

10 Things I Wish I Had Known When I Was 30

When you get to be my age, birthdays can be a bummer. I don't really want to be reminded that I'm old. So I discovered a way to ease the pain: I surround myself with younger people. At my birthday party last week were several young guys I am mentoring. They are 30, 27, 24, 23, 22 and 20—most of them younger than my own kids.

One of my greatest passions in life is discipling the younger generation. I love it partly because the young men I mentor are so hungry for spiritual direction they literally pull it out of me; I also love discipleship because it is indescribably fulfilling. It really is more blessed to give than to receive.

Discipleship is not just leading a Bible study or helping a person understand a dry spiritual truth. It is 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 the Romans. He told them: "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." And they recognize the blessing of getting some wise counsel they can put into practice now. I'll share a few of those nuggets here. Feel free to pass them along to other young (or old) disciples who are eager to grow spiritually.

1. Never let your failures or flaws stop you from chasing your God-given dreams. The biggest obstacle between you and your dream is not the devil, demons, your past sins, your family dysfunction or your lack of money or opportunity. Your biggest

enemy is you and the way you see yourself. You must come to see that your heavenly Father loves you (1 John 3:1) and that He wants to know you, bless you and use you.

2. Never, ever neglect the Bible. Jesus said His words provide a strong, secure foundation for life (Matt. 7:24-27). But you cannot experience that security if you treat God's Word flippantly. You need to feed on it daily. The loudest voices in our culture today tell us that the Bible is irrelevant; don't listen to them. Let God's Word become the steel framework of your life.

3. Relax! God wants you to enjoy the journey. When I was young I often got anxious about God's plans and I fretted too much. 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 plans, your career, your ministry or any other desire. Don't let anxious thoughts steal your joy.

4. Saturate your life in prayer, and never make a decision without seeking God's guidance. Life is really a journey, and 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.

5. Stay filled up 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. Who wants dead, lifeless, boring Christianity? Seek close fellowship with the Spirit, pray in the Spirit and pursue spiritual gifts so you can experience the supernatural realm.

6. Life is supposed to be an adventure. Never play it safe. 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 in life happened when I let fear of the unknown choke my faith.

7. Relationships are the key to success. The world tells us that life is about chasing fame, money, cars, houses, toys or sex. But I've learned that God wants us investing in people—and that is where you will find the greatest satisfaction. Material possessions can't give lasting fulfillment, and pleasure only lasts for a moment. If you want the abundant life that Jesus promised (John 10:10), pour your life into others.

8. It's really 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 someone else to bandage our wounds (Luke 10:30-37). True healing is found through the close friends God gives us. Open your heart to them.

9. Be as generous as possible so you can become a channel of financial blessing. When I was young I never imagined I could bless others financially. Yet even with my tiny ministry salary I began to tithe and bless people—and God multiplied my resources. Don't wait until you have lots of money to start sowing. Sow even in your season of famine and watch God release miraculous abundance.

10. Don't take your parents for granted. Because my father recently fell and incurred a serious brain injury, I'm relocating to Georgia to care for him and my mother. I'm grateful that I can spend these last years with them, but I'm wishing I had made the most of every moment we shared. You won't have your parents forever. Cherish your time with them and do everything you can to honor them as you honor Christ.

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