Help For Struggling Christians

57 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

58 Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

59 He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

60 Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

61 Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family.

62 Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”


(Let’s pause here and ask God to bless our time of study)

INTRODUCTION

I wish I could stand before you this morning/evening and tell you that I have mastered the Christian life. I wish I could tell you that I have conquered all sin in my life and that I never SAY, DO or THINK anything sinful. But I would be lying to you.

The truth is every time I look into a mirror I see the face of a man who truly wants to live for the Lord and has tried to live for the Lord, but has failed more times than I care to remember.
But I realize I am not alone!!! One of the most common complaints I hear from Christians is:

“I am trying really hard to live the Christian life, but no matter how hard I try I just keep failing.”

Sound familiar? Probably everyone of us here this morning/evening can identify with that sense of frustration and failure.

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I have entitled this message, “Help For Struggling Christians.” It’s a message I hope and pray will encourage those of you who are discouraged in your walk with Christ.

In this message I want to share with you three very practical principles that will help you in your Christian life.

We find our first principal here in our text in Luke chapter 9

**Principle #1: Remember The Christian Life Is Not Supposed To Be Easy**

1. Its one thing to DECIDE to follow Jesus, it is an entirely different matter to have the DEDICATION it takes to do it.

2. In our text we meet three men who DECIDED they wanted to follow Jesus. That is until they found out how difficult it was going to be.

   Jesus could tell that none of these three men had truly counted the cost of following him. Jesus could see that all three of these men were under the false notion that following him would lead to a life of comfort and ease. And they obviously thought they could follow JESUS on their own terms rather than on JESUS’ terms.
3. BUT Jesus quickly dispelled these notions in verse 58 when he said,

   “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”
   (Luke 9:58 NIV)

4. To the two men who wanted to put family commitments ahead of their commitment to Christ, JESUS quickly them know that giving him anything short of FIRST PLACE in their lives was simply unacceptable.

5. Christians, one reason you and I struggle so much in the Christian life is because the Christian life is not supposed to be easy!!!

   As a matter-of-fact, it is probably harder to live the Christian life than any other kind of life here on earth.

6. Jesus tells us in JOHN 15:18,19 “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”

   And in John 16:33 Jesus tells us, “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you WILL have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

7. I don’t know who is credited with this quote, but it is certainly true, “The Christian life is not for the faint of heart.”

   -If living the Christian life were easy, anybody could do it!

   -If living the Christian life required little or no discipline, sacrifice or commitment, then anybody could do it.
8. BUT the truth is…….

*It does require DISCIPLINE
*It does require SACRIFICE
*It does require COMMITMENT

And DEDICATION
And SURRENDER
And SELF-DENIAL
And SELFLESSNESS
And FAITHFULNESS
And OBEDIENCE

9. It is certainly the most rewarding life on earth, but it is also the most difficult! It takes a considerable amount of courage to live the Christian life in a world where CHRIST.....and CHRISTIANS.....and anything to do with CHRISTIANITY is hated!

10. So if you’re struggling to live the Christian life and you’re disappointed and discouraged.....just remember you serve a loving, forgiving, merciful God who understands YOU ARE TRYING TO LIVE THE MOST DIFFICULT LIFE ANYONE CAN POSSIBLY LIVE IN THIS WORLD.

And God is never going to GIVE UP on you! God is never going to FORSAKE YOU! So when you stumble.....when you fall, get up and keep moving heavenward!

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The second principle is this:

**Principle #2: Remember You Can’t Live The Christian Life By Yourself**

*Turn with me in your Bible to Galatians 3:1-3*

**GALATIANS 3: 1-3** You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

1. Paul is obviously giving a scathing rebuke of the Galatian Christians in these three verses.

   These people had stopped living by the Spirit and had turned the Christian life into an exercise in “HUMAN EFFORT.”

2. I truly believe that a lot of Christians today are guilty of doing the same thing the Galatian Christians were doing.

   One of the biggest reasons why so many Christians today live in defeat and struggle so much in the Christian life is because they believe that living the Christian life is all about “HUMAN EFFORT.”
3. For a great number of Christians, the Christian life is all about performance and maintaining a “religious appearance. This is why some Christians develop a self-righteous, arrogant, “Holier-than-Thou” attitude.

Many Christians believe if they go to Sunday School and church every Sunday and put their tithe in the offering plate each week……and read their Bible and pray……and try to live a good, decent, moral life and do lots of good deeds for others that NOT only does that make them a “GOOD CHRISTIAN”……it makes them BETTER than Christians who don’t do all those things they do.

That isn’t a righteousness that is centered upon GOD, that is a righteousness that is centered upon SELF.

4. Now I am not minimizing the importance of church attendance or Bible reading and prayer or any of those other things I mentioned.

