GOD

When we meditate on the Word of God and apply it to our lives, we learn to remain strong during the trials of life. (Matthew 7:24-25) God also speaks through His Word to give us wisdom for making right choices in life as well as giving us direction for the future. (Psalm 119:105) Meditating on the Word of God is a key to being blessed and fruitful in our life. (Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:1-3) REFER TO CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEY STUDY NO. 9

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 11 – The importance of having Christian Character and Integrity

INTRODUCTION:

The way we live our life has the potential to impact the lives of many others either positively or negatively. It is often said that our actions speak louder than our words. As Christians we have the potential to bring into our workplaces and friendships Kingdom values so that we can help to make our world a better place. For some people our lives are the only bible that they will ever read. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see you good works and glorify your Father in heaven. **(Matthew 5:14-16)**

All Christians have all been called to reign with Christ here on earth. **(Revelation 5:10)** Jesus led by example. He was the Servant King. **(Matthew 20:28)** When put in leadership roles, it is so important that we model in our life what it is to be a Christian. That we also lead by example. **(1 Peter 5:1-3)** In most cases children grow up to be just like their parents. Jesus also said, **“A servant is not greater than his master...” (John 15:20)**

A key part of Christian character is being faithful in our relationships and in doing what God calls us to do in life. When we prove faithful in the little things God then entrusts to us greater responsibilities. **(Matthew 25:14-23)** *Promotion in God’s Kingdom always comes from above.* Jesus Himself emphasised the importance of being faithful in all that we do. Jesus said, “He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.” **(Luke 16:10)** Our true character is best revealed in what we do and how we behave when we are alone. God sees all that we do in life.

God always prepares the man or woman first before opening up significant doors of ministry for them. For this reason it is important that we allow God to continually change us, so that we grow in Christ-like character. To be truly effective in our Christian witness we need to display honesty and integrity in all of our relationships and dealings with others. If we lose our reputation through ungodly actions, we also lose our credibility in ministering to others. Walking in integrity is also a key to experiencing God’s peace and blessings in our life.

Whilst God is always a God of second chances, people are not always as forgiving and gracious as He is. For this reason, maintaining an ongoing life of character and integrity as a Christian is crucial if we are going to be truly effective in influencing others to come to Christ. **(Ecclesiastes 7:1)** I will now share 7 keys that can help us to grow in Christian Character and integrity.

1) BEING COMMITTED TO MAKING RIGHT CHOICES IN LIFE

In a world that is full of temptations and influences that try and get people to live for themselves, it is so important that we continually choose to make godly choices in our life. We must simply be committed to doing what Jesus would want us to do rather than making decisions based on what seems easiest at the time. Rather than making wrong choices based on our fears or self interests, we must learn to make godly choices that are based on our trust in God and our knowledge that His ways are higher than our ways and that His plan for our life is the best. As we continually seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, we can be assured that all that we need in life will be added to us. **(Matthew 6:31-33)** BEING LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE KEY TO MAKING RIGHT CHOICES IN LIFE **(John 16:13)** *The Apostle Peter wrote, “For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” (1 Peter 3:17)*

2) BEING CAREFUL ABOUT WHAT WE MEDITATE ON

We must be careful what we look at and listen to, so as to prevent wrong desires from developing in our hearts. It is imperative that we guard our hearts with all diligence **(Proverbs 4:23)** by taking all wrong thoughts captive and bringing them into line with the Word of God. **(2 Corinthians 10:3-5)** Our thought life is greatly influenced by what comes into our eyes and ears.

In the book of James we read, “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 1:14-16)**

The Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of being careful about what we meditate on,

“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-meditate on these things.” **(Philippians 4:8)**

3) HAVING A TEACHABLE SPIRIT (BEING OPEN TO CORRECTION FROM OTHERS)

Having a teachable spirit and being open to correction from others is a key to developing character and integrity in our life. Jesus Himself only ever did what He saw His Father doing and spoke what His Father told Him to say. **(John 12:49-50)** The bible makes it clear that if we have a teachable spirit we will mature in our Christian walk:

“He who heeds the word wisely will find good, and whoever trusts in the LORD, happy is he.” **(Proverbs 16:20)**

“Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning.”

(Proverbs 9:9) “Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days.”

(Proverbs 19:20)

4) CHOOSING OUR FRIENDS WISELY

Our choice of friends has a great impact on our life and Christian walk. Growing in character and integrity is a daily choice. Wrong friends can easily have a negative influence on our walk with the Lord and pull us away from God’s best plan for our life. The bible makes it clear that as Christians we must not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, especially in the area of marriage. **(2 Corinthians 6:14-18)**

(1 Corinthians 7:39) The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits.” **(1 Corinthians 15:33)**

5) CONTINUALLY RENEWING OUR MIND WITH THE WORD OF GOD

Meditating on the Word of God helps us to renew our minds so that our thinking is in line with God’s Kingdom values. As we live in a world that is full of ungodly influences, continually renewing our mind with the Word of God is crucial if we are to walk in victory as a believer and fulfill God’s plan for our life.

(Joshua 1:7-8) (Psalm 1:1-3) The Apostle Paul wrote, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” **(Romans 12:2)**

6) MAKING TIME ON A REGULAR BASIS TO SPEND IN GOD’S PRESENCE (True Worship – John 4:23-24)

The more time that we spend in the presence of the LORD, the more Christ-like we become. We must learn to continually keep ourselves in the love of God. **(John 15:1-8)** Jesus Himself made it clear that we cannot bear fruit in our life (and grow in Christ-like character) without abiding in Him. Jesus told His disciples, *“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”* **(John 15:4-5)**

Learning to walk in the Spirit **(Galatians 5:13-16)** and being continually filled with the Holy Spirit are two disciplines that help us to overcome temptations in life and to grow in Christ-like Character. The Apostle Paul wrote, “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,” **(Ephesians 5:18)** Praying for God’s help to overcome temptations is also a key to remaining strong in our Christian walk and growing in Christ-like character. **(Matthew 26:41)**

7) CHOOSING TO LIVE A LIFE OF HUMILITY AND CONTENTMENT (Jesus is our example – Philippians 2:5-9)

When we choose to walk in humility and godly contentment we are better able to make right choices in life. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Now godliness with contentment is great gain”. **(1 Timothy 6:6)** The bible makes it clear that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Money is a good servant but a poor master. The Bible also makes it clear that pride always precedes a fall. **In the book of Proverbs we read,** “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” **(Proverbs 16:18)** and “Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty and before honour is humility” **(Proverbs 18:12)**

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 12 – EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS A MISSION FIELD AND MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION:

God has a unique plan for every believer's life. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (**Ephesians 2:10**) Every Christian however enters into a spiritual war the moment they give their life to Jesus Christ. The enemy, the Devil, will continually try and cause every believer to deviate away from God's best plan and purpose for their life. Every single believer has the potential to make a profound impact on the world. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." (**Ephesians 3:20**)

It is as every believer fulfills their God given destiny that we see the church making a great impact in this world and the Kingdom of God expanding here on earth. Every believer has a mission field where God has placed them (which includes their workplace, neighborhood and social spheres) and a unique ministry from God. The Apostle Paul emphasized the role of those called by Jesus into the five-fold ministry offices as being to equip all Christians for the work of ministry. "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the **EQUIPPING** of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." (**Ephesians 4:11-13**) "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself IN LOVE." (**Ephesians 4:16**) **WORKING AS A TEAM THE BODY OF CHRIST (THE CHURCH) HAS THE POTENTIAL TO TRANSFORM CITIES.**

True purpose in life only comes from being in a close and intimate relationship with the Lord and in finding and following His plan for our life. God has chosen every Christian for a unique plan and purpose that will produce fruit that remains. Jesus Himself said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." (**John 15:16**) It is in following God's plan for our life that we experience the abundant life that Jesus spoke of in John 10:10.

I will now share on 7 areas in relation to fulfilling God's plan for our life.

1) THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIFE

It is so important that we seek God for His plan for our life. Without a clear God given vision for our life we can squander months and even years of our life caught up in doing things that bear no real eternal fruit. We have one gift of life to store up treasures for eternity. **The Apostle Paul 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**)

2) MINISTERING AS A PART OF THE ENTIRE BODY OF CHRIST (BEING CONNECTED TO OTHER BELIEVERS)

God has uniquely positioned every believer in the Body of Christ as He has chosen. As we work together in unity with other believers we see the church making a great impact on the world. Our God given destiny will always be worked out in the context of being connected to others. No person was ever made by God to be an island unto himself. It is as we work in unison with others that God has placed in our life, that we see our lives bearing much fruit.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." (**Romans 12:3**) "For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." (**Romans 12:4-5**) and "But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary." (**1 Corinthians 12:18-22**)

3) THE IMPORTANCE OF FLOWING IN YOUR MINISTRY GIFTS

We are most effective and most anointed when we are operating in the gifts and calling that God has for our life. As we all need one another in the Body of Christ, it is so important that we are good stewards of our spiritual gifts. As Christians we need to be active in using our spiritual gifts. When we are faithful in using our spiritual gifts, we are able to both help other people come to faith in Christ and to encourage other Christians to fulfill their God given potential in Christ. **The Apostle Paul wrote**, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (**Romans 12:6-8**)

4) BEING PLANTED WHERE GOD PLACES YOU (THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A SPIRITUAL HOME)

Being connected to the life of a local church fellowship is crucial if we are to fulfill our God given destiny. In the context of a local church we can have a healthy accountability with other Christians and receive encouragement. As we connect with other believers we see God's plan for our life unfolding. **The Psalmist wrote**, "Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing. (**Psalm 92:13-14**)

In the book of Hebrews we read, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (**Hebrews 10:23-25**)

5) MINISTERING AND OPERATING IN GOD'S POWER AND AUTHORITY

As Christians we have been given great power and authority to enable us to make disciples of all the nations. There is great authority in the Name of Jesus. As Christians it is imperative that we are continually filled with the Holy Spirit. (**Ephesians 5:18**) Being baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit empowers a believer to be more effective in witnessing to the lost. (**Acts 1:8**) The Bible makes it clear that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness and that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. (**Philippians 4:13**) As we learn to yield to God He is able to minister powerfully through us. **The Apostle Paul wrote**, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake." (**1 Thessalonians 1:5**)

When Philip preached in the city of Samaria many people believed and were healed and set free. As a result there was great joy in that city. (**Acts 8:4-8**) Every believer has been given the authority to cast out demons in the name of Jesus and to lay hands on the sick so that they will recover. Miracles and healings are often the means through which people come to faith. As believers we need to learn to put our trust in the Lord and to step out by faith to pray for the sick and for people with needs. Depending on the Holy Spirit is the key to effective ministry. **Jesus Himself operated in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Acts we read**, "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." (**Acts 10:38**)

Jesus Himself said, "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My Name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." (**Mark 16:17-18**)

6) THE IMPORTANCE OF SERVING OTHERS (HAVING THE RIGHT MOTIVATION)

Whilst ministering in power is a great sign to others of the ability of Jesus to change lives and that He truly is the resurrected Son of God, we must never lose sight of the importance of walking in love towards others. The Apostle Paul make it clear that even though we may have faith to move mountains, but have not love it profits us nothing. (**1 Corinthians 13:2**) Being a servant in all that we do for the Lord is a key to greatness in God's Kingdom. **Jesus Himself said**, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (**Matthew 20:25-28**) God's ways are totally different to man's. Jesus said if you give your life away you will find it. It is as we give our life away to follow God's plan for our life that our lives begin to bear much fruit. **Jesus Himself said**, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour." (**John 12:24-26**)

7) CONTINUALLY MAINTAINING A KINGDOM PERSPECTIVE FOR LIFE (STORING UP ETERNAL TREASURES)

We must not allow the temporal things of this life to take our attention away from what really matters in life. At the end of our life, it is only what we have done in respect to eternity that will really matter. Have we loved people and helped people to come to Christ to receive the gift of eternal life. How important it is that we continually set our minds on things above. (**Colossians 3:2**) Having a clear God given vision for our life helps us to maintain a Kingdom focus in life. (**Proverbs 29:18**) Living with eternity in mind is crucial if our lives here on earth are going to influence many others to come to Christ and if our lives are going to bear much eternal fruit. **Jesus Himself said**, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (**Matthew 6:19-21**)

The Apostle John wrote, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." (**1 John 2:15-17**)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 13 – THE IMPORTANCE OF OVERCOMING (DEALING WITH) OFFENSES

In this life we all have the potential to be offended by others. Jesus Himself even warned that in the last days just prior to His Second Coming, many would be offended and even betray one another. Jesus said, “**And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold, But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” (Matthew 24:10-13)**

Sometimes offenses can simply spring up because we misunderstand people, or because of differences in our personality types, cultural backgrounds or experiences that we have had in life. At times it may even be as a result of having unrealistic expectations about people in our life. Jesus Himself said to His disciples, “It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!” **(Luke 17:1)** The Bible tells how King Saul became offended and jealous of David after he had returned from slaughtering the Philistines, when the women sang as they danced that “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” This jealousy was so strong that King Saul even sought to kill David. **(1 Samuel 18:5-11)** It is so important that we learn to take all wrong thoughts captive **(2 Corinthians 10:4-5)** and that we continually guard our hearts with all diligence. **(Proverbs 4:23)** Having grace towards others helps us to not take on offenses in life.

Having good relationships with others and with God is the key to experiencing the life and life more abundantly that Jesus spoke of in John 10:10. When we become offended with others, it negatively affects both our relationship with God and with those that we relate to in life. The bible makes it clear that a root of bitterness defiles many. **(Hebrews 12:14-15)** Being in unity with other believers is a major key to experiencing God’s blessing and power in our life and to being effective in witnessing to non Christians. Jesus Himself said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” **(John 13:34-35)**

Being connected to other believers and being involved in a local church fellowship is crucial if our lives are to bear much fruit as Christians. **(Psalm 92:13-14)** God will invariably connect us with other Christians who will help us to fulfill His plan and purpose for our life as we help them to fulfill God’s plan for their life. For this reason the Devil is always looking for an opportunity to offend believers to take them out of fellowship. When an ember is within a fire place it burns brightly. However, when the ember is spat out of the fire it quickly begins to die out and grow cold. So too does a Christian begin to struggle in their walk with the Lord when they withdraw from fellowship with other believers.

I will now share 7 keys that can help Christians to avoid taking on offenses.

