

The Centrality of Christ in Your Life and Marriage

Mark 8:34-38—“When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “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? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

Self-sufficient and self-centered living keeps us from finding our sufficiency in Christ. Adam and Eve were the first people to entertain the idea “to be like God” (Genesis 3:5), which is the essence of the self-centered worldview that Satan promotes.

The centrality of Christ stresses His relevance to every component of our lives. The alternative is compartmentalization. The biblical worldview focuses on the implications of Christ’s lordship in such a way that even the commonplace components of life can be expressions of the life of Christ within us, cultivating a heart of true wisdom.

The Cross Centered Life

A. Deny Yourself

- Dying to self is the primary battle of life and is essential to spiritual freedom and growth.
- **Denying yourself** is not the same as **self-denial**. The ultimate purpose of self-denial is self-promotion, whereas denying yourself is denying self-rule.
- Our flesh manipulates for the throne in our lives and struggles to be god in us, but only Jesus has the right to sit on the throne of our lives. Seeking to overcome self through ourselves is a futile effort.

B. Pick up your cross daily

The cross we pick up daily is not our own cross but Christ’s cross. “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)

- The cross provides forgiveness for all of the sin we commit because Jesus died in our place (justification). It provides deliverance from what we have been because we died with Him (positional sanctification).
- To pick up the cross daily means to acknowledge everyday that we belong to God. We have been purchased by His blood (1 Peter 1:18-19), we are children of God (1 John 3:1-3), and our life is hid in Christ, because He is our life (Colossians 3:3, 4).

C. Follow Christ

- **We must follow Christ by being led by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will lead us down the path of death to self-rule.**

2 Corinthians 4:11—“For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”

Romans 8:14—“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

- **We were not designed to live independently of God.**

Romans 12:1-2 –“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. 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.”

- **Picking up Christ’s cross daily is a blessing that includes three things:**

1. We are sacrificing the lower life to gain the higher life. If we find our identity and sense of worth in positions, titles, accomplishments, possessions, and seeking worldly well-being, we will lose our life. Our efforts to possess temporal blessings take away what we could have in Christ. If our goal is for things of this world, that is all we will get—and only for a short time. If our goal is for eternal things, we will also receive the benefits of knowing Christ now.
2. We are sacrificing the pleasures of things to gain the pleasures of life. Jesus discussed this with Mary and Martha. (Luke 10:38-42)
3. We are sacrificing the temporal to gain the eternal. A sign of spiritual maturity is to postpone rewards. (Hebrews 11:24-26) It is better to know we are children of God than to gain something in this world that we will eventually lose. Following Christ will result in hardships in this life, which He will make right in eternity.

Satan’s ultimate lie is that you are capable of being the god of your own life—and his ultimate bondage is the attempt to live as though his lie were the truth. Whenever you focus on yourself instead of Christ or prefer material and temporal values, Satan has succeeded.

The Wisdom of Seeking Christ in All Things

Proverbs 9:10—“*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*”

The pursuit of wisdom is directly related to living with Christ as the unifying center of our lives rather than a mere component.

Wisdom has many facets: insight, counsel, prudence, understanding, discernment, discipline, competence, discretion, instruction, guidance, knowledge, and righteousness.

A. What is wisdom? The most frequent Hebrew word for *wisdom* is “chokmah,” which means skill. Wisdom is the art and skill of living life with each area under Christ’s dominion. It is the ability to use the best means at the best time to accomplish the best ends.

- 2 kinds of wisdom: from above and from below—“*This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, and demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle; willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*” (James 3:15-17)
- Wisdom is the Lord’s plan by which He can transform the moral and spiritual chaos of a human life into an incarnation of God’s attributes of justice, equity, truth, and faithfulness.

B. How do we pursue wisdom? The treasure of wisdom rests in the hands of God. Since it comes from above (James 3:17), we cannot attain it apart from Him.

C. What are the conditions for attaining wisdom? Proverbs 9:10 gives us the answer: “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*” True skill in living life can only be achieved by cultivating the fear of the Lord.

- **Job 28:28**—“*And to man He said, ‘Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, And to depart from evil is understanding.’*”
- **Psalms 86:11**—“*Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.*”
- **Proverbs 1:7**—“*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.*”

D. What is the fear of the Lord? To fear God is to have an attitude of awe and humility before Him. It is to recognize the weaknesses of human flesh and our need for complete dependence upon Him in every activity of our lives. “*The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility.*” (Proverbs 15:23)

E. Why have so many people failed to develop this awe and humility before God?

Many people put their faith in themselves and walk in pride.

