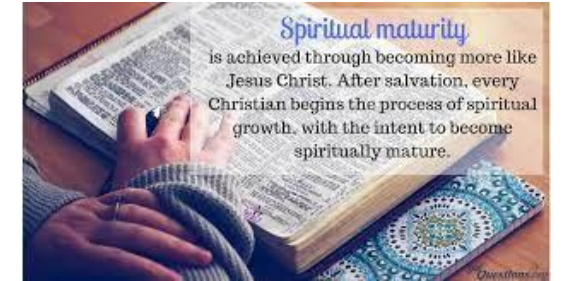


The importance of becoming a mature disciple



- Today I felt to share on the importance of continually growing in maturity in our Christian walk so that we become well grounded disciples who finish our Christian walk well
- This is so important especially given the ungodly and challenging times that we are now living in

As I prayed about today's message the following Scripture opened up to me really confirming my message for today, Jesus Himself said, "Whoever 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 and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul." (Mark 8:34-37)

- **So today I will be looking at the importance of becoming a mature disciple**



- I want to begin by encouraging everyone today that God has so much planned for every believer's life



- However, we are also living in the perilous times that the Apostle Paul wrote about and the lawless times that Jesus spoke of

- We also have a very real enemy, the devil, who will continually try and destroy the lives of believers



- So, becoming a mature disciple is such a great key to embracing all that God has planned for our lives

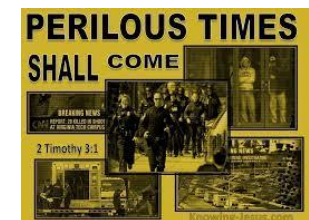
- It is so important that we continually grow in our Christian walk so that we can remain strong during the trials and challenges that we all experience in life so that we can fulfil our God given destiny here on earth



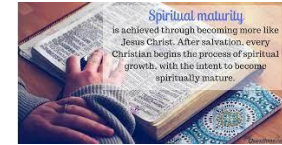
Jesus Himself said,

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

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



- The whole Christian walk is one of becoming more like Christ over time
- God even allows us to go through challenging times to help us to grow in the fruit of the Spirit and in Christlike character. We must always remain on the potter's wheel



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

- So today I want to look at 6 important keys to continually growing in our Christian walk



- I will begin however by saying that the way that we live our life is the greatest witness to the unsaved world

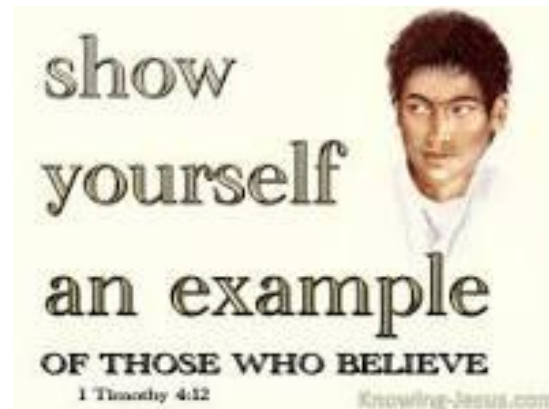


Jesus Himself said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

- Especially for those in leadership roles, it is important for us to model what it is to live out the Christian life

The Apostle Paul wrote to the young pastor Timothy,

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” **(1 Timothy 4:12)**



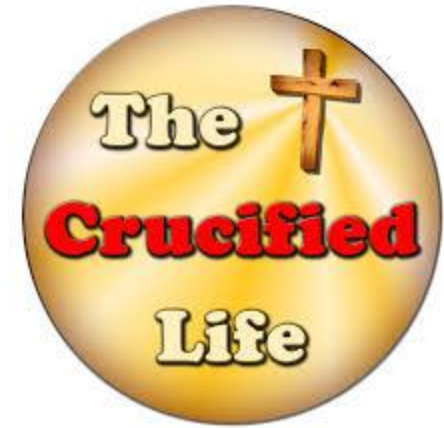
The Apostle Peter wrote, “Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”

(1 Peter 2:11-12)



- **I will now look at these 6 keys to continually growing in our Christian walk**

1) Choosing to live for Christ every day (Living a crucified life)

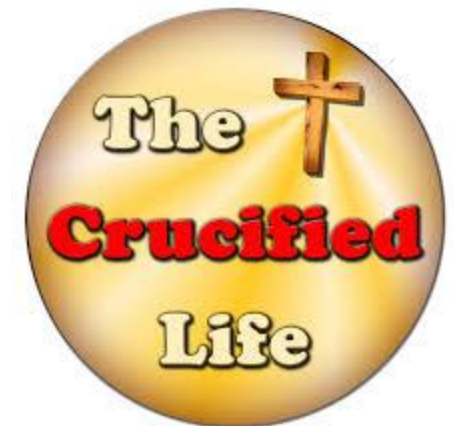


Jesus Himself said,

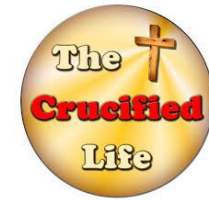
“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it.” **(Luke 9:23-24)**

The Apostle Paul who achieved so much during his time here on earth including writing around 25 % of the New Testament 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)

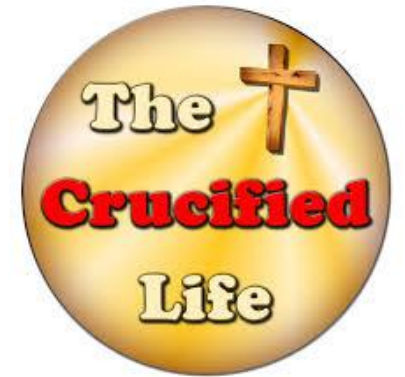


- Without a clear commitment to living for the Lord, we will invariably be sidetracked by the things of this world and the influences of others from living wholeheartedly for the Lord



Jesus Himself in His explanation of the Parable of the Sower said, “Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” (Mark 4:18-19)

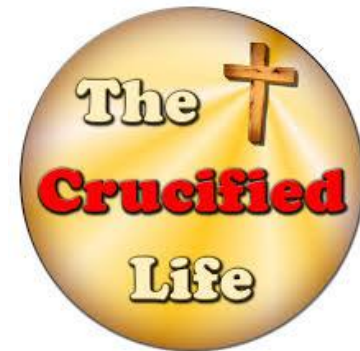
“But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” **(Mark 4:20)**



- **Jesus also made it clear that our lives will only make a great impact in this world for eternity if we are prepared to die to self and to live a crucified life for Him**

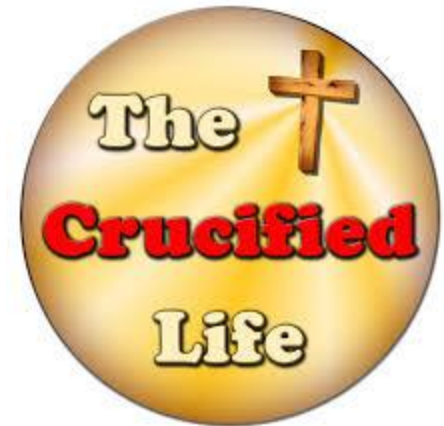
Jesus Himself said,

“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)**



Yet it is in living the crucified life that we begin to embrace the abundant life that Jesus spoke of when He 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)



2) Making our time with God and in His word our greatest priority in life

- In a world becoming more and more secular and ungodly, making time to spend with God needs to be our greatest priority in the times that we are now living in



- If we neglect our quiet times and fail to spend quality time in God's word, we become more susceptible to the spirit of the world beginning to influence our lives

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)**



- **Knowing God intimately and building our life on the firm foundation of the word of God is the key to fully embracing all that God has planned for our life and to remaining strong in our walk with the Lord**

The LORD said to Joshua when 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)



- Spending time in God’s word helps us to remain on track in our Christian walk and to grow in the ways of God so that we can be effective in our ministry callings**