- 1) ALWAYS LOOK FOR THE BEST IN OTHERS** The Devil will always try and magnify the faults in others. If we are not walking close to the Lord we are more prone to seeing the faults in others and to overlooking their good points. Continually emphasizing and acknowledging the good points and virtues of others is a key to building strong friendships. Learning to esteem others better than our self is a key to overcoming offenses. *We must also be sensitive to what may be going on in the lives of others when they appear to be a little abrupt towards us. We all at times can encounter challenging situations which may make us a little less tolerant towards others.*

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” (Philippians 2:3)

The Apostle Peter wrote, “Honour all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.” (1 Peter 2:17)

- 2) WE MUST BE AWARE OF OUR OWN SHORTCOMINGS** None of us are perfect. We will all let others down at times. We must ensure that we do not take ourselves too seriously in life. The world does not revolve around us. We need to be more focused on turning our own weaknesses into strengths than looking for the faults in others. In Ecclesiastes 7:21-22 we read, “Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.” (Romans 2:1-2) and

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” (Romans 12:3)

Jesus Himself said, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” “And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” (Matthew 7:1-5)

3) ALWAYS LIVE IN A WAY WHERE YOU SEEK GOD’S APPROVAL RATHER THAN MANS APPROVAL

In doing this we are less likely to be disappointed and offended when others do not appreciate what we have done for them. We are far more likely to be offended in life if we continually desire to receive praises and acceptance from people. At times we will not be appreciated for what we have done for others. God however always honours those who serve Him. **(John 12:26)** We must learn to do all things as to the Lord in life.

In the book of Hebrews we read, “For God is not unjust to forget you work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.” (Hebrews 6:10) The Apostle Paul also wrote, “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)

4) BE COMMITTED TO LIVING A LIFE OF HUMILITY AND LIVING FOR OTHERS (Romans 12:9-21)

We must continually choose to love and forgive others. Love is always a choice and the feelings follow. We must be quick to try and reconcile any differences in friendships. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“Be angry, and do not sin”; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.” (Ephesians 4:26-27)* We need to consistently look at building up and encouraging others with our words. *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue...” (Proverbs 18:21)* In the book of Proverbs we also read, *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1) and “A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!” (Proverbs 15:23)* Being slow to speak and quick to listen is one major key that can help us to avoid offending others. We must also avoid the tendency to want to always defend ourselves. God will always vindicate us if we are in the right. It is better to concede in an argument and win a friend than to win an argument and lose a friend. We must always be humble enough to say that I am sorry. *Jesus Christ was our example of humility.*

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:5-8)

5) ALWAYS MAKE SPENDING TIME WITH THE LORD YOUR HIGHEST PRIORITY IN LIFE.

We grow in our love for people by allowing Christ to be formed more and more in our life. When we love people with His unconditional love we do not become offended with others. The more time that we spend in His presence the more we are able to love like Christ. *Jesus said, “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5)*

Continually renewing our mind with the Word of God, **(Romans 12:2)** **(Joshua 1:7-8)** praying for God’s strength and love to forgive others, **(Matthew 26:41)** being continually filled with the Holy Spirit **(Ephesians 5:18)** and living a lifestyle of worship, **(Colossians 3:16)** are all disciplines that help us to overcome offenses in life. As we spend time in the presence of the Lord we become more like Him. Jesus showed us how to forgive others. On the cross He said as they ridiculed Him, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34)*

6) BE COMMITTED TO STAYING WHERE GOD PLACES YOU

We must not allow rejection or fear of rejection to cause us to run from where God has placed us and from what He has planned for our life. He will promote us in due time. God’s plan for our life will always unfold in the context of working together with others. We must simply learn to overcome any rejection by others with God’s love. His love has been poured out in the heart of every Believer by the Holy Spirit. **(Romans 5:5)** If we stay where the Lord places us, our lives will bear much fruit. In the book of Psalms we read, *“Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing.” (Psalm 92:13-14)*

7) REFUSE TO DWELL ON YOUR PAST HURTS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS.

We must continually keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and His plan for our future. We must choose not to dwell on our past disappointments, failures and the injustices that we have experienced in life. We must simply refuse to live in the past. Starting each day afresh with a clean slate is a key to maintaining a sweet spirit and to overcoming offenses. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12-14)*

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 14 – THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSEVERING IN OUR CHRISTIAN WALK

God has a unique plan for every believer's life. **(Ephesians 2:10)** As we follow His plan for our life we will see the lives of many other people impacted for eternity. God's plan for our life is far bigger than we could ever imagine **(Ephesians 3:20)** and it unfolds one step at a time as we allow the Lord to direct our steps in life. Learning to walk in victory as a Christian is the key to seeing our lives impacting the lives of those around us. Jesus said, **"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see you good works and glorify your Father in heaven."** **(Matthew 5:16)** However in this life we have a very real adversary (the Devil) who will try and continually distract and discourage us from following God's plan for our life. **(READ THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER: MARK 4:1-9 & MARK 4:13-20)**

The Apostle Paul wrote, **"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."** **(2 Timothy 3:12)** To the church in Corinth the Apostle Paul wrote, *"For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,"* **(2 Corinthians 1:8-10)**

As Christians we can be assured that when Jesus is truly Lord of our life, God is still sovereign in those times of our life when we are encountering great trials and that He will make a way where there seems no way, in His timing. Jesus said, **"Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will."** **(Matthew 10:29)**

As Christians when we go through challenges in life they help us to become more like Christ **(Romans 8:28-29)**, to grow in patience **(James 1:2-4)** and to become more dependent on God in all that we do in life **(2 Corinthians 1:8-10)** The trials that we go through in life also help to test the genuineness of our faith. The Apostle Peter wrote, **"In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love..."** **(1 Peter 1:6-8)**

The bible makes it clear that we must be over comers in our Christian walk **(Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5, 3:21, 21:7)** and that we need perseverance and endurance to fulfill God's plan for our life. The writer of the book of Hebrews wrote, **"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise."** **(Hebrews 10:35-36)**

Jesus also promised that those who persevered in their Christian walk would be kept from the hour of trial during the midst of the great tribulation. **(Revelation 3:10)** With the imminent return of the Lord how important it is that we are ready for His return. In the book of James we read, "You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand." The Devil fights for every lost soul. How important it is that we as believers persevere in our walk with the Lord, so that through our lives and Christian witness, many others will be plucked from the path leading to hell and destruction and become part of God's kingdom as we faithfully love and serve the Lord. **I will now share 7 keys that help us to lead an overcoming life and to resist the temptations that would try and pull us away from God's best plan for our life.**

1) HAVING A CLEAR GOD GIVEN VISION FOR OUR LIFE (KNOWING GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIFE)

Having a clear God given vision for our life helps us to stay focused when we are experiencing temptations and trials in our life. In the book of Proverbs we read, **"Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law."** **(Proverbs 29:18)** We have one short life to store up treasures for eternity. It is so important that we make the most of every day of our life. Knowing the will of God for our life and following His plan for our life is the key to living a life of fruitfulness and a life which is full of purpose and meaning. **The Apostle Paul 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)**

2) BUILDING OUR LIFE ON THE WORD OF GOD (Being both hearers and doers of the Word) JOSHUA 1:7-8

Building our life on the Word of God helps us to overcome the challenges that we all experience in life. The Bible is full of wisdom and promises for all believers. Jesus said, "Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the **rock**; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." **(Matthew 7:24-27)**

3) HAVING A LIFESTYLE OF WORSHIP AND PRAYER (BUILDING OUR LIFE BASED ON A FIRM TRUST IN GOD)

Living a life in communion with the Lord helps us not to be overwhelmed by life's challenges. Nothing is impossible for God. The Apostle Paul wrote, ***"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*** (Philippians 4:6-7)

When we start worshipping the Lord during our trials and challenges, our problems begin to appear smaller. When Paul and Silas were in prison after being beaten for their faith, they began to pray and sing hymns to God. **(Acts 16:20-26)** As they did their chains broke off. God inhabits the praises of His people and is able to deliver us from adverse situations. In His presence is fullness of joy and liberty. The LORD blesses those who put their trust and hope in Him. **(Jeremiah 17:7-8)** As we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, God promises to meet our every need. **(Matthew 6:31-33)** **(Philippians 4:19)** ***God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*** **(Hebrews 11:6)** If we keep our eyes on Jesus at all times we will not be overwhelmed by life's challenges. The LORD promises to never leave nor forsake us. **(Heb. 13:5)** Jesus said to His disciples, "...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen" **(Matthew 28:20)**

4) THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CONTINUALLY FILLED WITH AND LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Being filled with the Spirit and praying in the Spirit **(Jude 20)** helps to empower believers to lead an overcoming life and to be more effective in witnessing to the lost. In a world full of fallen demonic angels and evil spirits, it is very important to be continually filled with the right Spirit, the Holy Spirit. **The Apostle Paul wrote,** "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit," **(Ephesians 5:18)**

Being close to the Lord and sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit is crucial for all believers. We need to be continually led by the Holy Spirit **(Romans 8:14)** so that we are able to make right choices in life. Being sensitive to the Holy Spirit helps us to make correct choices in life and safeguards us against the wiles of the Devil. **(1 Peter 5:8-9)** **Jesus Himself said,** "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." **(John 16:13)**

5) BEING PLANTED IN A LOCAL CHURCH FELLOWSHIP (FELLOWSHIPING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS)

In a world where people can often be hostile to the things of God, it is important for all Christians to connect with other believers in a loving local church fellowship. In a world full of temptations, having accountability with other believers **(1 Peter 5:5)** is also important in helping us to remain strong in our Christian walk. **In the book of Hebrews we read,** "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." **(Hebrews 10:23-25)**

6) BEING CAREFUL ABOUT WHAT WE MEDITATE ON AND WHO WE CHOOSE AS FRIENDS

As Christians we must be careful what we look at and meditate on in life. With so many temptations in this world we must be careful what comes into our eyes and ears. The enemy is always looking for an opportunity to cause Christians to stumble and to discredit their witness. We must also be careful not to focus too much on the problems in our life, but rather be seeking the Lord for Him to turn our circumstances around. Discouragement comes when we take our eyes off Jesus (with whom nothing is impossible) and spend too much time focusing on the problems in our life. **The Apostle Paul wrote what we should meditate on in the book of Philippians,** "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-meditate on these things." **(Philippians 4:8)** As Christians we need friends who will encourage us to fulfill God's plan and destiny for our life and to live a godly life. **The Apostle Paul wrote,** "Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits." **(1 Corinthians 15:33)** In Proverbs 12:26 we read, **"The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray."**

7) BEING COMMITTED TO FINISHING WHAT GOD HAS CALLED US TO DO (Finishing our Christian walk strongly)

Early in His ministry here on earth, Jesus said to His disciples, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work." **(John 4:34)** **Near the end of His time here on earth Jesus said to His Father,** "I have glorified You on earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." **(John 17:4)** *Jesus fulfilled His mission here on earth.*

At the end of his life the Apostle Paul wrote, "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 4:8-9)** **LIKE THE APOSTLE PAUL WE MUST ALSO BE SIMPLY COMMITTED TO FINISHING GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR LIFE HERE ON EARTH**

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 15 – GREATNESS IS SERVING

In this world greatness is often associated with people who have great power and authority over others or who have achieved much. God's Kingdom is however totally opposite to the world. In God's Kingdom the key to promotion is to humble ourselves, whilst the key to receiving from God is giving. The Apostle Peter wrote, ***"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."*** (1 Peter 5:6) Jesus Himself said, ***"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*** (Luke 6:38)

When James and John, the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus asking if they could sit on His right hand and left hand in His Glory (Mark 10:35-37), Jesus called His disciples together and gave them a teaching on what in God's Kingdom was considered greatness – "to serve others". Jesus said, ***"You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*** (Mark 10:42-45)

As Christians we are called to serve the Lord and others as we follow God's plan for our life. (Ephesians 2:10) As Christian leaders it is imperative that we lead by example through serving others. It is in giving our life away to serve Jesus Christ and dying to self that our life produces much eternal fruit. Ironically the more we live for ourselves, the less happy we are. Most depression and unhappiness comes from being too caught up in our own world and from coveting what others have. (James 4:1-3) When our heart is not fully surrendered to the Lord, the enemy is far more readily able to distract us from what God has called us to do in life.

It is as we live for and encourage others using our God given gifts and abilities we experience the life and life more abundantly that Jesus spoke of in John 10:10. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel." (1 Corinthians 14:12) Jesus made it clear what was involved to become a disciple of His and how to experience true life. Jesus said, ***"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."*** (Matthew 16:24-27)

The closer and more intimate our relationship is with the Lord, the more we will have a desire to live for and to serve others. The more time that we spend with Jesus, the Servant King, the more we gain His heart to serve others. (Psalm 37:4) **I will now share seven biblical insights that can help us to serve the Lord in a greater way.**

1) DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD (SEEK TO GLORIFY GOD IN ALL THAT YOU DO IN LIFE)

It is so important that we always maintain a pure motive in all that we do for the LORD. Humility is the key to being used greatly by God. We must always ensure that we never do ministry out of a desire for personal recognition but rather to glorify God. Whenever we serve the Lord, we should always do so out of a motive of helping others to come to Christ. Only Jesus has the power to save and set people free. We must learn to continually give God the glory in all that we do in life. **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)

2) SERVE IN THE AREA OF YOUR GIFTING (BE FAITHFUL IN WHAT GOD HAS CALLED YOU TO DO)

God has a special plan for every believer's life and has created us each uniquely different. As we use our God given gifts, we help to see the Body of Christ grow and be edified (Ephesians 4:16) as we work together in unity with other believers. God has placed each believer in the Body of Christ as He has chosen with a unique function and ministry. (Romans 12:4-5). The Apostle Paul emphasised the importance of every believer using their spiritual gifts, ***"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."*** (Romans 12:6-8)

3) DO ALL THINGS OUT OF A MOTIVATION OF LOVE (ESTEEM OTHERS BETTER THAN YOURSELF)

Having a motivation of love in all that we do is a big part of being effective in our witness as Christians. Jesus said by our love for one another the world would know that we are His disciples. **(John 13:35)** No matter what area of ministry we have been called to, it is imperative that we always maintain a focus of loving and serving others. Serving unbelievers with the love and compassion of Christ is also a key to seeing their hearts opening up to receive Jesus Christ. Doing things out of a love for others rather than grudgingly, is what matters to God. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”** (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

4) MAKE SERVANTHOOD A LIFELONG HABIT (ALWAYS REMAIN HUMBLE WHEN GOD PROMOTES YOU)

We must always endeavour to remain humble when God promotes us. Jesus is our example of humility, **“who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”** (Philippians 2:6-8) Even though He was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus took of His glory in Heaven and came into this world **“to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”** (Mark 10:45) We must never allow our heart to be affected by success or the recognition of others, but be committed to always maintaining an attitude of humility and servant hood.

