

WALKING THE WALK – GODLINESS

1 Timothy 4:1-10

January 2, 2022

As we start out the year 2022 – I want to begin this new year with some discipleship training on how we are to walk the walk, and I would like to begin with godliness. The Apostle Paul gives these instructions to his young understudy Timothy – **1 Timothy 4:7-9**, *“Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.”* Paul’s instructions on pursuing godliness in these verses refers to living a God honouring life, which implies continually growing in the knowledge and love of Christ our Saviour, who died for us; thereby, developing a close intimate relationship with Jesus Christ as our ultimate goal in life. Pursuing godliness is a call to order our entire life in such a way that the love of Christ is a priority, coming before all else. And when we do that, our life become a gift to all those around us – our families, friends, coworkers, church, and community.

Godliness is important because God has gifted every believer for ministry. Ministry is not only for a select few who happen to have the microphone. Ministry is what we **ALL** do; it’s not what one does, while others sit and watch. That means that the mission of the church is to disciple and then mobilize every member of the family of God to use their God-given talents and gifting to serve right where God has placed them. And God’s mission for every member of SCCC is to acknowledge these three things: 1) I am seated with Christ; 2) I will walk humbly in my God given purpose and gifting; and 3) I will stand against the enemy. We can make these statements because God pursued us when we were dead in our sins, and made us alive in Christ Jesus, adopting us as sons and daughters, and seated us with Christ in Heavenly places. This is according to **Ephesians 2:4-7**, *“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”* Because of God’s mercy, grace, and great love for us, He made us alive in Christ for a reason – to do something for the kingdom of God. Which means that every believer is a vital part of God’s kingdom plan to bring Heaven to earth, and

that's why it's essential that we discover our God-given purpose and use our God-given spiritual gifts to answer the call to serve God with passion right where He has planted us. No one is exempt! Everyone who believes in Jesus and accepts His gracious gift of life must learn where they fit and how they can serve. And to do that – we need to grow in godliness!

Growing in godliness means developing spiritual practices and disciplines, which are activities and habits that God uses to grow people in His grace. And grace is not something we can earn but a gift from God. Although we can't earn it, we can place ourselves in the path of God's grace to receive it. A short tax collector named Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree to get a better look at Jesus as He passed by, putting himself in the path to receive God's saving grace. Blind Bartimaeus was on the road to Jericho that Jesus was travelling, putting himself on the path to receive God's healing grace. In the same way, we can't expect to grow and become like Christ through osmosis, it takes effort, it requires work, it requires us to put ourselves in the direct path of God's grace, so we can receive the blessings He has waiting for those who are hungry for more of God. God is knowable and He has provided us with the means to know Him, but we must choose to practice the spiritual disciplines if we are going to grow in godliness!

After spending the month of December eating way too many rich fatty foods and unhealthy sweets – in the new year we all start thinking about how we have abused our physical bodies and how we need to do something about it. This is a good thing, because we need to be in good physical shape to have an active and productive life, especially as we age. However, as believers the issue is that we don't often have the same concern for our spiritual well-being as we do for our physical well being, as a result we often neglect our spiritual bodies. And like Paul tells us in **1 Timothy 4:8**, YES – physical training is valuable and necessary for our time here on this earth, but godliness is not only valuable for us while on this earth but will carry forward into eternity as well. To paraphrase what Paul is saying here: *“Don't just focus all of your time and energy on your physical body and neglect the part of you that is spiritual, your spiritual life also needs to be healthy and well-developed for you to live a productive life in both this present life and the life to come!”*

The beginning of the new year is not only an important time to get our physical body in shape, but also a good time to get our spiritual body in shape for the task that God has for us. That's why we are going to spend the first part of 2022 –

learning to walk the walk. And as we do that, we need to remember that God walks alongside of us as we learn to walk the walk. God's desire has always been to walk alongside of His followers, we see this right from the very beginning of the Bible. In Genesis 3, we are told how God would walk through the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day to meet with the very first created humans – Adam and Eve. The Old Testament is also filled with stories of how God walked alongside of the many great men and women of the faith – such as Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Joseph, and Moses – who God spoke with face-to-face, and then there was King David – a man after God's own heart, and the many Old Testament prophets who kept calling God's people to repent, turn from their wicked ways and get back on the path of following God's ways rather than man's ways. Like many parents, God wants to spend quality time with His children.