Pride is an unhealthy focus and dependence on myself.

Four Categories of Pride

Every manifestation of pride falls into one of these four categories:

1. Beginning to assume responsibilities that belong to God.

- To protect myself—God is my protector. (Ps. 18:2)
- To be critical or judgmental of others—God is the judge. (Rom. 2:1-3)
- To take control of my life and situation. (I Tim. 6:15, Prov. 3:5-7)

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| • Protector | • Judge |
| • Counselor | • Savior |
| • Sustainer | • Guide |
| • Provider | • Control |

2. Looking to someone or something to give me what only God can give.

Ex: Worth, value, significance, acceptance. Because of the death of Jesus Christ, I have all these in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 1:3-6)

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| • Worth/value/acceptance | • Salvation |
| • Security | • Direction |
| • Protection | • Guidance |
| • Healing | • Help |

3. Holding on to things that rightly belong to God.

Ex: My life, physical body, time, plans, secret desires. (Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:2)

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| • My life | • Plans/future |
| • Family/children | • Friends |
| • Music/entertainment | • Possessions |
| • Secret desires | • Expectations |
| • Control | • Emotional focus |
| • Making others dependent on me | |

4. Neglecting or rejecting what God has clearly told me to do. (James 4:6-10)

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| • Resting in the finished work of Christ | • Forgiveness |
| • Recognizing myself dead to sin and alive to God | • Denial of self |
| • Meditation | • Prayer |
| | • Embracing my sufferings |
| | • Serving |

Introduction Prayer of Repentance for Pride

“Dear Heavenly Father,

You have said that pride goes before destruction and an arrogant spirit before stumbling. I confess that I have been thinking mainly of myself and not of others. I have not denied myself, picked up my cross daily, and followed You. As a result, I have given ground to the devil in my life. I have sinned by believing I could be happy and successful on my own. I confess I have placed my will before Yours, and I have centered my life around myself instead of You.

I repent of my pride and selfishness and pray that all ground gained in my members by the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ would be canceled. I choose to rely on the Holy Spirit’s power and guidance so I will do nothing from selfishness and empty conceit. With humility of mind, I will regard others _____ (fill in the blank with specific names) as more important than myself. And I choose to make You, Lord, the center of my life.

Please show me now all the specific ways I have demonstrated pride in my life. Enable me through love to be sympathetic to others and not react in pride. I ask this in the gentle and humble name of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.”

Please check off all the ways in which you have demonstrated or struggled with pride in your life.

The Symptoms of Pride

- Perfectionist—I set up standards for myself that are beyond the normal requirement.
- Lack of love—I am indifferent to the needs of others; I am hasty in judgment, insensitive and critical.
- I am self-righteous. I often think that I am more humble, spiritual, religious, or devoted than others.
- I have a poor relationship with God (God resists the proud).
- Legalism—I believe that I can gain more favor with God or those in spiritual authority by performing.
- I am selfish with my time and possessions.
- I am constantly comparing myself to others.
- I am discontent and ungrateful. I have a hard time accepting my suffering.

- I am unforgiving and bitter—I cannot release my offenders to God.
- I cannot forgive myself for the past—I cannot receive God’s forgiveness.
- I desire the acceptance of men rather than having God’s approval in the choices I make.
- I am self-willed, rather than seeking the will of God.
- I lean on my own understanding rather than seeking God’s guidance.
- I rely on my own strength and abilities rather than depending on the power of the Holy Spirit.
- I am more concerned about controlling others than developing self-control.
- I am too busy doing “important” things to take time to spend with God and my family.
- I have a tendency to think that I have no needs, spiritual or otherwise.
- I am overly concerned about getting the credit I feel I deserve.
- I am driven to obtain recognition and significance by attaining degrees, titles or positions, rather than finding my significance in Christ.
- I become defensive when criticized by those that really care about me.
- I have difficulty recognizing and admitting when I am wrong. I tend to want to deflect blame.
- I talk most often about myself and I am not interested in others when conversing with people.
- I draw attention to my abilities and achievements in a boastful way.
- I feel sorry for myself when I really should not (pity parties)

Prayer

“Heavenly Father, I come to You in the name of Jesus Christ. I thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I ask now that You would cleanse me of my sinful pride.

Your Holy Spirit has convicted me, and I renounce that I have been prideful in the following ways (list those checked). I repent and renounce these ways I have lived out of the flesh in pride. I ask that You would take back the ground I have given the enemy in this area of my life. I ask You, Lord Jesus Christ, that You will continue to convict me when I am responding in pride in the future. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.”

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