As believers it is also important that we are good stewards of the gifts that God has entrusted to us and that we are faithful in using them to serve others. **(Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-29)**

5) BE LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ALL THAT YOU DO (DEPEND ON HIS ENABLING POWER IN ALL YOU DO)

It is so important that we allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us, so that we continually stay in the centre of God’s will for our life. We must be careful that we are not distracted from what God has called us to do by doing things that He has not called us to do. The Apostle Paul 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)

It is also important to depend on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit in all that we do. Jesus Himself ministered to others in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the book of Acts we read, **“how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”** (Acts 10:38)

God may at times prompt us to serve and encourage others when we are tired, but His strength is made perfect in our weakness. **(2 Corinthians 12:9-10)** We must always minister in the power of the Holy Spirit.

6) ALWAYS DO EVERYTHING UNTO THE LORD (DESIRE GOD’S APPROVAL RATHER THAN MANS APPROVAL)

If we constantly seek the approval of man when we serve or help others, we have the potential to be disappointed and let down in life. We will not always be fully appreciated for all that we do in life. For this reason we must learn to seek God’s approval in life rather than mans approval. God will never disappoint us and will acknowledge what we do for Him in life. **(John 12:26)** When we learn to serve and encourage others with God’s unconditional love, seeking more to please God than to receive approval from others, we are less likely to be affected when we are not appreciated, or even sometimes rejected, when helping others. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“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)

7) NEVER BECOME A MARTHA (TOO BUSY SERVING TO SPEND TIME WITH JESUS)

We must never allow serving the Lord and ministry to become a higher priority than spending time with Jesus. When Martha complained about her sister Mary not helping her to serve the Lord, Jesus emphasised to Martha that spending time in His presence was a higher priority than serving Him. **(Luke 10:38-42)**

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 16 – LIVING IN THE FULLNESS OF GOD’S PROMISES AND BLESSINGS

There are many promises in the Word of God for all believers. God wants all believers to live a life which is full of purpose and meaning. Jesus Himself said, ***“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)*** God does not have personal favourites (**Ephesians 6:9**) and desires that all people enjoy a life full of purpose and meaning.

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus will turn away no person who comes to Him (**John 6:37**) and that once a person believes in Him they can tap into all the promises of God. **The Apostle Paul wrote**, “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.” (**2 Corinthians 1:20**) Although the Bible is full of promises for all believers, many fail to appropriate all that God has planned for their life, and live a life far beneath their God given potential because of fear, continually dwelling on past failures or through living a compromised Christian life.

God’s promises are generally conditional. This can be seen in the following scriptures: In the book of Isaiah we read, ***“If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land.” (Isaiah 1:19)***, Jesus Himself said, ***“... seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33)***, ***“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, And whose hope is the Lord...” (Jeremiah 17:7)*** and ***“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,”*** Says the LORD of hosts, ***“If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”*** ***“And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes ...” (Malachi 3:10-11)*** **Obedience is a key to living in God’s blessings.**

God has so much in store for every believer’s life and is willing and able to help all those who come to Him. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” (**Ephesians 3:20**) How important it is that we learn to live in the fullness of God’s promises that are available for all believers so that we realise our full potential in Christ and fulfil our God given destiny.

I will now share seven keys that can help all believers to appropriate all that God has planned for their life.

1) THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMITTING OUR PLANS TO THE LORD

The most important thing is that we continually commit our plans to the Lord and allow Him to guide and direct our steps in life, so that we enter into the fullness of what He has planned for our life. It is only in giving our life away to whole heartedly follow Christ’s plan for our life, that our life bears much eternal fruit. (John 12:24-26) (Luke 9:23-24) (Matthew 16:24-27) We have one life to store up treasures for eternity.

In the book of Proverbs we read, “Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established.” (**Proverbs 16:3**) and **“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)**

2) HAVING A CLEAR GOD GIVEN VISION FOR OUR LIFE (KNOWING THE WILL OF THE LORD FOR OUR LIFE)

Knowing and clearly journaling the will of God for our life helps us to bear much eternal fruit in our life. Without having a clear understanding of God’s will for our life, we can squander years of our life doing things that have no real importance for eternity. The Apostle Paul 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**)

God has a unique plan for every believer’s life. It is in following this plan for our life that our lives have great purpose and bear much eternal fruit. The Apostle Paul wrote, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” (**Ephesians 2:10**)

In the book of Proverbs we read, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law.” (**Proverbs 29:18**)

The Lord said to the prophet Habakkuk, “Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it.” (**Habakkuk 2:2a**)

Having a clear God given vision for our life helps us to enter into all that God has planned for our life.

3) TAKING STEPS OF FAITH (God's plan for our life always involves taking steps of faith. Stepping out to do things that He calls us to do that would not be possible for us to do without His supernatural help)

In the book of Hebrews we read, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." **(Hebrews 11:6)**

Jesus Himself said, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." **(Mark 9:23)** and "I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." **(Matthew 17:20)**

NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD IF WE YIELD TO HIS WILL FOR OUR LIFE AND TRUST AND OBEY HIM

Jesus also said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." **(John 15:16)**

4) BEING CONTINUALLY LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (God knows the beginning from the end. We must always be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit who will reveal to us step by step God's ways and plans for our life)

Jesus Himself said, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." **(John 16:13)** **GOD'S WAYS ARE FAR HIGHER THAN OUR WAYS (Isaiah 55:8-9)**

5) HAVING A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER (We must continually pray into being God's plan for our life as we seek His direction, empowerment and provision for all that He has called us to do in life. We must continually learn to cast our cares to the Lord in prayer and to depend on the Lord in all that we do in life.)

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." **(Philippians 4:6-7)**

God promises to answer all of our prayers that are in line with His will for our life. The Apostle John wrote, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. **(1 John 5:14-15)** **Jesus Himself said,** "... Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." **(John 16:23-24)**

6) BUILDING OUR LIFE ON THE PROMISES OF GOD (As we study and meditate on God's Word (the Bible) we gain a greater understanding of all of God's promises that are available for all believers. It is so important that we discipline ourselves and learn to make time to meditate on the promises contained in God's Word)

The Apostle Paul wrote, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." **(Romans 10:17)**

As we meditate on the promises of God contained in His Word our faith grows as the word goes from our head into our hearts. The LORD said to Joshua just before he led the children of Israel into the Promised Land, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." **(Joshua 1:8)** **Jesus also said,** "If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." **(John 8:31-32)**

7) BEING PLANTED IN A LOCAL CHURCH (We all need to be connected to other believers in a loving local church to fully realize God's plan for our life. His plan for our life is always worked out in partnership with others)

In the book of Psalms we read, "Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing." **(Psalm 92:13-14)** **In the book of Hebrews we also read,** "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." **(Hebrews 10:24-25)**

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 17 – INVESTING YOUR LIFE IN STORING UP ETERNAL TREASURES

INTRODUCTION:

We have all been given one life in which we can make a difference in this world for eternity. As Christians we can stand on the many promises contained in God's Word (**2 Corinthians 1:20**) and make a difference in the lives of many people. Jesus said to His disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see you good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (**Matthew 5:16**) With the many tragedies that we have seen of late and with so many people struggling in life we have a great opportunity in this life to bring a message of Hope to those around us.

In a world which is full of temptations and challenges, is so important that we keep our mind set on things above and not on things on the earth (**Colossians 3:1-2**) and that we allow God's plan for our life to unfold. If we are open and available to being used by God, He can cause our life to be a great blessing to many. In light of the temporary nature of this life here on earth, how important it is that we always live our life in the context of eternity.

Jesus Himself said, ***"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*** (**Matthew 6:19-21**)

Our Christian walk is a marathon and not a sprint. Fulfilling our God given destiny is not so much where we end up at the end of our life, but what we do for eternity on the journey through life as we encourage and help others to come to Christ and grow in their own walk with the Lord. As we are faithful in the serving the Lord in the little things, God will give us progressively greater opportunities to impact the lives of others for eternity. Always doing everything unto the Lord is the key to not becoming discouraged when others do not appreciate what you do for them. The Apostle Paul wrote, "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**)

A sobering fact is that we will all one day give an account of our life to the Lord for the things that we have done in the body (**2 Corinthians 5:9-10**) and it will only be those things that we have done for eternity and out of a motivation of love that will stand the test of fire when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ. (**1 Corinthians 3:13-15**) However, as our labour for the Lord is never in vain (**1 Corinthians 15:58**) and as our Father in heaven honours all those who serve the Lord, (**John 12:26**) giving our best for the Lord should always be our highest priority in life. As we learn to live in this way we can help to see heaven populated and hell plundered as we continually live with eternity in mind. As believers we have been chosen and appointed by the Lord to bear fruit that will remain. (**John 15:16**) I will now share seven thoughts that can help us to become more focused on living our life with eternity in mind.

1) WE ARE ALL UNIQUELY GIFTED TO FULFILL GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR LIFE

God has a unique plan for every believer's life. (**Ephesians 2:10**) God also knows exactly what we need and the gifts that we require to fulfill His plan for our life. We must always avoid any tendency to want to compare ourselves with others as it is God who has given each believer a measure of faith and the gifts that they need to fulfill His plan for their life. The Apostle Paul wrote, ***"For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith."*** (**Romans 12:3**) and ***"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us..."*** (**Romans 12:6**)

2) TRUE PURPOSE AND MEANING IN LIFE COMES FROM USING OUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

We are most fulfilled in life when we are able to use our God given spiritual gifts. Serving the Lord and others with our spiritual gifts will always energise us and give us great contentment in life. The Apostle Paul said, ***"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."*** (**Romans 12:6-8**)

3) IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW AND FOLLOW GOD'S WILL AND PLAN FOR OUR LIFE (WE ALL HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE TO PLAY IN THE BODY OF CHRIST)

Knowing the will of God for our life and following His plan for our life is the key to living a life that is full of purpose and meaning. Life is full of choices so it is important to involve the Lord in all that we do in life. The Apostle Paul 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)

Being in the right place at all times and doing what God has called us to do in life, will enable us to best use our God given gifts. Making right choices in life and being led by the Holy Spirit (**John 16:13**) helps us as believers to fulfill God's plan and destiny for our life. If we allow the Lord to direct our steps in life we will: **i)** Help others to come to Christ, **ii)** Be able to encourage and bring hope to many, (a word in season for the weary) and **iii)** Help others to fulfill their God given destiny

4) THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A MOTIVATION OF LOVE IN ALL THAT WE DO FOR OTHERS

As Christians we have the ability to love others with the agape (unconditional) love of God. In the book of Romans the Apostle Paul wrote, ***"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*** (Romans 5:5) Compassion is a quality found only in God or those who love God. Our ability as believers to love others unconditionally makes us different to those in the world who do not know Christ. As we spend time with the Lord (abide in Him) we grow in our love and compassion for others.

It is so important that all ministry and service for the Lord is motivated by love. Jesus said ***"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"*** (John 13:35) The Bible also makes it clear that true love will always have a practical application as well. (**James 1:27**) (**1 John 3:16-19**) However the bible makes it clear that no matter what we do in life in service to others, if it is not motivated by love it profits us nothing. The Apostle Paul wrote, ***"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."*** (1 Corinthians 13:3)

5) TRUE GREATNESS COMES FROM LIVING A LIFE CHARACTERISED BY SERVING OTHERS

In this world people often have a desire to be in control of their life and greatness is often associated with power and worldly influence. In a world which often encourages people to focus on themselves and meeting their own needs and wants, we as Christians can make a profound impact on the lives of those around us as we follow Christ's example of being a humble servant. Jesus Himself said, ***"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*** (Matthew 20:25-28)

6) THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING PLANTED IN A LOCAL CHURCH FELLOWSHIP (WE ALL NEED EACH OTHER)

To fully enter into all that God has planned for our life we need to be connected to the life of a healthy local church. We all need each other in the Body of Christ for encouragement and support (**Hebrews 10:24-25**) and to see God's plan for our life worked out. God has a church home for all believers in which they can be encouraged and supported in their walk with the Lord. Like the members of the human body, every member (believer) in the body of Christ has an important function (or role) to play. God's plan for our life will always be worked out in relationship with other believers. The Apostle Paul emphasised the importance of all Christians using their gifts in the Body of Christ, ***"from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself IN LOVE."*** (Ephesians 4:16)

7) DEPENDING ON THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ALL THAT YOU DO FOR THE LORD (Ephesians 5:18) (Zechariah 4:6)

Just as Jesus depended on the Holy Spirit to perform His ministry here on earth (**Luke 4:14**) (**Acts 10:38**) all believers need to rely on the Holy Spirit to empower them to do all that God has called them to do in life. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. What God has planned for our life can never be done in our own strength and ability and will invariably always involve the need to take steps of faith. The Apostle Paul wrote, ***"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."*** (Ephesians 3:20)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 18 – JUST DO WHAT JESUS TELLS YOU TO DO

God has a unique plan and purpose for every person's life which commences the moment they receive Jesus Christ into their heart and life to be their Lord and Saviour. **(Ephesians 2:10)** The moment we come to Christ and are born again, we gain the gift of eternal life. Jesus Himself said, "... that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." **(John 3:15)**

As we commit to following God's plan for our life, our lives have the potential to make a great impact on the world for eternity. His plan for our life is far greater than we could ever imagine. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." **(Ephesians 3:20)** Knowing and following God's plan for our life is the key to bearing fruit in our lives as Christians. Jesus said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." **(John 15:16)**

There are many reasons why we need to stay close to the Lord so that we just do what Jesus tells us to do. These include, i) The LORD has a future full of hope for us, **(Jeremiah 29:11)** ii) His plan for our life is the key to experiencing abundant life (a life full of purpose and meaning) **(John 10:10)**, iii) God's ways are far higher than our ways, **(Isaiah 55: 8-9)** iv) we only have one life in this body to store up treasures for eternity **(Matthew 6:19-21)**, v) Our labour for the Lord is never in vain **(1 Corinthians 15:58)** and vi) because we have a very real adversary, the devil, who will continually try and distract us and cause us to make wrong choices in life, so that we miss out on what God has planned for our life. **(1 Peter 5:8)**

Before we look at the account of Jesus turning the water into wine, I will now share quickly four of many ways in which the LORD speaks to us to give us direction in our lives as Christians:

- 1) As we read and meditate on the Word of God (the bible) we will receive direction for our life from God through His Word. (A Rhema Word is where a piece of Scripture is illuminated by the Holy Spirit which relates to an area of need in our life, or is a direct answer to our prayers) **(Psalm 119:105) (Psalm 119:133)**
- 2) God speaks directly to us as we seek Him in prayer for help and direction in life. The Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. **(John 14:26) (John 16:13)** It is so important that we make time to be still before the LORD so that we can hear His voice. **(Jeremiah 23:18)**
- 3) Through other Christians when we gather together in fellowship **(Proverbs 11:14)**, and
- 4) Through our circumstances. The Lord closes doors that no man can open and often through our circumstances causes us to come back into alignment with His will and plan for our life. Often trials and challenges also get us back to a place of intimacy with our walk with the Lord so that we can hear His voice more clearly. In the book of Acts we see how the Apostle Paul was forbidden by the Holy Spirit at one stage to preach the word in Asia. **(Acts 16:6-8)**

I will now look at the account of Jesus turning the water into wine in Chapter two of the gospel of John.