When we get to the New Testament, as Jesus began His ministry, He didn't walk alone. Jesus didn't carry out ministry on His alone but in fellowship with others. We read in **Matthew's Gospel** that as Jesus walked along the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, He came to two fishermen, Simon Peter, and his brother Andrew, to whom Jesus gave this very simple invitation: ***“Come, follow me”*** (Matthew 4:19). And as a result of that invitation, Peter and Andrew immediately left their nets (the family business) and followed Jesus. Then, as Jesus continued to walk along the Galilee shore, He sees two other brothers and gives James and John the same invitation to follow Him, and they as well left everything to walk with Jesus. Sometime later Jesus sees a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth, and also said to him, ***“Follow me”*** (Matthew 9:9), and on-and-on the invitations continued until Jesus had twelve disciples that followed Him during His three years of ministry, plus many other un-named disciples, both men and women followed as well, learning from Jesus so they could grow spiritually to imitate their master.

As believers today – Jesus' invitation still stands: ***“Come, follow me,”*** so I'm inviting you to join me in a refresher course on the essential practices and disciplines of the Christian life, which I am adapting from a book by pastor and author Adam Hamilton. I'm sure all of you are very familiar with these foundational and essential spiritual exercises which anyone can do and incorporate easily into their daily lives. Here are some of the practices we will be looking at:

1. Worship and prayer – as a regular part of your daily routine, not just at Sunday morning worship services.

2. The Study of God's Word – the importance of listening and paying attention when God is speaking to us, especially through the reading, hearing, and studying His Word, so that we would be in the center of God's will for our lives.
3. Serving Others– intentional acts of kindness, as we serve others above ourselves.
4. Generosity – generosity towards God through the church and towards others within our community and around the world.
5. Sharing your Faith – letting others know you are a Christian, telling your faith story and inviting others to church as you witness your faith within your community. You are God's gift to others!

These are all measurable goals that we can keep track of during the coming year – they are meaningful goals that help us to grow our faith– and they are maintainable goals, something we can incorporate into our daily routines. The end point of practising these five spiritual disciples is spiritual godliness, holiness, and maturity – helping us to go deeper with God by loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and then loving our neighbour as we love ourselves; thereby, being God's gift to others, blessed to be a blessing. So, if we would all practiced these spiritual practices and disciplines, being committed to learn from Jesus over this coming year – *“What would SCCC look like by this time next year?”*

We need discipline to walk with God. The image of walking with God is found throughout the entire Bible as an image and example on how followers lived out their faith in their daily lives. We are reminded of the meaning of faith in **Hebrews 11:1**, *“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”* And then, the writer goes on to list all these great examples of faith who lived by faith despite not seeing God's promises fulfilled in their lifetime. A few verses later the writer tells us this in **verse 6**, *“And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly see him.”* To receive our rewards, we need to earnestly seek Him, which means commitment in setting priorities!

The writer of Hebrews reminds us that believers who earnestly seek Him and learn to walk the walk towards godliness will live by faith and believe even though they may not see God, or experience God, or may never receive the things promised them while on this earth. However, as we wait, we are not idly sitting in our lazy

boys – but active, going about the Lord’s business, as we realize that God is always at work in this world through those believers who are actively hosting His presence and changing the atmosphere around them, working to bring God’s kingdom down to this earth. So, the story of the Bible isn’t the story of a God who whisks people away to safety when trials and tribulations come, but about a God who walks beside us even through the valley of the shadow of death. The important part that we play as believers is that our lives are a testimony to God’s faithfulness, especially during those times of hardship and difficulties, showing others how God’s grace works through the lives of His saints!

