

IF I HAD ONLY KNOWN...

I wish someone had explained these things to me that have taken me a long time to learn.

Do yourself a favor. Catch these 10 keys early in life!

1. THAT GOD IS GOD AND I AM NOT. I thought that if I worked hard enough, was an effective change agent would make a difference in my world. "Everything God does will endure or ever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so men will revere him" (Eccl. 3:14. Work hard? Yes, I still do. Pray? Absolutely. But think that everything is up to me? Not anymore.

2. THAT THE CHURCH IS BIGGER THAN MY VIEW OF IT. Once I thought that I was on the cutting edge. Now there is the danger that I may think my way is still creative and progressive. It isn't. The One who said, "I the Lord do not change" (Mal. 3:6) is also the dynamic One who said, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). That's what He is doing.

3. THAT PEOPLE ARE INFLUENCED BY MORE THAN ME AND MY IDEAS. They are influenced by all of society, even by their own genetic makeup. Anything can be filtered one way by one person & another way by another person. Jesus said the Holy Spirit "will guide you into all truth" (Jn 16:13). God's Spirit will do what He came to do. That relieves me of a lot of pressure & responsibility.

4. THAT THERE ARE THINGS I CANNOT CONTROL. I can't control politics (though I vote), world economics (though I invest and save), changes in technology (though I try to keep up). Change happens. "You do not even know what will happen tomorrow" (James 4:14). I adjust to change, but I don't control it.

5. THAT IMMORAL INFLUENCES DO HARM MEN. I once thought that people could discern for themselves what influence films, television and other forms of entertainment had on them. Jesus warned, "If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matt. 6:23). I've seen the cumulative effect of darkness on people who never thought that it would have a lasting impact. A wise person recognizes darkness and stays in the light.

6. THAT FORMING GOOD HABITS MAKES A DIFFERENCE. Good prayer & study habits form strong cords that hold. When surprises come, when temptations hit you, when you need to make a big decision, you will be liberated by good habits.

7. THAT "I LOVE YOU" IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN CORRECTION & NAGGING. Don't be just a discipline-giver. Children read attitudes and actions far more than they respond to words. Real love isn't shown through lectures.

8. THAT GROWING IN LOVE WITH A SPOUSE REALLY IS GREATER WITH EACH PASSING YEAR. A couple totally in love on their honeymoon can be even more totally in love 40 years later because their capacity to love increases. Life shared together builds love in ways that those who take their spouses for granted or dabble in multiple relationships never experience.

9. THAT BEFORE GOD I AM RESPONSIBLE FOR ME. I will be held accountable not only for what I do, but also for what goes on in my thoughts, my inner person. "For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Eccl. 12:14). We become what we do and what we think about.

10. THAT WORRY IS A DENIAL OF TRUST. Sleepless nights, fretting, anxiety, an upset stomach, tells me that I still think that I am in charge. Jesus was right; I haven't added one bit to my height. I'm learning to be proactive rather than reactive and to "cast all my anxiety on him" (1 Pet. 5:7). That's what He has always wanted me to do.