"On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece.

Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom.

And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!" This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him." **(John 2:1-11)** **I WILL NOW LOOK AT SEVEN THINGS THAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THIS PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE**

- 1) **THE IMPORTANCE OF INVOLVING THE LORD IN ALL THAT WE DO IN LIFE**
 When the wine ran out at the wedding, the mother of Jesus made this problem known to Him. When we go through life we need to commit our cares to the Lord continually and to seek His direction in all that we do in life. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”** (*Philippians 4:6-7*)
- 2) **JESUS IS ALWAYS WILLING AND ABLE TO MEET OUR NEEDS**
 God knows our every single need even before we ask Him. (**Matthew 6:7-8**) When Jesus became aware of the fact that they had run out of wine at the wedding feast, he was prepared to supernaturally meet this need. When we put the Lord first place in our life, He promises to meet our every single need. Jesus said, **“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ Or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”** (*Matthew 6:25-33*) In the book of Psalms we read, **“No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”** (*Psalms 84:11*)
- 3) **WE MUST ACT UPON WHAT GOD CALLS US TO DO IN LIFE (Faith without works is dead) OBEDIENCE IS A KEY TO EXPERIENCING GOD’S BLESSINGS (ISAIAH 1:19)**
 Faith will almost always involve taking steps of action. When we are in need of help God will give us the keys to seeing our circumstances turned around. As we step out and act upon what God has called us to do in life, we begin to see the miracles and breakthroughs in our life. The servants filled the waterpots with water at the instructions of Jesus. As we step out in faith to do the new things that God has called us to do, we can be assured that He will never let us down. It was as Joshua and his men of war and the seven priests marched around the city of Jericho with the ark, as instructed by the LORD, that the wall fell flat down. (**Joshua 6:1-20**)
- 4) **GOD’S WAYS ARE OFTEN DIFFERENT TO WHAT WE WOULD DO IN LIFE**
 God’s ways are often so different to the way that we would do things. His ways are however far higher than our ways. Rather than trying to rationalise what the Lord tells us to do, we need to simply ***just do what He tells us to do*** with a childlike faith. To the servants to fill the six waterpots with water would have made little sense as they needed more wine. In Proverbs we read, **“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.”** (*Proverbs 3:5-6*)
- 5) **GOD’S PLAN FOR OUR LIFE WILL INVARIABLY INVOLVE TAKING STEPS OF FAITH (WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE GOD)**
 Once the waterpots had been filled the servants were told by Jesus to draw some of the water out and to take it to the master of the feast. AND THEY TOOK IT. It was as they stepped out by faith to serve the water that they experienced the miracle of seeing the water turned into wine. In the book of Hebrews we read, **“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”** (*Hebrews 11:1*)
- 6) **GOD’S DESIRE IS TO GIVE US THE BEST IN LIFE (A life full of purpose and meaning)**
 The master of the feast after tasting the water that had been turned into wine said that it was the best wine. God has the best plan for our life and knows what is best for us. If we continually just do what Jesus tells us to do, we will live a life which is full of purpose and meaning, although not free of trouble. However even when we are going through the tough times in life, the Lord knows best what we should do during these trials. Jesus said, **“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”** (*John 10:10*)
- 7) **GOD IS ABLE AND WILLING TO PERFORM MIRACLES IN OUR LIFE TODAY (Today no situation is impossible in your life. Jesus still performs miracles today)**
 In the book of Hebrews we read, **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”** (*Hebrews 13:8*) **Jesus Himself said, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.”** (*Mark 9:23*) Today if you seem to be in an impossible position in life, there is a God who is able to redeem your life. Today you can make your need known to Jesus Christ. As we put our faith and trust in Him and ***just do what He tells us to do***, He is still able to make a way where there seems no way.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 19 – THE IMPORTANCE OF ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER

As Christians we can bring a message of hope and encouragement to many people in our life. Because God's love has been poured out in the hearts of every believer by the Holy Spirit, **(Romans 5:5)** every Christian has the ability to love others unconditionally. In a world which is becoming more rushed and less personal, we have the ability more than ever before to shine even brighter as we love and encourage those around us. Because of the hope that we have in Christ, we can continually let others know in this world that there is a God who is both willing and able to help them in life. Jesus said, **"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see you good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)** As we continually love and encourage those people around us with the love of the Lord, we are more readily able to lead them to Christ because of our Christian witness.

Receiving encouragement also helps people to remain strong when they are going through trials and tests in life and helps to empower them to persevere in their Christian walk when they are experiencing temptations. In a world that is now in many ways getting more complex and harder to live in, how important it is that we look to encourage one another as often as possible. In the book of Hebrews we read, **"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end," (Hebrews 3:12-14)** In this passage of scripture we see clearly the importance of continually encouraging one another in our walk with the Lord.

As Christians we also live in a world which is increasingly becoming more opposed to Godly values. For this reason more than ever before, we need to look at every opportunity to encourage our brothers and sisters in the Lord to keep persevering in their faith. Jesus Himself said, **"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also." (John 15:18-20)** Fellowship with other believers is therefore crucial for all Christians. It is within the context of a loving local church fellowship that we can encourage others and be encouraged ourselves.

As we are all in a constant spiritual war, we must also continually guard our hearts from becoming hardened through the hurts of life, or from becoming critical and judgmental. The bible makes it clear that what is in our hearts will ultimately come out of our mouths when we speak, because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. **(Luke 6:45)** In the book of proverbs we read, **"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." (Proverbs 4:23)** As Christians it is so important that we continually guard our heart so that we remain soft and loving towards others and that we do not allow life's bitter experiences to make us cynical in life. The Bible makes it clear that we must through many tribulations enter the Kingdom of God. **(Acts 14:22)** Before I share 7 reasons why we need to continually look for every opportunity to encourage others, I will share six keys that help to keep our heart soft so that we can continually love and encourage others with our words and actions.

These six keys are: **i)** Learning to continually walk in the Spirit – staying under the controlling influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit **(Galatians 5:13-16)**, **ii)** Living a lifestyle of worship in which you worship the Father in Spirit and truth – having a genuine heartfelt love and devotion for the LORD **(John 4:23-24)** **(Psalm 37:4)**, **iii)** Continually renewing our mind with the Word of God – Developing Kingdom minded thinking **(Romans 12:2)** **(Joshua 1:8)**, **iv)** Being quick to forgive those who hurt us (not allowing a root of bitterness to spring up in our heart) **(Matthew 18:21-22)** **(Hebrews 12:14-15)**, **v)** Choosing to pray for those who spitefully use or reject us (praying for our enemies) **(Matthew 5:44)** and, **vi)** Being careful to choose our friends wisely – evil company corrupts good habits. **(1 Corinthians 15:33)**

HOW IMPORTANT IT IS THAT WE LEARN TO LOVE AND ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER IN LIFE

I will now share seven reasons why it is so important to encourage others in life.

1) IT HELPS TO MAINTAIN LOVE AND UNITY IN OUR CHURCHES, WORKPLACES AND FAMILIES

Being in an environment where people love and encourage one another on a consistent basis will be blessed. The bible makes it clear that where brethren dwell together in unity God commands a blessing. **(Psalm 133:1-3)** When people work together in unity they will invariably achieve much more in life. When we work or live in an atmosphere where people respect and think highly of one another, we will experience great unity and love. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”** (Philippians 2:2-3)

2) IT GIVES STRENGTH TO OTHERS (To encourage others means “to give strength” to others)

Everyone at times will experience discouragement. Words of encouragement and time spent with people going through trials and challenges can greatly lift their spirits. Having fellowship with other believers gives us the opportunity to encourage each other in our walk with the Lord. In the book of Hebrews we read, **“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”** (Hebrews 10:23-25) In the book of Acts we read, “When Paul saw them (the brethren), he thanked God and took courage.” (Acts 28:15)

3) WE SHINE MORE BRIGHTLY IN THIS WORLD

In a world where people often mistreat and speak badly about others, if we continually live a life where we love and encourage others, we will shine brightly and make a great difference in this world. Jesus Himself said, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** (John 13:34-35)

4) IT HELPS IN BUILDING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

Most people respond to love and being affirmed for what they do in life. Rather than focusing on the faults in people we need to always look at affirming the good things in the lives of all those that we relate to. As we make a habit of encouraging those in our life by acknowledging their good points and achievements, we will invariably develop better and stronger relationships in life. Being friendly and encouraging others is the key to developing good friendships and lasting relationships. In the book of Proverbs we read, **“A man who has friends must himself be friendly...”** (Proverbs 18:24)

5) THE WORDS THAT WE SPEAK NEED TO BE “LIFE GIVING” (There is life and death in the power of the tongue)

The words that we speak in life in many ways frame our world. If we continually speak words of life and faith and encouragement to others, we will live in an atmosphere of faith and love in our homes and workplaces. The words that we speak have the potential to either build up or to pull down and discourage others and the ability to strengthen or destroy our relationships with others. In the book of proverbs we read, **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.”** (Proverbs 18:21) Our self talk must also be positive.

6) WE CAN HELP INSPIRE PEOPLE TO FULFILL THEIR GOD GIVEN DESTINY

Our Christian walk is a marathon and at times we will go through wilderness seasons. It is during the winter seasons of our life that we most need encouragement. A word in season can sometimes be the difference between a person fulfilling their God given destiny or quitting on the point of a miracle. Continually encouraging those in our life to be all that God has planned for their life and to keep going during their trials can be the key to them fulfilling their full potential in Christ. In the book of Proverbs we read, **“A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!”** (Proverbs 15:23)

7) IT HELPS BELIEVERS TO REMAIN STRONG IN THEIR FAITH WHEN BEING PERSECUTED FOR THEIR FAITH

The bible makes it clear that just prior to the return of the Lord there will be great times of persecution. In the early church there was also great persecution. In the book of Acts we see how Barnabas was used mightily to encourage the believers at Antioch to continue with the Lord. **(Acts 11:22-24)** As a result a great many people were added to the Lord. Receiving constant encouragement from other believers is crucial in the times that we now live in.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 20 – THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING FILLED WITH (BAPTISED IN) THE HOLY SPIRIT

INTRODUCTION:

Once a person becomes a Christian, God has another wonderful gift for them - the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift is known as the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Bible speaks much about this experience. John the Baptist spoke of it, and revealed that Jesus Christ is the Baptiser with the Holy Spirit. John himself said, ***“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”*** (Matthew 3:11)

THE APOSTLES HAD THEIR NEW BIRTH EXPERIENCE ON RESURRECTION SUNDAY

After appearing to His disciples on resurrection Sunday, Jesus said to them: **“Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”** And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them; **“Receive the Holy Spirit.”** (John 20:21-22)

This was the New Birth experience for His disciples. The Apostle Paul outlined in the book of Romans that there were two requirements for receiving New Testament Salvation: ***“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”*** (Romans 10:9)

Prior to resurrection Sunday the apostles had already confessed Jesus as their Lord. (Mark 8:29 and John 6:67-69) But now, for the first time, they also believed that God raised Him from the dead. Thus their salvation was completed. This was the point at which they experienced the new birth. The Holy Spirit, breathed into them by Jesus, imparted to them a totally new kind of life - eternal life - which had triumphed over sin and Satan, over death and the grave.

However, just before Jesus ascended back to Heaven He told His disciples that there was still a fuller experience of the Holy Spirit to come. Jesus said to His disciples, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49) “For John truly baptised with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” (Acts 1:5) and

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

THE DISCIPLES WERE BAPTISED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4)

Before a person can receive the Holy Spirit, they must be first saved (Born Again). (Acts 19:2a)

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is the submerging of the whole being into the Spirit of God. It is being filled with the Holy Spirit Who Himself is a living person.

Being filled with the Holy Spirit should not be just a one-time experience but an ongoing practice. As we give out to others we must continually be filled ourselves. 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 distinction between the Born Again experience (John 4:14) and the overflowing fullness of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit experience (John 7:37-39) which all those in the Upper Room experienced on the Day of Pentecost, can also be clearly seen in the book of Acts where Philip preached the gospel in the city of Samaria.(Acts 8:4-17)

WHEN CHRIST WAS PREACHED IN SAMARIA

1) **Multitudes in that city were born again,**

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord **heeded** the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.” (Acts 8:5-6)

2) **Then Water Baptized, and**

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, ***both men and women were baptized.***” (Acts 8:12)

3) **Finally Baptized in the Holy Spirit (Received the Holy Spirit)**

"Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might **receive the Holy Spirit**. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they **received the Holy Spirit**." (Acts 8:14-17)

The Holy Spirit empowers us to minister to others. Jesus promised His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came upon them they would receive power to be His witnesses. (Act 1:8) After receiving the Holy Spirit, all the disciples become powerful preachers. Being Baptised in the Holy Spirit enables all believers to witness with greater joy and freedom, and with much more boldness when sharing with others who Jesus is, and what He has done for them. It also helps believers to enter into a richer spiritual awareness of the Lord.

God has given a lasting sign as evidence that we have been baptised in the Holy Spirit. That sign is speaking in tongues, or praying in the Spirit. (Mark 16:17 & Acts 2:4) The language that you receive when baptised in the Holy Spirit, is not one that you have learnt with the mind. However, you must use your own mouth and tongue to speak the words that God will give you.