One of the great advantages of walking with God – is that God promises to bless those that choose to walk with Him by faith, even if they have no idea where God is taking them. For example: God asked Abraham and Sarah to leave the place where they were living and walk with Him to a distant un-known land, and then left the choice up to them, and if they choose to obey, then God promised to bless them: ***“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”*** (Genesis 12:2-3). All of life is about choices and we need to choose wisely to be in the center of God’s will. Abraham choice wisely! Abraham believed and God greatly blessed him as He promised because God keeps His promises. Then, about five hundred years later God gave the same promise to His chosen people the Israelites through Moses, after they left their years of slavery in Egypt. As they were heading for the Promised Land, they also had to choose – would it be God’s way or their way!

But, unlike their patriarch Abraham, his descendants didn’t choose wisely and ended up wandering the desert for forty years, until that whole generation that had left Egypt had passed away. And then, just before this new generation that was born in the desert wilderness were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses gives them these final warning, hoping they had learned the lessons of their ancestors, and would chose wisely and choose to put their faith in God and trust God.

Deuteronomy 10:12, “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” And here is God’s promise if they choose wisely – ***Deuteronomy 28:9, “The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in obedience to him.”*** You will notice in both of these

verses, there is a condition required of them – they must choose to walk the walk to receive His promises. Walking in obedience to God’s spiritual practices and disciplines was the key to receiving His blessings, and it’s no different for us today. We need to choose wisely and when we do, God’s promises apply to us as well!

Like a loving parent – God’s greatest desire has always been for us to choose to walk in obedience, but we often tend to try and walk down our own path as rebellious children. And then, wonder why we end up in the wilderness like God’s chosen people of the past. And that’s why Israel’s Old Testament prophets constantly tried to call God’s people back onto the path and walk with the Lord, over-and-over-and-over again. Through His prophets, God constantly reminded His people, what He required of them. God didn’t want their meaningless rituals and burnt offerings, which were done out of obligation, trying to buy God’s favour; instead, what God wanted was their unconditional love, a completely surrendered life, and complete devotion to Him as their Heavenly Father, and God still wants the same for us today! We find God’s desire for us most clearly displayed in **Micah 6:8, “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”**

The image of walking humbly with God is prevalent throughout the entire Bible, because whenever we walk with Christ and follow in Christ’s footprints, we choose to walk in the light, and when we walk in His light, we will not stumble and fall or be in danger of being deceived, which is especially important in these end times with all of these demonic storms raging around us. And, I believe COVID is a demonic storm that Satan has brought about as a frontal attack against the church to get us off track, to prevent us from meeting together, to get us arguing about masks, vaccines and health regulations; thereby, taking us out of the war we are in for the souls of those around us who don’t know Christ. And as a result of this COVID war there will also be many casualties among believers. Paul makes this clear in his letter to Timothy, **“The Spirit clearly says that in the later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons”** (1 Timothy 4:1). Statistics tell us that up to 30% of believers will not be returning to in person services once we get back to normal. Even before COVID, the great falling away predicted by Paul was already taking place as we have seen denomination-after-denomination accommodating the ways of the world in compromising their faith, justifying sin and embracing sinful practices and ungodly laws!

As we age – our health slowly declines, and we become less active and more lethargic. After our evening meal, instead of heading outdoors for a brisk walk to burn off some calories, most head to their recliner, turn on the TV, and try to stay awake until bedtime. This slow decline can happen to us spiritually as well, especially when we have been a believer for a long time. Compared to our physical lives, if we don't continue to exercise our faith, we will get out of shape spiritually, becoming complacent and lethargic, no longer interested in getting as involved in the mission of the church to save souls and no longer waging war against all of the ungodly laws being passed by our governments, letting Satan take over our lives, families and nation. Much like our physical condition can quickly deteriorate if we don't stay physically active, so can our spiritual condition deteriorate if we don't stay active in spiritual activities and disciplines.