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“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)**



- Consistently spending quality time alone with the LORD helps us to get to know God intimately



- This is a great key to remaining strong during the trials of life
- In His presence is fullness of joy and it is the joy of the Lord that will keep us strong during the trials of life
- It is in isolation that we also receive revelation from God
- Practicing God's presence helps us to keep our passion for the things of God alive

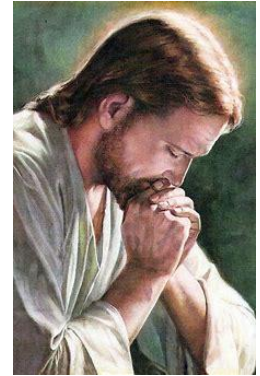
- A great key to growing in intimacy in our walk with the Lord is to have a special place where we can meet with God without being distracted by other things



Jesus Himself said, “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.” **(Matthew 6:6)**

- It is also good to start each day with the Lord to get His perspective for our day and what He has planned for our lives. This also helps our day to run more smoothly

- Jesus Himself would often get away from everyone early in the morning while it was still dark to spend time in solitude with His Father in heaven

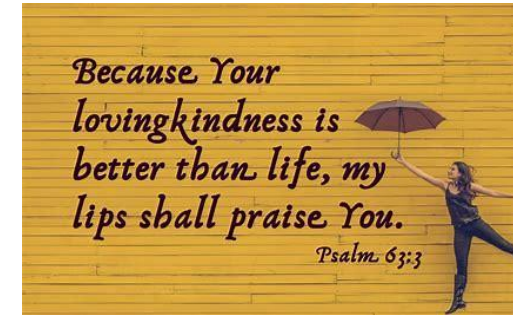


- Praying at night, or early in the morning on a mountain top, or in a deserted place allowed Jesus to give His full attention to His Father in heaven

In the gospel of Luke we read, “So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.” (Luke 5:16)

- King David was the only man referred to in the bible as being a man after God's own heart. He had a consuming passion to know God intimately

In Psalm 63 King David wrote,



“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. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.” (Psalm 63:1-3)

- **Consistently spending quality time with the Lord also helps us to remain in the will of God for our life. This is a great key to living a fruitful Christian 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)

- It is only in maintaining an intimate and abiding relationship with Christ that we will grow in Christlike character and in the fruit of the Spirit



Jesus Himself 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)

- It is in putting Christ first in our lives and making our relationship with Him our greatest priority that we will have the boldness and ability to do great things for God

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 marvelled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” **(Acts 4:13)**



In the book of Daniel we read,

“... but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.” **(Daniel 11:32)**

Jesus Himself emphasised the importance of putting God first in our lives when He 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)**



- This is so crucial, especially given the times that we are now living in when Jesus said the love of many will grow cold**

3) Choosing to continually walk in the Spirit AND to love others unconditionally

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 fulfil the lust of the flesh.”
(Galatians 5:14-16)



- **We must simply choose to continually cooperate with the Holy Spirit rather than reacting out of our carnal and fleshly nature. This needs to be a continual choice**

- The more we say no to our carnal nature when under pressure, or when going through trials and challenges, the more self control we begin to develop so that we begin to consistently reflect the fruit of the Spirit in our life



The Apostle Paul wrote, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

- It is so important that we also choose to love others at all times by choosing to look for the best in others
- The bible makes it clear that what really matters to God is that we have a genuine love for others
- True Christian maturity is found in a person's ability to love others unconditionally, even when mistreated by others



Jesus Himself said,

“And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” **(Mark 12:31)**



The Apostle Peter wrote, “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” **(1 Peter 4:7-9)**

Jesus 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)



- **Again, the way that we live our lives really matters**

- It is our genuine love for others that is also such a great key to experiencing *true joy in our Christian walk*, because again it is our love for others that really matters to God



Jesus Himself said, “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you.” **(John 15:11-14)**

4) Being planted in the house of God (The importance of having fellowship with other believers)