To receive the gift of the Holy Spirit a believer must simply ask their heavenly Father for the special gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." (Luke 11:13)

Like the gift of salvation it is to be received – by Grace – through Faith – Not of Works

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9) **A believer must simply receive the gift of the Holy Spirit by FAITH.** "...that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." (Galatians 3:14)

HOWEVER FAITH IS NEVER A SUBSTITUTE FOR OBEDIENCE. TRUE FAITH IS ALWAYS MANIFESTED IN OBEDIENCE. The apostle Peter focused on the obedience aspect of genuine faith in his defence to the Jewish council. "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." (Acts 5:32)

SEVEN THINGS TO CONSIDER IN RELATION TO RECEIVING (BEING BAPTISED IN) THE HOLY SPIRIT

- 1a) **Maintaining a humble heart as you operate in the gifts of the Spirit. Whatever we do in life must always be done to glorify God and to serve others.** (1 Corinthians 10:31) (1 Corinthians 12:7) (1 Corinthians 12:11)

SIX SCRIPTURAL STEPS OF OBEDIENCE AND FAITH TO HELP BELIEVERS TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

- 1b) & 2) **Repentance and being Baptized** The first two steps are stated by the Apostle Peter. These are genuine repentance and being water baptized upon becoming a believer. **"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."** (Acts 2:38)
- 3) **Being Hungry and thirsty for the fullness of the Spirit. Jesus said,** "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." (John 7:37-38) "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6)
- 4) **Asking our Heavenly Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said,** "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father **give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!** (Luke 11:13)
- 5) **We must receive the Holy Spirit (DRINK) Jesus said,** "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." (John 7:37) **"Drinking"** represents an active process of receiving. The infilling of the Holy Spirit cannot be received by a negative or passive attitude, just as no one can drink with a closed mouth. The Lord says, "Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it." (Psalm 81:10) **God cannot fill a closed mouth. We must open our mouth to receive the fullness of the Spirit**
- 6) **We must "yield" ourselves to God** The apostle Paul speaks to Christians of a twofold surrender to God: **"But present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God."** (Romans 6:13)
- The first surrender is the "surrender of the will and the personality" **YOURSELVES**
 - The second surrender involves the surrender of our **PHYSICAL MEMBERS**

In surrendering our physical members, we can no longer seek to understand intellectually what God asks of us. We must simply hand over unreserved control of our physical members and allow God to use them according to His own will and purpose. The particular member He takes full control of is that unruly member which no man can tame – the tongue. Thus the yielding of our tongue to the Spirit represents the ultimate surrender of one's members and by this we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **The above six Scriptural steps of obedience and faith are not always fulfilled when some believers receive the Holy Spirit, but they are important steps to be taught to those believers desiring to be Baptized in the Holy Spirit.**

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 21 – THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUE WORSHIP (Worshipping in spirit and truth)

INTRODUCTION:

We were all made to worship God. As unbelievers, people invariably worship many things to try and cope with their separation from God's presence. In India alone there are around 300 Million different gods and idols that are worshiped. In the Western world people worship pop stars and sporting celebrities. The simple fact is that every person has a God shaped vacuum that can only be filled by God when they come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself emphasised the importance of true worship when He spoke to the woman at Samaria. **“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”** (*John 4:23-24*) Genuine worship helps us as Christians to keep our hearts close to God so that we have His compassion for others. When we worship the LORD on a regular basis with sincerity of heart, we become more and more like Him.

Having our first love for Jesus ablaze is the key to loving people and having an effective ministry to others. Every believer has a unique ministry and plan for their life. (**Ephesians 2:10**) It is only when we minister to others out of a motive of love that our lives begin to have a great impact on this world. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.”** (*1 Corinthians 13:1-3*)

Being in love with the Lord is the key to loving others. It is out of our love relationship with Jesus that we begin to love others with His compassion. (**Psalms 37:4**) Jesus Himself emphasised the importance of loving the Lord and others. **“And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”** (*Mark 12:30-31*)

In the book of Revelation, Jesus acknowledged that the church at Ephesus had persevered and laboured patiently in doing good works and how they could not bear those who were evil. (**Revelation 2:1-3**) However, He had one thing against them; they had left their first love for Him. In the book of Revelation we read, **“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lamp stand from its place-unless you repent.”** (*Revelation 2:4-5*)

True worship helps us to know the LORD in a more intimate way. It is so important that we never allow worship to become just a routine part of our Christian life, but that we always have a passion to know God in a deeper way when worshipping Him. (**Mark 7:6-7**) King David was a worshipper and a man the bible says was a man after God's own heart. In the book of Acts we read, **“And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, ‘I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.’”** (*Acts 13:22*) In Psalm 138 King David wrote, “I will praise You with my whole heart; Before the gods I will sing praises to You. I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; ...” (**Psalms 138:1-2**)

Given the times that we are now living in, (**2 Timothy 3:1-9**) how important it is that we embrace in our own life the message in the following words of a well know worship song: “I’m coming back to a heart of worship, because it is all about You, all about You, Jesus.” I will now share seven thoughts in relation to true worship.

1) WE MUST NOT ALLOW THE CARES OF THIS WORLD TO PREOCCUPY OUR MINDS WHEN WE ARE WORSHIPPING THE LORD (**Matthew 6:31-33**)

When we worship the LORD we connect with the heart of God. During our times of worship, God will often speak to us and give us fresh revelation and direction for our life or a timely word of encouragement. For this reason we must ensure that we do not allow the things going on in our life to distract us from fully entering into our worship to the LORD. The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word (in our heart) (**Mark 4:19**) and also distract us from wholeheartedly worshipping the Lord. In the book of Colossians the Apostle Paul wrote, **“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”** (*Colossians 3:1-2*)

- 2) **WE NEED TO MAKE TIME TO WORSHIP THE LORD ON A REGULAR (DAILY) BASIS (*Psalms 34:1*)**
(The importance of both private and corporate worship – Sunday to Sunday corporate worship is not enough)
 In a world which is getting more and more-fast paced, it can be possible to develop a habit of spending insufficient personal time with the LORD during the week. Being too busy in life makes it harder to walk in the Spirit and to seize the opportunities that God gives us to share our faith with others. Starting each day with the Lord in worship and prayer helps to enable and empower us to bear much more fruit in our life, as our lives shine more brightly from spending time with Him. Each day we need God's wisdom and direction for our life, to know His next steps for our life. **(Psalms 37:23)** For these reasons we must daily choose to make time to seek the face of the LORD. In the book of Psalms we read, **"Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker."** (*Psalms 95:6*)
- 3) **OUR ENTIRE LIFE NEEDS TO BE AN ACT OF WORSHIP**
 As Christians our whole life should be an act of worship in which our light so shines before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. **(Matthew 5:16)** If we live our life in a God glorifying way, our lives will continually make a difference in this world for eternity. The Apostle Paul wrote, **"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."** (*Romans 12:1*) Worshiping the Lord needs to become a way of life. The Apostle Paul also wrote, **"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."** (*Colossians 3:16*)
- 4) **WORSHIP CHANGES OUR CIRCUMSTANCES AND HOW WE SEE OUR PROBLEMS**
(It helps to change the atmosphere around us. God inhabits the praises of His people)
 When we begin to worship the LORD our problems begin to appear smaller as we focus on the bigness of our God. As we worship the Lord we also bring God's presence into our circumstances, homes and workplaces. God is able to deliver us from our trials and challenges in life. When the demon-possessed man, who had often been bound with shackles and chains which he pulled apart, who night and day was crying out and cutting himself, ran up to Jesus Christ and worshiped Him, he was instantly set free and became clothed again and of a right mind. **(Mark 5:1-15)**
 After Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison for their Christian ministry, *everyone's* chains were loosed as they prayed and worshiped God. In the book of Acts we read, **"But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed."** (*Acts 16:25-26*) As we worship God in spirit and in truth, we begin to see our circumstances in a different light and we grow in our expectation and faith that He will work things out in our life as we seek His face.
- 5) **WE MUST NEVER ALLOW WORSHIP JUST TO BECOME A ROUTINE PART OF OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE**
 We must never allow worship just to become a routine part of our Christian life and church services. God has so much in store for every believer's life. When we worship the LORD we should always do so with an excitement and sense of expectation, that we will have a fresh encounter with God as we seek His face in worship. In the book of Psalms we read, **"Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms."** (*Psalms 95:1-2*)
- 6) **WHEN WE WORSHIP THE LORD WE GROW IN OUR LOVE AND COMPASSION FOR OTHERS IN NEED**
(As we touch heaven with our worship, God will use us to help change earth as we gain His compassion for people and perspective for helping others in need) As we worship the LORD we become filled with God's love and compassion for people and begin to have a greater passion and desire to live for Jesus Christ and for others. King David wrote in Psalm 37:4, **"Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart."** Spending time worshipping the Lord is one major key for helping Christians to become more Christ-like. **(Romans 8:29)**
- 7) **WHEN WE WORSHIP THE LORD WE ARE STRENGTHENED DURING THE TRIALS OF LIFE**
(In His presence is fullness of joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength) As Christians, one trait or expression of the fruit of the Spirit is joy. King David wrote, **"You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."** (*Psalms 16:11*) The joy of the Lord is our strength. **(Nehemiah 8:10)** When we worship the LORD during our trials and challenges, we gain the strength (*Isaiah 40:28-31*) and boldness (*Acts 4:13*) to overcome them.

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 22 – THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING A CONSECRATED CHRISTIAN LIFE

INTRODUCTION

Given the late hour in which we are now living in, more than ever before we need as Christians to be living a life which is totally yielded to the LORD. Jesus Himself said in relation to the times just preceding His return, ***“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) As Christians we must always be ready for the return of the LORD, that we are a part of the faithful church which will be preserved from the hour of trial, which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. (Revelation 3:10) As believers we must always be ready for the time when Christians will be raptured from the earth to be with the Lord, (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17) to be judged for their rewards for their life here on earth. (2 Corinthians 5:10) (1 Corinthians 3:5-15) This will occur before the great day of God’s wrath towards those who have lived in rebellion towards Him, (Revelation 6:17) because God has not appointed believers to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:9) How important it is that we are ready for the Lord’s return.

Those remaining on the earth will experience a time of great tribulation before the Second coming of Christ, who will restore peace back to the earth during His millennium reign. (Revelation 20:4) Prior to His return the Anti-Christ, (also referred to as the beast), will arise (Revelation 13:1-5 & 7) with his false prophet, (another beast who will perform great signs to deceive people) and he will rule over the earth. The false prophet (Revelation 13:11) will cause those on earth to worship the first beast. (Revelation 13:12) For a period of forty-two months (Revelation 13:5) the Anti-Christ will be given power to make war with the saints and to overcome them. (Revelation 13:7) During this time only true believers will not worship the Anti-Christ. In this period of time an image of the beast will also be made (Revelation 13:14) and be given power (by the False Prophet) to cause as many as do not worship it to be killed. (Revelation 13:15) During this time Christians will be beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God and for not worshipping the beast or his image (and for not receiving his mark on their foreheads or hands). (Revelation 20:4) For those people who worship the Anti-Christ and the image of the beast and take the mark of the beast (to buy and sell), (Revelation 13:16-17) (Revelation 14:9) they will end up in the lake of fire (Revelation 14:9-11) with the Devil and his angels and the Anti-Christ and False Prophet, (Revelation 20:10) who were given their power by the Devil. (Revelation 13:2 & 4) (Revelation 13:11-12) How important it is that we remain close to the Lord in these days and that we are continually filled with the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18) In this way we will remain strong in our walk with the Lord and will not be led into deception by demon spirits. (1 Timothy 4:1)

There is no safer place than being in the centre of God’s will for our life. In the book of Daniel we see the faithfulness of God to three Jews called Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, who refused to compromise and worship other gods and a gold image, even when threatened by King Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel Chapter 3) As believers today we can also fully trust in the faithfulness of our God because, ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”*** (Hebrews 13:8) In Chapter 3 of the book of Daniel, we see the faithfulness of God to these three young Jews who refused to obey the King’s request to bow down to his gods and a gold image that he had made. In this chapter we see;

- i) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refusing to fall down and worship the Image of gold, although threatened with death by King Nebuchadnezzar if they did not do so, (Daniel 3:12-15) (Daniel 3:18)
- ii) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego expressing to King Nebuchadnezzar the ability of their God to deliver them from the burning fiery furnace that he was going to throw them into to die (Daniel 3:17) **They had faith in their God and completely trusted in Him.**
- iii) That King Nebuchadnezzar’s mighty men of valour died from the heat of the fire in the furnace (which had been heated up seven times more than usual) as they undertook to cast Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego into the fiery furnace Daniel 3:22-23)
- iv) How the Lord was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in the midst of the fire in the furnace (Daniel 3:24-25)
- v) That after being called to come out of the fiery furnace by King Nebuchadnezzar, not one part of their body had been burnt and they did not even smell of fire. (Daniel 3:26-27) The Lord had absolutely protected them and had been with them during their fiery trial.
- vi) Through their unfailing commitment to God and the King seeing the form of a fourth like the Son of God in the midst of the fire who had protected these three young Jews, King Nebuchadnezzar himself beginning to praise God (Daniel 3:28-29) and
- vii) King Nebuchadnezzar promoting Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego after God had delivered them. (Daniel 3:30)

There is no safer place than being in the centre of God’s will for our life and standing up for our faith. Jesus Himself said, “Therefore, whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:32-33) If we commit to following the Lord’s plan for our life, He will never leave nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5) (Matthew 28:20) and God will grant us favour in all that we do. In Proverbs 21:1 we read, ***“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.”*** As we seek first His Kingdom and plan and purpose for our life, the LORD promises to meet our every single need. God has a unique plan for every believer’s life (Ephesians 2:10) that can make a profound impact on the lives of many. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” (Ephesians 3:20)

It is however only as we give our life away to follow God’s plan for our life, (when we live a life that is set apart and consecrated to the LORD), that our lives will bear much fruit for eternity. Jesus Himself said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour.” (John 12:24-26)

I will now look at seven areas in relation to living a life which is consecrated to the Lord.

1) THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING AN INTIMATE WALK WITH THE LORD

Having intimacy with the LORD is a key to *remaining strong* in our Christian walk. The more time that we spend with the LORD, the more we grow in our love for Him and in our desire to serve Him. Jesus Himself said, **“If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.”** (John 14:23) King David also wrote, **“Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.”** (Psalm 37:4) Spending time with the LORD also helps us to get to know Him in a more intimate way, so that we *“...know the love of Christ which passes knowledge;”* and that we are *“...filled with all the fullness of God.”* (Ephesians 3:19) Having intimacy in our walk with the LORD is a key to living a consecrated life and to knowing His will for our life. (Ephesians 5:15-17) Meditating on the word of God (Joshua 1:8) and having an active prayer life (1 Thessalonians 5:17) also help us to remain strong and focused when we are going through challenges in life.

2) THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING GODLY ASSOCIATIONS

As Christians it is crucial that we choose our friends wisely. To fulfil all that God has planned for our life we need to associate with those who will encourage us in our Christian walk and inspire us to be all that God has planned for our life. The bible says much about the importance of having godly associations and friendships in life. In the book of Proverbs we read, *“The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.”* (Proverbs 12:26) The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits.”** (1 Corinthians 15:33)

3) BEING CAREFUL WHAT WE MEDITATE AND FOCUS ON

In a world full of temptations and distractions we must be careful what we look at and listen to. The enemy is always looking at finding a way to get Christians to compromise and stumble in their Christian walk. Someone once said, “God put the church in the world but the devil tries to put the world in the church” 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) Meditating on the right things in life is crucial if we are to continually live a consecrated Christian life. The Apostle Paul emphasised the importance of focusing on the right things in life. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-meditate on these things.”** (Philippians 4:8)

4) IF WE LIVE A CONSECRATED CHRISTIAN LIFE OUR LIVES WILL BEAR MUCH ETERNAL FRUIT

God knows the plan that He has for every believer's life. (Ephesians 2:10) He Himself chose and appointed every believer for a unique plan and purpose and to bear much eternal fruit. Jesus Himself said to His disciples, **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.”** (John 15:16) As we commit to following His plan for our life, our lives will bear much fruit.

5) A LIFE OF OBEDIENCE IS THE KEY TO LIVING IN GOD'S BLESSINGS

When we are committed to following the will of God for our life, we put ourselves in the position where we can experience God's blessings and favour upon our life. However, like in the case of Joseph, who had two dreams of greatness as a youth, (Genesis 37:5-11) there can often be a timing factor involved before we begin to see the doors opening in our life and God's blessings coming our way. Often like Joseph, we can experience great struggles and trials before we see the breakthroughs in our life, even when we are living a life of obedience. After his two dreams, Joseph was almost immediately sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, (Genesis 37:27-28) was wrongly accused of making advances to his master's wife (Genesis 39:7-19) and then thrown into jail for several years. (Genesis 39:20) However after 13 years of great trials and unfair treatment, God promoted him from the prison to the palace in one day, to be second in charge in Egypt, with only Pharaoh himself being greater than Joseph. (Genesis 41:37-46) In the book of Isaiah God spoke through the prophet Isaiah to His people, **“If you are willing and obedient, You shall eat the good of the land.”** (Isaiah 1:19)

6) WE MUST ALWAYS BE READY AND PREPARED FOR THE RETURN OF THE LORD

Living a consecrated Christian life helps us to be always ready for the return of the Lord. Given what is going on in the world at present, how important it is that we are always ready for the return of the Lord. *Jesus Himself said, “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”* (Matthew 24:44)

7) WE HAVE ONE LIFE TO STORE UP ETERNAL TREASURES (We must always live with eternity in mind)

We all have just one short life in this body to store up treasures for eternity. It is so important that we redeem the time and make the most of every God given opportunity to help lead people to Christ and to encourage other believers. As we daily choose to live a life devoted to serving the LORD (Galatians 2:20) our lives will bear much eternal fruit. True joy only ever comes from finding and following God's plan for our life. *Jesus Himself said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* (Matthew 6:19-21) *Jesus also said, “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”* (Matthew 16:27)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 23 – A KEY TO SHARING OUR FAITH - UNDERSTANDING HUMANITY

Once we become a Christian we have the responsibility and privilege of helping others to come to Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”* (2 Corinthians 5:18-19) Jesus Himself said to His disciples, *“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”* (Mark 16:15) In the book of Proverbs we read, *“And he who wins souls is wise.”* (Proverbs 11:30)

Being baptized in the Holy Spirit empowers us to witness to others (Acts 1:8) – See Growth Key No. 20 – Jesus Himself told His disciples to depend on the Holy Spirit when asked to defend their faith. In the gospel of Luke we read the words of Jesus. *“Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist.”* (Luke 21:14-15)

When sharing our faith with others we need to depend on the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Peter also emphasised the importance of depending on God when ministering to (and sharing our faith) with others. *“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”* (1 Peter 4:11)

However it is also good to prepare ourselves for the opportunities that God gives us, to share our faith with others by being diligent in studying the word of God and by gaining a greater understanding of those around us. The Apostle Paul also emphasized the importance of study and being prepared to share a word in season and out of season. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* (2 Timothy 2:15) *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* (2 Timothy 3:16-17) *“*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”* (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

In this growth key I will be *first sharing seven general characteristics or traits of humanity*. I will then *share seven reasons why Christ is the answer to every human need*. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 4:19) Jesus Himself said, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (the things we need in life) shall be added to you.”* (Matthew 6:31-33) Understanding both humanity and how Christ can meet our every need in life, helps us to better share the gospel with others.

SEVEN GENERAL TRAITS OF HUMANITY (PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE NOT BORN AGAIN)

- i) Without a relationship with Jesus Christ there is an emptiness and loneliness that cannot be filled by any other person, thing or activity. We were made to worship the LORD and to be in a relationship with Him. There is a void in every life that can only be filled by having a relationship with Jesus Christ. Many people drink, take drugs, become workaholics, or lovers of pleasure to try and cope with the emptiness of a life without a relationship with Jesus.
- ii) All people have a desire to be loved and accepted by others. We were made to be in relationship with others. Only God can love us perfectly.
- iii) We all need to have a sense of belonging. That is why God designed the family unit. It is not good for man to be alone. People struggle most when they have been isolated and rejected by others.
- iv) The heart of an unsaved person is deceitful and desperately wicked. In the book of Jeremiah we read, *“The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?”* (Jeremiah 17:9) The apostle Paul wrote on the characteristics of human nature (the flesh) for those who are not in an intimate personal relationship with the LORD and who are not walking in the Spirit. *“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”* (Galatians 5:19-21)
In general there is a tendency for people to want to live for themselves, to be independent, to more readily see the faults in others than in themselves and to want more than what they have. The Bible makes it clear “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23)
- v) People have a tendency to have fears and worries about things in life. (Fear of the future, fear of sickness or death, having a lack of money, or a fear of failure) Many people have a fear of being rejected by others, to be alone, or abandoned by others. **For this reason peer group pressure has a big influence on many people.**

- vi) People's past failures and disappointments often affect their future choices. A person's past experiences, upbringing and mistakes often prevent them from living a future full of purpose and meaning. Many people live with regrets and struggle with guilt and shame from the wrong choices that they have made in their life. (A typical example is when women have made a hasty decision to have an abortion when they were young)
- vii) Every person needs to have a purpose or meaning for living. Where there is no vision people perish. Every person needs hope for the future. Every person would like to think that they can live a life of significance

SEVEN REASONS WHY CHRIST IS THE ANSWER TO ALL OF OUR NEEDS IN LIFE: HE OFFERS EVERYONE

- 1) **FORGIVENESS OF SINS (Isaiah 1:18) *NO MORE SHAME OR GUILT* We can enjoy the presence of God (Acts 3:19)**
When we come to Christ all of our sins are forgiven and forgotten by God and all of our shame is dissolved in the Blood of Jesus Christ. The LORD Himself said to the people of Israel through the prophet Isaiah, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins." (**Isaiah 43:25**) The Apostle John wrote, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (**1 John 1:9**)
- 2) **A FRESH START TO LIFE: GOD IS THE GOD OF SECOND AND THIRD AND FOURTH CHANCES**
When we come to Christ we have a new start to life and we become part of God's Kingdom and family (a child of God). The Apostle Paul wrote, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, **all things** have become new." (**2 Corinthians 5:17**) God is able to perform miracles in the lives of those who turn to Him. God is able to restore broken lives and to pull people out of the deepest of pits when they surrender their lives to Jesus Christ. King David wrote, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, And **forget not all His benefits**; Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, **who redeems your life from destruction**, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." (**Psalms 103:2-5**)
- 3) **A FUTURE: GOD HAS A UNIQUE PLAN AND DESTINY FOR OUR LIFE WITH ETERNAL REWARDS**
God has a unique plan for every believer's life which is full of purpose and meaning. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (**Ephesians 2:10**) God rewards and honours those who are prepared to lay down their lives to follow His plan for their life.
- 4) **FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM AND OTHERS: (WE WILL NEVER EVER BE TOTALLY ALONE IN LIFE)**
When we come to Christ and are Born Again, we enter into an intimate personal relationship with the LORD. Once we are born again, God also begins to connect us with other believers to help us to grow in our faith. As believers, even when we are alone and separated from our loved ones, God is with us. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (**Romans 8:38-39**)
- 5) **FULLNESS OF LIFE AND HEALTH: FREEDOM TO BE ALL THAT GOD HAS CALLED US TO BE IN LIFE**
Knowing the LORD and following His plan for our lives is the key to experiencing the abundant life that Jesus spoke of. In His presence is fullness of joy. (**Psalms 16:11**) Jesus Himself said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." (**John 10:10**) Jesus also said, "If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (**John 8:31-32**) As Christians we can also walk in divine health (**1 Peter 2:24**) and tap into God's Kingdom resources and privileges. (**Ephesians 1:3**) (**Matthew 6:33**)
- 6) **HIS FAITHFULNESS AND COMMITMENT TO ALL WHO BELIEVE IN HIM (WE CAN DEPEND ON HIM)**
As Christians we can depend on God's absolute faithfulness. "... For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (**Hebrews 13:5**) In Jeremiah we read, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, And whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit." (**Jeremiah 17:7-8**) In the book of Lamentations we read, "Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is your faithfulness." (**Lamentations 3:22-23**) **AND**
- 7) **A FOREVER HOPE (ETERNAL LIFE)** *When we repent and believe in Jesus Christ, death no longer has any sting. For Christians, to be absent from the body is to be with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8)* Jesus Himself said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die..." (**John 11:25-26**) We all as believers have a wonderful future home in the presence of God. (**Revelation 21:3**) In the book of Revelation we also read, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (**Revelation 21:3**)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 24 – KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD FOR OUR LIFE

The bible makes it clear that God has a predestined plan for every person when they come to Christ. God's desire is that every person would lead a life that is full of purpose and meaning. Jesus Himself said, *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."* (John 10:10) God has created each and every one of us uniquely different. (Psalm 139:13-16) Even our experiences before we become a Christian, were known beforehand by God and formed part of our preparation for what He has planned for our life as believers. As Christians we need to choose to commit our plans daily to the Lord so that He can direct our steps in life.

Apostle Paul wrote, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10) God's plan for our life unfolds one step at a time. In the book of Psalms we read, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD and He delights in his way." (Psalm 37:23) Every believer has an important part to play within the Body of Christ. Like the members of the human body, each member of the body of Christ (believer) cannot function properly in isolation, but needs to be connected to other believers in the Body of Christ.

During our life we have to make many important choices and decisions. The choices that we make in life will ultimately impact our future and how fruitful our lives will be. Making choices in line with God's will for our life will help us to live a life full of purpose and fruitfulness. Given the times that we are now living in (2 Timothy 3:1-5), times of great lawlessness, how important it is that we constantly stay close to the Lord so that we know His will for our life and make right choices in life. The Apostle Paul 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) *The bible clearly outlines God's revealed will for our life in every major area of life and how we should relate to Him and to others.*

Being in the centre of God's will for our life enables us to fulfill what He has planned for our life. As Christians we must always be disciplined and focused in life. We must not allow the things of this world to distract us from following God's plan for our life. This is crucial to leading a life that is full of purpose and meaning as a believer. In the book of Hebrews we read, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." (Hebrews 12:1) The Apostle Peter also 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) **KNOWING AND FOLLOWING GOD'S WILL AND PLAN FOR OUR LIFE HELPS US TO LIVE A FRUITFUL LIFE**

I WILL NOW SHARE SEVEN REASONS WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO KNOW AND FOLLOW GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIFE

1) WE ONLY HAVE ONE GIFT OF LIFE TO STORE UP TREASURES FOR ETERNITY

At the end of our life here on earth, it is only what we have done for eternity that will matter. We cannot take our earthly possessions with us when we leave our earthly body to be with the Lord, but what we have done here on earth in the name of Jesus will stand for eternity. With this life so fleeting, how important it is that we make the most of every God given opportunity to help see people coming to Christ and to encourage other believers in their walk with the Lord. Being wise stewards of the gifts that God has given us and using them for His glory should always be a primary focus in our life here on earth as believers. (Roman 12:6-8) Jesus Himself said, **"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** (Matthew 6:19-21)

2) WE WILL ALL ONE DAY STAND BEFORE THE LORD TO BE JUDGED FOR OUR LIFE HERE ON EARTH

We will all one day stand before the Lord to give an account of our life here on earth. As Christians we will not be judged unto condemnation but to determine our eternal rewards for our life here on earth in this body. (Matthew 16:27) The Apostle Paul wrote, **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."** (2 Corinthians 5:10)

As believers our rewards will most likely be determined by i) How faithfully we followed God's plan for our life (Ephesians 2:10), ii) whether what we did for the Lord was motivated by love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3), and iii) did we do things for the Lord in our own strength and ability or in His power and strength. (1 Peter 4:11)

3) AS WE FOLLOW GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR LIFE OTHERS WILL COME TO CHRIST AND GROW IN THEIR FAITH

When we are faithful in following the will of God for our life, our lives will make a profound impact in this world for eternity in two distinct ways. Firstly, through our lives others will come to faith in Jesus Christ as we witness to unbelievers. In the book of proverbs we read, **"And he who wins souls is wise."** (*Proverbs 11:30*) Secondly, by using our spiritual gifts and encouraging other believers, we will help many Christians to fulfill God's plan and destiny for their own life. Jesus emphasised the importance of making disciples in the Great Commission. Each and every believer has the ability to help others in their Christian walk to grow into maturity. Jesus said to His disciples, **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"** (*Matthew 28:19*) The Apostle Paul also said to the young pastor Timothy, **"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."** (*2 Timothy 2:2*) When Christians are committed to following the will of God for their lives the church makes a big impact on the world. The Apostle Paul wrote, **"from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself IN LOVE."** (*Ephesians 4:16*)

4) FOLLOWING THE LORD'S PLAN FOR OUR LIFE IS A KEY TO LIVING A LIFE FULL OF PURPOSE AND MEANING

True purpose and meaning in life can only ever come from being in the centre of God's will for our life. King Solomon was the richest man in the world, had 700 wives and 300 concubines and achieved many great things in life. Yet near the end of his life King Solomon said, after his wives had turned his heart after other gods for many years, (*1 Kings 11:4-6*) "Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labour in which I had toiled under the sun." (*Ecclesiastes 2:20*) **"Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now your creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them."** (*Ecclesiastes 11:10-12:1*)

God's plan for our life, though not exempt from trials and challenges, (*Acts 14:22*) is far greater than we could ever imagine. As we are faithful in the little, God will use us to do great things for Him. The Apostle Paul wrote, **"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us."** (*Ephesians 3:20*) God has the best plan for our life which is full of purpose and meaning.