Paul in his letter to Timothy compares our spiritual health to our physical health – without exercise, either physically or spiritually we will get out of shape. We will get complacent. Being out of shape physically, we will find it difficult to do many of the things we love to do; likewise, being out of shape spiritually, we will find it difficult to keep up with Christ's call to follow Him and will start to stray from God's path. With the following results: the evidence of the fruit of the Spirit will be less evident in our lives, we will exhibit less patience, kindness, compassion, mercy and love towards others; God will seem more silent and distant; our faith will become lifeless, mundane and routine; we will worry more and trust God less; we will not discern the times we are living in and be easily deceived; our thoughts will revolve less on God and more around us, our needs and our health issues, causing our values and priorities to shift away from our calling to minister to others. Much like our physical condition, this slippery slope usually happens slowly over time, so that we many not even realizing how out of shape spiritually we have become, until it's too late.

This is nothing new – the early Christians struggled with this issue. In **Revelation 2:1-7**, we find Jesus' letter to the church in Ephesus. At first Jesus commends these believers on their past deeds, how they persevered and endured hardships for His Name and had not grown weary, but then Jesus gives them these words of warning as they allowed their spiritual health to decline – ***“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place”*** (Revelation 2:4-5). This once vibrant full of life church that was established by Paul in the city of Ephesus,

over time, had become complacent and lethargic, spiritually out-of-shape, and as a result they had forgotten the love they had for Christ when they first believed. So where is the Ephesus church today? Long gone! Nothing but crumbling ruins! It no longer exists! They started off strong but over time fizzled out, and it can happen to us here at SCCC if we forsake our love for Christ!

Like the Ephesian believers, when we first come to faith it's not un-common to be on fire for the Lord, being committed to learn as much as we can about God's Word and obediently serve Him and be committed to following the spiritual practices and disciplines. Because we all tend to get a bit out of shape over time – we need refreshers on these spiritual practices and disciplines every now-and-then. As we begin 2022, I am praying that we will all be committed and accept the challenge to go deeper with God. Paul speaks about the importance of strict training and self-discipline in **1 Corinthians 9:24-26**, ***“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one person gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.”*** As God's army we need to get in shape and stay in shape, so we will be fit and ready to fight the battle before us in 2022!

Paul is encouraging us here to not go through our lives aimlessly – but have a plan in place so we can run the race set before us with clear goals in sight, realizing that we will receive our rewards later, a crown in Heaven that will last for all of eternity. So, I'm encouraging you to set some goals for yourself in 2022, and they don't have to be huge unattainable goals, but goals that you know you can accomplish. Setting goals, even small ones, are important, because they stretch us, motivate us, and push us to do more that we would normally do.

Smart watches and fit-bits are very popular today in keeping track of our physical activities, telling us how many calories we are burning and how well we are sleeping. Most that wear these electronic devices set goals for themselves that motivates them to achieve those goals, such as taking a specific number of steps each day. Likewise, I am encouraging you to set spiritual goals for yourself to motivate you during the year. For example:

- I will read __x__ number of Bible verses a day or read through the entire Bible this year.
- I will pray __x__ number of times/day.

- I will do ___x___ acts of kindness each week/month
- I will invite ___x___ number of people to church this year.

The beginning of the new year is the perfect time to start feeding your spirit. This is the best time to push pause and listen to what the Spirit is saying to you. The end of the old year and the beginning of the new year is a time to reflect deeply and refine your focus. It's also a good time to decide what stays and what needs to go. If you fail to do the house-cleaning and pruning required now, the devil will be sure to clutter your life with distractions, with needy people, and meaningless projects that will zap your strength and cloud your focus in this coming year. So, decide now what needs to stay and what needs to go? We all may be involved in doing many good things for God's kingdom, but what are the **BEST** things we can be doing?

Remember, time and resources are always limited, so we need to be selective. It's like pruning fruit trees, pruning is not about getting rid of the "dead" unproductive branches, but involves selecting and cutting off some of the "good" branches to divert maximum sap, energy, and nourishment from the fruit tree into the most fruitful branches. So, ask yourself, what is the most wildly important and productive thing (or idea) that God has put into my life? What does Heaven want to express through you in this new year, and then divert all your available energy into that branch and feed it, and then watch it produce abundant fruit!

To start this year off on the right foot, let's revisit what we believe!

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We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with

the scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen!