

10 Things I Wish I'd Known When I Was Younger

One of my greatest passions is discipling the young generation. I love it because the young people I mentor are so hungry for spiritual direction that they literally pull it out of me. I also love discipleship because helping others to be successful is indescribably fulfilling. It really is more blessed to give than to receive.

Discipleship is not just leading a Bible study or helping someone understand a dry spiritual truth. It's imparting your life—sharing the wisdom you've gained from years of personal experiences. That's what a father or mother does with their children; that's what Paul did for Timothy, and for his disciples in Corinth, Rome, Ephesus and Philippi. He told the Romans: "For I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, that you may be strengthened" (Rom. 1:11).

I often tell the guys I mentor: "I wish I had known this when I was your age." They recognize the blessing of getting wise counsel they can put into practice now. If I can help them avoid the mistakes I made, then they can surpass me and do a better job than I did. I want my ceiling to be their floor so they can go farther.

When they ask me what I wish I'd known when I was 30, I share these nuggets of truth:

1. Never neglect the Bible. The loudest voices in our culture today tell us that the Bible is irrelevant; some woke preachers are urging people to "deconstruct" their faith and rewrite God's Word to fit today's narratives. Don't listen to the deconstructors. My first mentor taught me to feed on the Bible every day, and that is what made me a strong Christian

when I was in college. Let God's Word become the steel framework of your life.

2. Never make a decision without seeking God's guidance. God wants to steer us every step of the way. The closer you are to the Shepherd, the clearer you will hear His voice telling you to turn to the left or the right. Don't be rash or impetuous about your plans. Always be prayerful. Psalm 32:8 is a guarantee from the Lord: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you."

3. Never let your failures or flaws stop you from chasing your God-given dreams. We are all tempted to think that other people succeed because they are stronger or more gifted. Yet the apostle Paul taught us that God puts His supernatural power in common clay vessels. He said: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). Your limitations are just an opportunity to prove God's limitless ability. Never focus on your weaknesses—focus on His strength.

4. Relationships are the most important thing in life. The world tells us that life is about chasing fame, money, possessions, titles, toys and sex. But I've learned that God wants us to invest in people—and that's where you will find the greatest satisfaction. Material possessions can't give lasting fulfillment, and pleasure is momentary. Our God loves people. If you want the abundant life that Jesus promised, make His priorities yours.

5. Don't be in a hurry. God wants you to enjoy the journey. When I was younger, I often got anxious about God's plans. I finally learned to stop striving. I quit trying to make things happen—and I surrendered to God's timing, knowing that only He can bring about His will. This is true whether you are praying about marriage, career, ministry or any other desire. Don't let anxious thoughts steal your joy. Rest in Psalm 37:5: "Trust also in Him, and He will do it."

6. Never play it safe. The Christian life is an adventure. That means there will be risks, challenges and scary moments. Learn to live by faith. Every true follower of Christ will come to the place that Peter did when Jesus called him out of the boat. Peter left his comfort zone and stepped onto the water. You must do the same. My biggest mistakes happened when I let fear choke my faith.

7. It's okay to admit your weaknesses. Most of us come to Christ in a state of bondage; we struggle with all kinds of hurts and addictions. I finally learned that God never intended for me to deal with these issues alone. Just as we learned in the story of the Good Samaritan, we need people to bandage our wounds (Luke 10:30-37). Stop pretending to be perfect and humble yourself. Open your heart to others, admit your struggles and find true healing.

8. Don't neglect your spiritual gifts. Paul told the Corinthians: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware" (1 Cor. 12:1). Yet sadly too many Christians go through their entire lives without opening the gifts God gave them. I discovered in my 20s that I had a gift of prophecy, and I started stepping out and using it. That gift developed over time, and then I began to discover and use other gifts.

9. Surround yourself with wise counselors. When I was young I was tempted to think that older people were irrelevant and out-of-touch. Because of youthful pride I was drawn to the cool people. But I eventually learned that it's foolish to ignore the wisdom that comes with gray hair. So even at my age I am intentional about staying close to mentors and wise friends.

10. Stay filled with the Holy Spirit. The biggest mistake we could ever make is to try to live our lives with an empty tank. Don't ever try to follow Christ in your own strength. Let the Holy Spirit empower you. Seek close fellowship with

the Spirit so you can experience the supernatural realm. And when you are running on empty, stop, rest and refuel. Otherwise, you will have nothing to give others!

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