5) HAVING A CLEAR GOD GIVEN VISION FOR OUR LIFE HELPS US TO STAY FOCUSSED ON WHAT GOD HAS CALLED US TO DO IN LIFE (Having a clear vision for our life helps to see God's will for our life unfolding)

Having a clear written down God given vision helps us to stay focused on the eternal things in life. The bible makes it clear that it is imperative that we have a clear vision for our life. The Lord said to the Prophet Habakkuk, **"Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run who reads it."** (*Habakkuk 2:2a*) In the book of Proverbs we read, **"Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law."** (*Proverbs 29:18*)

A clear written down God given vision for our life,

- i) Helps to make us more fruitful in our Christian walk (*John 15:16*)
- ii) Better enables us to overcome the temptations and distractions that we all experience in life (*1 Peter 5:8*) (*James 1:12-16*)
- iii) Helps us to make plans for each day, each week and each year to help see God's vision and purpose for our life unfolding and coming to pass (*Proverbs 21:5*)
- iv) Helps us to be more focused on equipping ourselves for the tasks that God has given us to do in life (*2 Timothy 2:15*)
- v) Helps us to better prioritise what we spend our time and money on. (Sowing into eternal things), and
- vi) Enables us to remain strong and focused when we are going through times of great discouragement (*Galatians 6:9*)

6) WHEN WE CONTINUALLY SEEK TO FOLLOW GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIFE OUR EVERY NEED WILL BE MET

When we continually seek to pursue the will of God for our life, we can be assured that all of our needs will always be met. Jesus Himself said, **"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."** (*Matthew 6:33*) MAINTAINING AN ONGOING INTIMATE WALK WITH THE LORD IS THE KEY TO STAYING IN THE WILL OF GOD FOR OUR LIFE (*Proverbs 3:5-6*) **There will be different seasons in our life. As we stay close to the Lord He speaks to us and guides us through His Word.** (Psalm 119:105) The Holy Spirit also guides and directs us (*John 16:13*) when we commit our works to the LORD. (*Proverbs 16:3*) We need to be continually led by the Holy Spirit as believers. (*Romans 8:14*)

7) WHEN WE ARE YOKED WITH JESUS AND FOLLOW HIS PLAN FOR OUR LIFE WE EXPERIENCE HIS REST

When we continually commit to following God's plan for our life, we see God moving on our behalf and opening up doors that no man can close. As we learn to walk in the Spirit we find that God empowers us to perform all that He has called us to do in life. The Bible makes it clear that His strength is made perfect in our weakness. **Jesus Himself said**, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (*Matthew 11:28-30*)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 25 – LIVING A LIFE OF FAITH (APPROPRIATING GOD'S KINGDOM PROMISES)

INTRODUCTION:

God has so much in store for every person once they become a believer. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. In the book of Hebrews we read, “**But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.**” (Hebrews 11:6) Putting our faith and trust in the LORD is the key to embracing and experiencing all, that God has planned for our life. When we place our dependency on the LORD rather than on others and even our own wisdom and abilities, we begin to see God opening up doors that no man can close (**Revelation 3:7-8**) and turning around what seemed impossible circumstances.

In the book of Jeremiah we read, “Thus says the LORD:

“Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited.” (**Jeremiah 17:5-6**)

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, And whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes; But its leaf will be green, And will not be anxious in the year of drought, Nor will cease from yielding fruit.” (**Jeremiah 17:7-8**)

Trusting in the LORD is the key to experiencing God’s peace and strength, even during the storms of life, (**Isaiah 26:3-4**) to seeing our every need being met, (**Matthew 6:31-33**) to experiencing God’s ongoing protection in life, (*Daniel Chapter 3 – Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego survived unharmed after being thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship other gods*) and to fulfilling all that God has planned for our life. The bible makes it clear that God wants all Christians to live a life full of purpose and meaning. (**John 10:10**) As Christians we can tap into all of God’s promises. The Apostle Paul wrote, “For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.” (**2 Corinthians 1:20**)

The Christian walk is however an overcoming walk (**Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 3:5, 3:21, 21:7**) and as believers we need perseverance and endurance to fulfill all that God has planned for our life. In the book of Hebrews we read, “*Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.*” (**Hebrews 10:35-36**) As Christians we need to appropriate our God given destiny. The bible makes it clear that every believer can walk in a supernatural dimension and achieve great things because of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. The Apostle Paul wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” (**Ephesians 1:3**) “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” (**Ephesians 3:20**)

Jesus Himself said, “And these signs will follow those who believe: In My Name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.” (**Mark 16:17-18**) Jesus also said to His disciples, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **If you ask anything in My name, I WILL DO IT.**” (John 14:12-14) As Christians we need to live an ongoing life of faith, just doing what Jesus tells us to do, so that we fulfill all that God has planned for our life. As Christians we should aspire to live in the supernatural realm and believe for God’s miracles in our own life. (**Mark 9:23**) I will now share 7 keys that can help us to live a life of faith.

1) WE NEED TO CHOOSE TO TAKE STEPS OF FAITH AS THE LORD DIRECTS – HAVING A CHILDLIKE TRUST IN THE LORD

The bible makes it clear that God is absolutely faithful and is both willing and able to help those who put their trust in Him. From God parting the Red Sea to make a way of escape for Moses and the children of Israel, (**Exodus Chapter 14**) to the woman being healed from the issue of blood as she reached out by faith to touch the hem of Jesus garment, (**Mark 5:25-29**) the Bible is full of accounts of the miracle working power of God. However to see the miracles we need to usually step out by faith to receive them. As the Children of Israel marched around the city of Jericho as instructed by the LORD, the walls fell down. (**Joshua Chapter 6**) God moves when we move. When Peter stepped out of the boat at the request of Jesus, he walked on the water. (**Matthew 14:25-29**) In the book of Hebrews we read, “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” (**Hebrews 11:1**) In following God’s plan for our life, we will at times be forced to overcome our fears and to take steps of faith, but God promises to be with us at all times. (**Matthew 28:20**)

2) THE IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOWING GOD'S WILL FOR OUR LIFE (OBEDIENCE) – HIS VISION, HIS PROVISION

We must always move in faith but not in presumption. God's work done in His ways will never lack finances. His vision for our life will never lack provision. Knowing the will of God for our life is therefore very important. The Apostle Paul 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**) We need to be continually led by the Holy Spirit in all that we do, (**John 16:13**) as well as in our prayers. (**Romans 8:26-27**) The Apostle John wrote, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." (**1 John 5:14-15**)

3) WE MUST BELIEVE FOR ANSWERED PRAYERS WHEN WE PRAY

We must always pray in faith, believing for the answered prayer as we pray. Meditating on the promises contained in God's Word helps to build up our faith for miracles as we pray. The Apostle Paul wrote, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (**Romans 10:17**) *As the Bible is one hundred percent inspired of God (2 Timothy 3:16) and because God promises that His Word shall not return to Him void, (Isaiah 55:11) we can pray out and build our lives on all of the promises contained in God's word with absolute confidence.* **Jesus Himself said**, "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says." *"Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."* (**Mark 11:22-24**)

4) KEEPING OUR EYES CONTINUALLY ON JESUS AND THE BIGNESS OF GOD RATHER THAN ON THE PROBLEMS IN OUR LIFE

We must always keep our eyes on Jesus and the bigness of God. Nothing is impossible for God when we put our complete trust in Him. Jesus said, **"If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."** (**Mark 9:23**) Even though God was giving the land of Canaan to the children of Israel, (**Numbers 13:1**) ten of the twelve spies that Moses sent out to spy out the land that God was giving them could only focus on the giants in the land and as a result were filled with fear. Because of their fear and unbelief they so disheartened the children of Israel with their negative report that a whole generation of the children of Israel failed to enter into the land that God had promised to give them. (**Numbers Chapters 13 & 14**) When Peter took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the storms around him, he began to sink. (**Matthew 14:30**) If we continually meditate on the problems in our life, what is only a molehill can begin to look like a mountain. We must learn to speak to the mountains in our life "to be removed in the Name of Jesus" rather than about the mountains. We must always keep our focus on the bigness of our God and keep our focus on the eternal things. (**Colossians 3:1-2**) Jesus said, Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' Or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (**Matthew 6:25-33**)

5) MEDITATING ON THE PROMISES AND MIRACLES IN GOD'S WORD – RENEWING OUR MIND WITH KINGDOM THINKING

In a world full of negativity and fears it is important that Christians continually meditate on the Word of God to maintain a Kingdom mindset and a strong faith to believe for miracles. The miracles performed by God in the early church, as seen in the book of Acts, can be experienced by all believers today. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." (**Hebrews 13:8**) The Apostle Paul wrote, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (**Romans 12:2**) **The LORD said to Joshua just before he was about to lead the children of Israel into the promised land**, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (**Joshua 1:8**)

6) WE MUST BE CAREFUL WHAT WE LOOK AT AND LISTEN TO IN LIFE (FEAR ENTERTAINED IS FAITH CONTAMINATED)

As Christians we need to ensure that we are careful about what we focus on and meditate on in life. Negative, unbelieving, fear filled statements from others and the bad news reports in the media can all begin to undermine the faith of even the strongest of believers. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-meditate on these things."* (**Philippians 4:8**)

7) CHOOSING OUR FRIENDS WISELY (We must choose friends who encourage us to become people of faith and destiny)

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits." (**1 Corinthians 15:33**)

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 26 – THE GREATEST IS LOVE

The Bible makes it clear that love is the most important thing that we should pursue in life as believers, with our love for Jesus being our highest priority. In the book of James we read, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself,” you do well.” **(James 2:8)** Jesus shared about the incredible love of God when He said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” **(John 3:16)** The Apostle Paul wrote, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.” **(1 Corinthians 13:13)**

Having a genuine love for others is actually one of the indicators of a person having a relationship with the Lord. The Apostle John wrote, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.” **(1 John 3:10)** The bible is full of references to the importance of people having a genuine love for God and for others. **(Mark 12:30-31)**

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” **(1 Corinthians 13:1-3)** The Apostle Paul also wrote, “**Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.**” **(1 Corinthians 14:1)** *Love always sees the best in others, helps to bring out the best in others, heals broken relationships and helps to build a happy home.*

Jesus Himself also said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **By this** all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” **(John 13:34-35)** **Jesus in His life here on earth showed what God’s love was through His compassion for the marginalised and less advantaged in society. *Jesus had great compassion for the lost, the afflicted and sick and for those who had been rejected by society such as the lepers. In the gospel of Matthew we read,*** “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” **(Matthew 9:35-36)**

Compassion is a word that is only ever associated with God and those who demonstrate God’s love. God’s agape love is unconditional. JUST AS GOD LOVES EVERY PERSON WE TOO ALSO NEED TO HAVE A GENUINE LOVE FOR ALL PEOPLE. Having a genuine love for one another is a key to maintaining unity in all of our relationships. UNITY BRINGS GOD’S BLESSINGS. In a world full of hate and strife and many broken relationships, the one defining characteristic of Christians should be that they stand out in this world because of their genuine love for others. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see you good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” **(Matthew 5:16)** HAVING A GENUINE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER IS A KEY TO UNITY AND TO SEEING GOD’S KINGDOM POWER OPERATING IN OUR LIFE. In the book of Psalms we read, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” ... “It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing – Life forevermore.” **(Psalm 133:1 & 3)**

THE FIRST CHURCH WAS UNIFIED AND MOVED IN GREAT POWER

In the book of Acts we read, “And through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon’s Porch.” **(Acts 5:12)**

JESUS HIMSELF SAID THAT A DIVIDED HOUSE WOULD FALL. (Unity is a key to establishing strong churches) Jesus said, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.” **(Luke 11:17)**

In this Growth key I will be sharing seven thoughts in relation to having a genuine love for others.

TRUE AGAPE LOVE HAS THE FOLLOWING ATTRIBUTES:

1) IT IS ALSO PRACTICAL

In the book of Acts we read, “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked, for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.” **(Acts 4:32-35)**

2) IT IS GENUINE AND DEMONSTRATES FORGIVENESS

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...” **(1 Corinthians 13:4-8)**

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” **(Ephesians 4:31-32)**

3) IT IS OTHERS FOCUSED

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” **(Philippians 2:3-4) AND**

4) IT IS SACRIFICIAL (Like Jesus we must choose to lay down our life for others)

Jesus said, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” **(Matthew 20:26-28)**

WE ALL HAVE THE ABILITY AS BELIEVERS TO LOVE OTHERS SACRIFICIALLY AND UNCONDITIONALLY BECAUSE GOD’S LOVE HAS BEEN POURED OUT IN OUR HEARTS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. **(Romans 5:5)**

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control...” **(Galatians 5:22-23)**

WHAT CAN HOWEVER STOP THIS LOVE FROM FLOWING OUT OF THE LIVES OF BELIEVERS?

I will now conclude this Growth key by sharing three major factors which can prevent Christians from loving others unconditionally. These are:

5) A LACK OF INTIMACY IN OUR WALK WITH THE LORD (We must not allow the cares of this world to take our focus off the LORD. We must purposely make time each day to spend with the LORD)

i) We must continually abide in His love **(John 15:4-5)**

ii) We need to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit **(Ephesians 5:18)**

iii) We need to lead a lifestyle of worship **(John 4:23-24)** and prayer **(1 Thessalonians 5:17)**
(Involving God in all areas of our life) **(Proverbs 3:5-6) (Psalm 37:4)**

6) OUR ATTITUDES (Walking in the flesh)

a. Being critical or judgemental of others **(Matthew 7:1-5)**

b. Being envious or jealous of others **(James 3:14-16)**

c. Having selfish ambition **(Philippians 2:3)**

d. Having pride in our life **(Colossians 3:12 & 4:6) (James 4:1-10)**

7) HAVING A FEAR OF MAN (A fear of being rejected)

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” **(1 John 4:18)**

In conclusion, the key to consistently loving others is to put Jesus Christ first place in our life. That self no longer has any place on the throne of our heart, but that Jesus Christ is truly Lord of all. The Apostle Paul wrote, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” **(Galatians 2:20)** **It is only when we live a life that is set apart for God and for others that we consistently begin to love others unconditionally and see our lives bearing much fruit. Jesus Himself said,** “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.” **(John 12:24)**

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 27: THE IMPORTANCE OF OVERCOMING OUR FEARS

INTRODUCTION:

God has a wonderful plan and purpose for every believer's life which begins to unfold when they come to Christ and are born again. **The Apostle Paul wrote, "But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-10)** The great things that God has prepared for all those who love Him, not only refer to the things that await us in the life to come, but also to what God has planned for our life here on earth NOW. **The Apostle Paul also wrote, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." (Ephesians 3:20)**

Fear however has stopped many people from realising their full potential in life. In chapters 13 and 14 of the book of Numbers in the Old Testament we see an account of how a whole generation of the Children of Israel, with the exception of two men of faith, Joshua and Caleb, **(Numbers 14:26-33)** were to die in the wilderness never entering into the land that God had promised to give them. **(Numbers 13:1)** In this account we see how ten of the twelve spies that Moses sent out to spy out the Promised Land could only see the giants in the land **(Numbers 13:31-33)** and gave a bad report **(Numbers 13:32)** which sowed fear and discouragement into the children of Israel. **(Numbers 14:1-4)** Even though God was giving the children of Israel the land of Canaan, and even though Joshua and Caleb encouraged the children of Israel to enter into the land that God was giving them, **(Numbers 13:30, Numbers 14:6-9)** fear and unbelief prevented them from entering into the promised land. Fear is the opposite of faith.

