

STILL PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE - January 3, 2021

As Christians, it's so important to know the keys to living a successful Christian life. And in His word, God makes it very clear what we need to know and do to be living for Him, to be fruitful, to be prosperous, to be successful. Psalm 1:2-3, Joshua 1:8-9
- Last time we talked about seven different truths we need to believe and apply to our lives – we talked about your relationship with God, and about faith, prayer, purpose, identity, humility, and thankfulness. And today we want to look at seven more truths.

8. Church. The church is essential for your life, and is one of the primary means by which you spiritually grow, and by which God's purposes are fulfilled. Matt. 16:18
- The church is made up only of those who are true Christians, who are children of God. It is a spiritual family, and you and I need this family, where there are spiritual brothers and sisters, where there's love, fellowship, communication, encouragement, loyalty, and a purpose from God that together we work on and fulfill. 1 Cor. 12, Matt. 28:19-20
- The church is one of the main ways by which you learn the truths God wants you to know about the Christian life. It is also the place where you can use the spiritual gift God has given you, that special spiritual ability you have to help build the church. 1 Pet. 4:10

9. Relationships. God does not want you to be a loner, to go it alone in the Christian life. And this is one of the main reasons you need the church. But you also need people you can be close to, people you can spend time with, people you can talk to openly, people you can share your heart and life with, people you can get counsel from, people who pray for you, and people who really care for you.
- Now relationships and friendships need to go both ways. They can't be one-sided. That is, in a relationship, there needs to be mutual concern, mutual care and love. You can't just expect to be loved, you need to love that person. You can't just expect that person to pray for you, you need to pray for him or her. And when there's mutual give and take, there's real blessing, fellowship, and progress for the Lord. Rom. 1:11-12

In all this, we are talking about relationships that are centered around the Lord, that are committed to Christ. That is, these relationships need to have an outward focus and purpose, that is, are focusing on Christ and fulfilling His purposes. In the Bible we have the examples of Jonathan and David, Paul and Timothy, Elijah and Elisha, and Daniel with his 3 friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And all these are examples of ones who had a relationship with a purpose. Dan. 2:17-18, 49; Col. 4:7-14

10. Holiness. As Christians, we are righteous in God's sight, we have been forgiven of all our sins, and in fact, we are called saints, a word that means holy ones. God sees us as perfectly holy, and wants us to now live like holy ones, to live like as children of God.

And this means living a life that is set apart from sin and from the world. It means not being sinful and worldly, but living a holy life. It means not being angry, bitter, proud, selfish, or lazy, not being a liar, a cheat, a thief, or an impure or immoral person. Now if a person wants to be a good athlete, he needs to be holy, that is, he needs to avoid junk food, he needs to stay in shape, and he can't go out partying. 1 John 2:15-17 - 1 John 1:5-9. And if you sin, you need to confess your sin, not for the purpose of being forgiven, but for the purpose of having fellowship with God, and for the purpose of being able to do God's work. Heb. 11:23-29, Heb. 12:24, 2 Tim. 2:20-21

John 17:17. One of the main keys to living a holy life is God's word.

- Psalm 119:9, 11. *"How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word... Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You."*

To live a holy life, you need to delight in God's word, read His word, meditate on it, and pray over it. 1 Pet. 2:1-3. And knowing God's love and kindness will motivate you to put aside your sins, and long for His word, and then you will be a holy person, a growing, fruitful, and successful Christian. Rom. 6:12-14

- You also need the Spirit to empower you, to enable you to get victory over your sins, for it's not by your power, but by the Spirit's power that you will truly live. Rom. 8:12-14

11. Obeying God. This relates to the purposes God has for you, which I talked about last week. Now obedience is very specific, and something you can really focus on. A Christian may wonder – what should I do in life? Or what does God want me to do? The simple answer comes down to obeying God, to keeping His commands, for this is the key and the means to fulfilling God's purpose, to fulfilling God's will for your life. Lk. 8:19-21 - Psalm 119:1-8. We see that obeying God is very important, for it's the main theme of this first section of Ps. 119. There are many things in God's word, but one thing that's absolutely necessary is that you learn His commands and obey them. And this is the way you fulfill God's purpose, God's will for your life. Ps. 119:29-32

The most important commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Every other command comes from this. That is, if you truly love God then you will obey God and do what He wants you to do. And obeying God is one of the main ways you show your love for God. John 14:21, 23. Here are some other important commands:

- Mark 12:31 – *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

- 1 Peter 1:16 – *"You shall be holy for I am holy."*

- Mark 12 – *"Have faith in God."*

- Proverbs 3:5-6 – *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart."*

- Ephesians 5:18 – *"Be filled with the Spirit."*

- Matthew 28:19 – *"Go make disciples of all the nations."*

I encourage you to obey these commands, and as you read the word, you will find more commands. And I encourage you to write them down, and obey them. James 1:22-25

12. Promises. We just talked about how you need to obey God, how you need to do what God wants you to do. But God's promises tell you what He wants to do for you. Now let me mention just a few thoughts about promises:

- a. Promises speak about the future, what God says He will do, and it can relate to your present life on earth or the ages to come.
- b. God's promises are unlike man's promises for when God promises you something, then it's His guarantee that He will do what He says. Man can't 100% guarantee you something.
- c. Promises are necessary and encouraging for they help you focus on God, on what He will do and not what you are to do. Promises are God-centered, and God-glorifying.
- d. Promises can be unconditional, that is, they are not dependent on what you do, or they can be conditional, that is, they are dependent on what you do.

Here are some examples of God's promises:

- Psalm 32:8 – *"I will lead you in the way that you should go."*
- Hebrews 13:5 – *"I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."*
- Psalm 46:10 – *"I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."*
- 1 Cor. 1:8-9 – *"God will keep you strong to the end, so that you are blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."*
- Rev. 22:20 – Jesus said, *"Behold, I am coming soon."* Now all these are unconditional.
- Prov. 3:5-6 – *"In all your ways acknowledge Me, and I will make your paths straight."* Now this is conditional for if you don't acknowledge God, then your paths won't be straight.

13. Character. We talked about what you are to do, that you are to obey God. But it's not just what you do, but who you are, that you have godly character. Here are examples:

- God wants you to be loving, to be kind, giving, and compassionate.
- God wants you to be forgiving, to forgive people who sin against you.
- God wants you to be a hard worker, a diligent worker, and not be lazy, or a sluggard.
- God wants you to be courageous, to be a fighter, even when the enemy attacks.
- God wants you to be truthful, to be honest, to be a person who has integrity.
- God wants you to have gratitude, to be thanking God for what He does for you.
- God wants you to be rejoicing and not be grumbling or complaining.
- God wants you to persevere, to keep going even when there are trials and life is hard.
- God wants you to have hope, to be looking forward to the future God has for you.

And God is the One who builds character in your life. By His Holy Spirit, by His word, by learning from the examples of others, by praying, and by the trials God gives you, you will grow in character. And to be honest, one of the main reasons you have trials is so that you grow in character, so you become more godly. One more thing – you can learn a lot about character from people in the Bible. Learn from Abraham, Moses, David, Hannah, Esther, and from Peter, Mary, and Paul, and of course, learn from Jesus Christ

14. Sacrifice. God wants you to sacrifice your life for Him. God did not save you and leave you on earth so you could be successful in a worldly sense and make a name for yourself. He left you here for He wants you to sacrifice your life for Him and for others. Phil. 1:21-26 - Romans 12:1 - *"I urge you by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God."* Luke 9:23 - *"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny Himself, and take up His cross daily and follow Me."*

Let me share some thoughts about sacrificing your life for God, for Jesus Christ.

a. Jesus Christ sacrificed His life for you, and you then should sacrifice your life for Him.

Jesus' life is an example for you to follow. Eph. 5:1

b. When you sacrifice your life for a person, you're loving him. It is a sacrifice when you are kind to others, give to others, are compassionate, are patient with others, are loyal, when you use your time for others, or when you give your money to others.

c. Sacrificing your life is hard, it's difficult, it's denying the flesh, it's not what I would call fun or pleasurable. Heb. 11:23-27

d. Sacrificing your life results in other people's lives being blessed and in your life being blessed, blessings that often aren't seen until you get to heaven, or until the kingdom age.

e. Suffering and being persecuted for Christ's sake, and even dying for Christ, that is, physically losing your life, are ways that you can sacrifice your life. Matt. 5:10-12

Let me finish by reading some verses that relate to the days of our lives this year:

- Psalm 23:6 – *"Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life."*

- Psalm 90:12 – *"Teach me to number my days that I may present to Thee a heart of wisdom."*

- Psalm 90:14 – *"Satisfy me in the morning with your unfailing love that I may sing for joy and be glad all my days."*

- Psalm 118:24 – *"This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."*

- Psalm 139:16 – *"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."*

We have looked at a number of truths and keys for spiritual success. Now I want you to go over them and apply them to your life. And I would suggest that you start with just two or three, and then go from there. And as you do, I'm sure God will change your life and use your life, and that you will be a blessing to God, to others, and that you yourself will be blessed. And here is a promise from God to you - Psalm 32:8.