But Christians, we have got to understand that LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE is not about our “human efforts” its about our complete surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and submission to the Holy Spirit’s leading and guidance in our lives.

5. If we could live the Christian by our own human efforts without any help from the Holy Spirit, then even non-Christians could live a christian life.

6. The truth is YOU NOR I can live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit. It is absolutely impossible!

*It is only through the POWER of THE HOLY SPIRIT you and I can conquer SIN in our lives. You and I don’t have enough will-power or sheer determination. Only the Holy Spirit can give us victory over SIN!
It is the Holy Spirit who leads us and guides us and instructs us when we STUDY GOD’S WORD.

When you hear God’s Word proclaimed and you are convicted of a particular sin in your life, it’s more than just the preacher stepping on your toes. it is the Holy Spirit letting trying to steer your life back on course.

It is the Holy Spirit who produces SPIRITUAL FRUIT in you and me, the fruit of LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS and SELF-CONTROL.

7. Do you see now why you and I can’t live the Christian life without help? The more you and I yield control of our lives to the HOLY SPIRIT, the stronger we become in fighting off temptation and overcoming sinful habits, and the more confident we become in living a victorious Christian life!

Let’s review our first two principles:

Principle 1: Remember The Christian Life Is Not Supposed To Be Easy

Principle 2: Remember You Can’t Live The Christian Life By Yourself

That brings us to our third and final principle……

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PRINCIPLE 3: Remember The Christian Life Is More About A Relationship Than It Is About Religion

Turn with me to PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

7 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ;

9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but that which is through faith in Jesus Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

10 I want to know Christ, the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

1. Do you know why so many of us struggle with failure and disappointment in the Christian life? Its because many of focus more attention on keeping a bunch of “religious rules” and observing all the “do’s and don’ts” than we do on building a close, intimate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

2. In verses 5 and 6, preceding the verses we just read, Paul reflected back on his life in the days before he accepted Christ, the days when he was a Pharisee.

   In those days, Paul was about as religious as any man could possibly be.

   ……He had observed all the religious rituals and ceremonies.
……..He had obeyed all the “thou shalt”s and “thou shalt nots.”

Paul says in verse 6, “I was faultless.”
In other words, “I was so religious I even impressed myself.”

3. But then down in verse 8, Paul reveals how he feels about all those religious credentials now. He said, “I consider them rubbish compared to knowing Christ.”

In verse 10 Paul reveals that the most important thing in his life is KNOWING CHRIST.

4. Christians listen…….That is what the Christian life is really all about! It is about a close, personal relationship with JESUS CHRIST!

You see, it is very possible for someone to go to church every time the church doors are open…..and read their Bible and pray every day……..and be squeaky clean in their morals……..AND STILL NOT REALLY KNOW CHRIST!

5. Perhaps your Christian life has grown stale and lifeless and you feel “empty” as though you are just going through the motions.

That is a sure indication you have allowed the Christian life to become nothing more than COLD RELIGION.

6. If you want to see your Christian life take on a whole new meaning, shift your focus away from BEING RELIGIOUS to BUILDING A CLOSE, PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS!
CONCLUSION

The New Testament often compares the Christian life to a race, not a sprint, but a long, grueling marathon.

Christian that means there will be many more struggles in the days ahead until you reach the finish line.

The road ahead will sometimes be smooth, sometimes bumpy. There will be mountains and valleys……. victories and defeats…..successes and failures……. days of great joy and days of great sorrow.

And the struggle will continue until you draw your last breath and meet your Savior face to face.

So when you get discouraged or frustrated or you feel like giving up…….

JUST REMEMBER: THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ISN’T SUPPOSED TO BE EASY (It is the most difficult life one can live in this world)

AND REMEMBER: YOU CAN’T LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE BY YOURSELF (You need power and the protection of God’s Holy Spirit)

AND REMEMBER: THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS MORE ABOUT A RELATIONSHIP THAN IT IS ABOUT RELIGION. (Its about a close, intimate, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ!)
Closing Poem

WHEN I SAY “I AM A CHRISTIAN”

When I say…..”I am a Christian”
I’m not shouting “I am saved!”
I’m whispering “I get lost”
That is why I chose His way.

When I say…..”I am a Christian”
I don’t speak of this with pride.
I’m confessing that I stumble
And need Jesus to be my guide.

When I say…..”I am a Christian”
I’m not saying that I’m strong,
I’m saying that I’m weak
And need Christ’s strength to carry on.

When I say…..”I am a Christian”
I’m not boasting that I’m a success,
I’m admiting I have failed
And can never repay the debt.

When I say…..”I am a Christian”
I’m not claiming to be perfect,
My flaws are too visible,
But God believes I’m worth it.

When I say…..”I am a Christian”
I’m not saying I’m better than anyone,
I’m admiting that only through Christ
Will my eternal victory be won!