As Christians we need to be overcomers to appropriate all that God has planned for our life. **(Revelation 3:10-12)** To fulfill our God given destiny will involve taking steps of faith and learning to overcome our fears. There are many different types of fears that can prevent people from realising their full potential in God. Fear of failure, fear of being rejected, fear of man, fear of the unknown, worries about not having enough money and fear of doing new and unfamiliar things in life. All these fears can prevent people from following God's best plan for their life, which always involves taking steps of faith. As Christians we can be assured that whatever God calls us to do in life He will be with us each and every step of the way, **(Matthew 28:20)** that He will empower and enable us to do the tasks that He gives us and that He will meet our every single need in life. We can put our absolute trust in God as He is both willing and able to help us in all areas of our life. **Jesus Himself said, "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' Or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:31-33)** As Christians we can also be assured that greater is He who is in us (the Holy Spirit) than he who is in the world. **(1 John 4:4)** When we come to Christ we become part of God's family **(John 1:12)** and have a new start to life. As Christians we are new creations in Christ, **(2 Corinthians 5:17)** called to reign with Christ here on earth. **(Revelation 5:10)** As believers we can tap into all of God's Kingdom promises. **The Apostle Paul wrote, "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." (2 Corinthians 1:20)** As Christians we can be assured of God's faithfulness when we step out to follow His plan for our life. I will now share 7 keys that can help us to overcome our fears so that we are able to appropriate all that God has planned for our life.

1) BUILDING OUR LIFE ON THE WORD OF GOD (Psalm 1:1-3)

In a world full of uncertainties, fears and negative reports, we must continually renew our minds with the truth contained in the Word of God. The Word of God is full of promises and wisdom for all believers to build their lives on. **The Apostle Paul wrote, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2)**

It is imperative however for all believers that God's Word makes its way from our heads into our hearts. Meditating on the Word of God and speaking out the promises of God causes faith to arise in our hearts to believe for miracles. **The Apostle Paul also wrote, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Romans 10:17)** Being both hearers and doers of the Word of God is the key to believers prospering and having good success in life. **(Joshua 1:7-8)**

2) BEING CAREFUL WHAT WE FOCUS ON

With much negativity and violence in the world these days, it is imperative that we make a conscious choice to be careful about what we look at and listen to in life. Most news reports these days only focus on the tragedies and economic problems going on around the world. Listening to these bad reports will invariably sow seeds of fear into our hearts and lives and undermine our faith. Dwelling on the cares of this world and on our fears can prevent us from stepping out by faith to do what God has called us to do in life. Fear entertained is faith contaminated. The Apostle Paul emphasised what we should meditate on as Christians in the book of Philippians, **"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-meditate on these things." (Philippians 4:8)**

3) BEING IN FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER FAITH FILLED BELIEVERS (CHOOSING OUR FRIENDS WISELY)

As Christians we have a very real adversary who continually seeks to destroy our life and to distract and discourage us from following God's plan for our life. **(John 10:10) (1 Peter 5:8-9)** Fear and rejection are two tools that the devil uses to stop many believers from leading a victorious Christian life here on earth and from making an impact in this world for eternity. *Being connected to a loving bible based local church fellowship and having godly friendships are two keys to remaining strong in our Christian walk.* Encouragement from other believers helps us to remain strong in our faith and to overcome our fears. **In the book of Hebrews we read, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:23-25)** As Christians we need to choose our friends wisely and consistently associate with people of faith, godly character and vision. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits."* **(1 Corinthians 15:33)**

4) LIVING A DISCIPLINED THOUGHT LIFE – REFUSING TO ENTERTAIN WRONG UNBELIEVING THOUGHTS

The thoughts that we entertain in our mind have a powerful impact on our life. Our mind is where the real battle field is and where the devil attacks us most. Keeping our mind fixed on things above **(Colossians 3:1-2)** and on the bigness of our God helps us to live an overcoming Christian life and to maintain our peace even during the storms of life. In the book of Isaiah we read, *"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the LORD forever, For in YAH, the LORD, is everlasting strength."* **(Isaiah 26:3-4)** On the other hand however, to continually entertain negative and fearful thoughts will steal our peace and prevent us from realizing our full potential in Christ. Fear has the potential to paralyze people and to prevent them from taking steps of faith to fulfill all that God has planned for their life. Irrational fears have prevented many people from living a life full of liberty and purpose.

In reality most of what people fear never comes to pass anyway. In this respect fear is actually False Evidence Appearing Real. The bible makes it clear that we must take all wrong thoughts captive and bring them into line with the truth contained in God's Word. **The Apostle Paul wrote, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)** Living one day at a time and not worrying about things in the future that we can do nothing about today, was a key that Jesus gave us to help us not to be overwhelmed by the cares and worries of this world. **(Matthew 6:34)** As Christians it is crucial that we discipline our thought life at all times. If we do not take our wrong thoughts captive but continually meditate on the fears in our life, these fears can begin to enter into our heart and cause us to speak words of defeat. In the book of Proverbs we read, *"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life."* **(Proverbs 4:23)** Jesus Himself said that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. **(Luke 6:45)**

5) LIVING A LIFESTYLE OF PRAYER AND SIMPLE TRUST AND DEPENDENCE ON THE LORD

Living a simple lifestyle of prayer and childlike dependence on the LORD helps us not to be overcome by fear and anxiety when we go through trials and tests in life. **The Apostle Peter wrote, "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)** Rather than being overwhelmed by our fears we need to give them to the LORD and seek Him for the answers and direction that we need to overcome our problems in life. **The Apostle Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)**

When we feel like we are being overwhelmed by fears and problems, we need to as the words of one song say, "just take it to the Lord in prayer." Nothing is impossible for God. We can depend on His faithfulness, ability and willingness to help us at all times when we pray to Him. The word of the LORD came to the Prophet Jeremiah when he was in prison, *"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."* **(Jeremiah 33:3)** Jesus Himself said, *"Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."* **(Mark 11:22-24)**

6) BEING FILLED WITH GOD'S LOVE – MAINTAINING AN ONGOING INTIMATE WALK WITH THE LORD **(John 15:4-5) (Acts 4:13)**

Having an intimate walk with the Lord helps us to walk in love towards others. As Christians the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. **(Romans 5:5)** Continually keeping ourselves in the love of God **(Jude 21)** helps us to consistently walk in love towards all others. Being continually filled with the Holy Spirit **(Ephesians 5:18)**, spending time alone in the LORD's presence and living a lifestyle of genuine Spirit led worship, **(John 4:23-24)** all help us as believers to grow in our love for God and for others. Having a genuine heartfelt knowledge of Christ's love and being filled with all the fullness of God **(Ephesians 3:19)** helps to empower believers not to fear in life. *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."* **(2 Timothy 1:7)** **The Apostle John wrote, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." (1 John 4:18)**

7) SIMPLY STANDING ON THE TRUTH THAT GOD IS TRULY SOVEREIGN IN THE AFFAIRS OF THE WORLD AND IN OUR OWN LIFE WHEN WE HAVE MADE JESUS LORD OF ALL.

As Christians we can be assured that if Jesus Christ is truly Lord of our life, nothing can ever happen to us unless our Heavenly Father permits it. God is truly sovereign in the affairs of this world and His plan for our life will unfold and come to pass if we simply allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct our steps in life. **(John 16:13)** Jesus Himself said, *"Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will...Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows"* **(Matthew 10:29 & 31)**

CHRISTIAN GROWTH KEYS

KEY NO. 28 - THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARING YOUR FAITH

INTRODUCTION: The Bible makes it clear that God has a great love for all people and that His desire is that none would perish but that all would have eternal life. **(1 Timothy 2:3-4) (2 Peter 3:9) (Ezekiel 18:3)** Jesus Himself made this very clear when He wept over Jerusalem after He knew that they would reject Him and His offer of eternal life. **(Luke 19:41-44)** In the gospel of John we read the words of Jesus,

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” *(John 3:16-21)*

In the above passage of Scripture, Jesus made it clear that everyone who chooses to believe in Him will have everlasting life. Jesus also made it clear that people have a choice between whether or not to repent and believe in Him or to reject Him preferring a worldly lifestyle rather than living for Him. God has given everyone a free will to choose. The bible also makes it clear that there is only one way for a person to be saved and to receive the gift of eternal life which is through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. **“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”** *(Acts 4:12)* Jesus Himself said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”** *(John 14:6)* **“I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”** *(John 10:9)*

As Christians we have the wonderful but awesome responsibility to help lead others to Christ. With the reality of both heaven and hell we need to be always looking for opportunities to help lead our friends and family and others to Christ. In the book of Proverbs we read, **“Deliver those who are drawn toward death, and hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, “Surely we did not know this,” does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds?”** *(Proverbs 24:11-12)* **“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise.”** *(Proverbs 11:30)* Sharing our faith with others also helps us to keep our own walk with the Lord strong and vibrant.

It is as we share the gospel with others that God’s saving grace moves upon people’s hearts to enable them to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”** *(Romans 1:16-17)* It is as we share the gospel that faith arises in the hearts of people to receive Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”** *(Romans 10:17)*

We must simply be available to share our faith with others. The Apostle Paul wrote, **“For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!”** *(Romans 10:13-15)* WE NEED TO SIMPLY BE ALWAYS AVAILABLE TO SHARE OUR FAITH WITH OTHERS WHEN GOD GIVES US THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO

I WILL NOW SHARE SEVEN KEYS TO HELP YOU TO BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE IN LEADING PEOPLE INTO A RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS CHRIST

1) WE MUST HAVE A GENUINE LOVE FOR THOSE THAT WE ARE MINISTERING TOO – THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS

Jesus was motivated by His great compassion for people and particularly for the lost and hurting. We must have a genuine love and concern for those that we witness to. **(Matthew 9:36) (1 Thessalonians 1:8)**

2) WE NEED TO HAVE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

We must have a clear understanding of the gospel message and never deviate away from the key points of the gospel – i) **That Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and to fulfil God's justice**, ii) **That on the third day He arose from the dead and is alive forevermore**, and iii) **That Jesus Christ gives the gift of eternal life to all those who RECEIVE Him (believe in Him)** The following passages of Scripture are good to study to gain a thorough understanding of the Gospel of Grace. **(Romans 3:9-28) (John 3:15-21) (Ephesians 2:1-10) (Galatians 2:16) (Galatians Chapter 3) (Romans 5:1-2) (Romans 5:6-9) (Philippians 3:9) (2 Corinthians 5:21) (John 3:1-5)** We must all be born again ("have a second spiritual birth from above")

3) MEMORISE KEY SCRIPTURES TO USE WHEN SHARING YOU FAITH (THE GOSPEL) 2 TIMOTHY 2:15

Memorizing and sharing key scriptures helps us to communicate the gospel in a more powerful way. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." **(Romans 10:17)** The following Scriptures are good to memorize and to get into our hearts to help us in sharing the gospel with others. **(Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks)** **John 3:16-18, John 14:6, John 10:9, Romans 3:10-12, Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Romans 5:6-9, John 1:12, Isaiah 1:18, Romans 5:1-2, Revelation 3:20, Revelation 1:17-18 and Romans 10:13**

4) HAVING AN ONGOING INTIMATE WALK WITH THE LORD – THE KEY TO HAVING GOD'S COMPASSION

Spending time in the presence of the Lord is the key to gaining God's love for the lost. We need to continually maintain an intimate walk with the Lord if we are to bear fruit in our lives and to minister God's love to others when we share our faith with them. **(Psalm 37:4) (John 15:4-5)**

5) THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CONTINUALLY FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WITNESSING IN THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT – IT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO CONVICTS PEOPLE OF THEIR SIN (UNBELIEF)

Being baptized in the Holy Spirit (See Growth Key No. 20) **(Acts 1:5 & 8)** and being continually filled with the Holy Spirit, **(Ephesians 5:18)** is a key to being empowered to preach the gospel to others and to effectively sharing our faith with unbelievers. **(1 Corinthians 2:2-5)** We need to allow the Holy Spirit to minister through us as we share our faith with others. Only the Holy Spirit can convict people of their sin and unbelief and their need for Jesus Christ to save (forgive) them. **(John 16:7-11)** The Baptism in the Holy Spirit empowers believers to witness effectively to the lost. BEING LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT IS ALSO A KEY TO CONSISTENTLY WITNESSING TO THOSE PEOPLE WHO ARE OPEN TO THE GOSPEL **(Divine appointments)**

6) THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYING FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE OUR FAITH AND PRAYING FOR THE SICK (MIRACLES ARE OFTEN THE MEANS BY WHICH PEOPLE COME TO FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST)

Praying for others helps us to gain a greater understanding and love for them and gives us a greater heart to share our faith with unbelievers. Praying for people to come to faith also helps us to be more aware of opportunities to share our faith with them and is a key to being effective in evangelism. **(1 Timothy 2:1-3)** As we pray for people to come to faith, the Holy Spirit often gives us keys as to how to best reach them with the gospel. It may be a particular gospel tract or a book that will help them in their current trials. Sometimes God will give us a word of knowledge to share with a person that will help them to come to Christ. For every need in life Jesus has an answer. As believers we can lay hands on the sick in the Name of Jesus and they will recover. **(Mark 16:17-18)** Healings and miracles are often the means by which people come to faith.

7) LIVING A LIFE THAT REFLECTS CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER AND A GENUINE LOVE FOR AND TRUST IN GOD

People must see in our own lives that our faith is real and that there is something different about our life. Being an example of what we preach by living a God glorifying life and having a steadfast faith and trust in the Lord adds great credibility to our witnessing to others. When people see God's love and character in our own lives, it is far easier to lead them to Christ. In short we must not be hypocrites. **(Matthew 5:16)**