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. To declare that the LORD is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.” (Psalm 92:13-15)

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)



- We are not meant to do the Christian walk alone. We are better together



- We need the constant encouragement of other believers, especially in the lawless times that we are now living in if we are to realise our full potential in life
- Being accountable to other mature believers is also a great safeguard to remaining strong in our walk with the Lord, especially given the ungodly world that we are now living in

In the book of Proverbs we read,

“Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.” (Proverbs 11:14)



- God’s plan for our life will always be outworked in connection with other believers that He connects us with
- For this reason, we must refuse to allow offences to disconnect us from those that God has placed in our life

- It is within the context of a loving local church fellowship that we can receive encouragement and support and wisdom from others to help us to fulfil God's plan for our life

- The simple fact is that we are better together



- As we see the nearness of the rapture of all true believers and the growing hostility towards Christian values, being planted in a local church fellowship is crucial if we are to remain strong in our Christian walk so that we can fulfil our God given assignment here on earth

5) Living a life of simple trust in AND obedience to God



In the book of 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)**



- God's ways are higher than our ways
- We need to simply allow Jesus Christ to be truly Lord of all of our life and sovereign in all of our plans
- That we simply remain committed to being obedient to following God's plan for our life. Trust and obey for there is no other way
- It is in following God's plan for our life that we will see His favour and blessing upon our lives

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)



As we live a life of simple trust and obedience, we can be assured that we will remain strong in our faith and fulfil God’s 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)**

In the book of Nahum we read,

“The LORD is good,
A stronghold in the day of trouble;
And He knows those who trust in Him.” **(Nahum 1:7)**



King David wrote,

“Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. **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 37:3-5)**

AND



6) Living our life to **SERVE** others with our spiritual gifts and talents

- It is so important that we always have a motivation of serving others with our gifts and talents. That we invest our lives in helping others to fulfil their God given destinies and that we help unbelievers to come to Christ
- Jesus is our example of what it is to live the Christian life
- Jesus was the Servant King



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)**



- We have one gift of life to serve others with our spiritual gifts
- Every believer has an important ministry
- Serving others with our gifts and talents helps us to stay focused in our walk with the Lord and is evidence of the genuineness of our faith



In the book of James we read,

“Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” (James 2:17)

- A great key to growing in our faith is to be good stewards of our spiritual gifts by serving others with our own unique gifts and talents



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)**

- **As Christians we have also been given the ministry of reconciliation**



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. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

- So, a big key to growing in spiritual maturity is to break open our lives to serve others with our gifts and talents and to help others to come to Christ.
- That our focus in life is always on serving others with our unique gifts and talents and in helping others to come to Christ, rather than spending our lives in the pursuit of the things of this world. **THAT WE LIVE OUR LIVES WITH ETERNITY IN MIND**

In the book of Proverbs we read,

“...And he who wins souls is wise.” (Proverbs 11:30)



So, in conclusion 6 keys to continually growing in our Christian walk are:



- 1) Choosing to live for Christ every day (Living a crucified life)
- 2) Making our time with God and in His word our greatest priority in life
- 3) Choosing to continually walk in the Spirit AND to love others unconditionally

4) Being planted in the house of God (The importance of having fellowship with other believers)



5) Living a life of simple trust in AND obedience to God, AND

6) Living our life to SERVE others with our spiritual gifts and talents (Investing our lives in others)

- I will now begin to conclude by simply encouraging everyone to focus in these coming days on growing even deeper in your walk with the Lord so that you will continue to remain strong in your faith in the perilous times that we are now living in



- It is in doing this that your life has such great potential to make a great impact in this world for eternity as you simply stay connected to God's plan for your life

The Apostle Paul wrote in relation to our potential as Christians to make such a great impact in this world for eternity, especially at a time when so many people are now looking for genuine hope,

“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)**



- I will now conclude with one final thought and the words of Jesus

- **You will never come second putting God first in the long run**



I will finish with the words of Jesus, “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)