**RECEIVE**

Decisions that Encourage Discipleship

Choosing to intentionally grow into Christlikeness.

*“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” Hosea 4:6*

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**Unit 101 Choosing to leave the place where Jesus finds me.**

*(Luke 9:23a) “if anyone will come after me…”*

**Unit 102 Choosing to Serve Jesus where He Leads me.**

*(Luke 9:23b) “…let him deny himself…”*

**Unit 103 Choosing to Learn from Jesus as He guides me.**

*(Luke 9:23c) “…take up his cross daily…”*

**Unit 104 Choosing to Work with Jesus as He Enables Me.**

**104.3 “Following with Others” : text**

**Mark 8:34b-37***“…and said to them, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospels shall save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

Here is Mark’s version of the key verse of our study, **Luke 9:23**. You will notice that the word “daily” is not in this first verse. The contrast between losing your life and saving it could not be clearer. To build your life on this world’s values is like the man in Matthew 7 who hears the word of Jesus but does not act on it and builds on the sand. It should be obvious that there is nothing you can exchange for your soul at the judgment, no matter what you gain in this world. The good news is that we do not follow Jesus alone, but fellow travelers on the narrow road are a great encouragement to us to join with the faithful ones who are spending their lives for Jesus and His kingdom. I really became aware of how important it was for me to be in fellowship with other Christians when I was praying with a young woman, Named Carmen:

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**Carmen**

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**Hebrews 3:13** *“But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”*

One of the values of following Jesus with others is the encouragement we should receive by walking with those who know and love Jesus. The deceitfulness of sin is so intense that it can be discouraging to the sincere follower of Christ, and if left unchecked can form a hardening in our hearts as we try to do by ourselves what only the body of Christ can do together. This element of discipleship is too often lacking in our churches and fellowship groups.

There are some who even seem to delight in the criticism of others and harming others in their walk with Christ. Notice it is day by day. One word of encouragement is not adequate. We all need to find support daily for our walk.

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**Calling Ministry**

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**John 15:12-17***"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends, if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another.”*

Not only is encouragement desired, but love is commanded! When love is assured in a relationship, almost anything can be discussed. Notice that the relationship of Jesus to his disciples was one of friends! It was clear who did the commanding, but it was also clear that it was done in the boundaries of friendship. How we relate to each other on the path of our journey with Christ will have leaders and followers, but all should be in the love of friendship and commitment not only to Christ, but also to His goal for our lives…bearing fruit that will remain! **This does not mean that there will not be need for “constructive criticism.” I**f there is more that needs to be said, it should be in the guidelines of Matthew 18:15-18. Scripture says what should happen if a fellow traveler is “overtaken by a fault” (Galatians 6:1)

**Philippians 2:3-4** *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”*

In this walk with others as well as Christ, the issue of self and our self-image (of conceit) is always at play because we are human. Yes, we have denied ourselves (unit 102), but self still tries to assert itself if we are not careful. An attitude of consideration for others is so essential. The question should be, “What is the good for the group and what is the good for another person?” This was the attitude of our leader, Jesus, when He was alive, and we follow in His steps (I John 2:6). This is incorporated in our lives through the “Golden Rule,” (Matthew 7:12)*“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”* In my life, I especially want to pray for others in the same way that I would like others to pray for me, if my situation was as theirs presently is. How can we love and pray in any other way?

[**Matthew 23:10-12**](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?book_id=47&chapter=23&verse=11&version=49&context=verse) *"Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.”*

This seemed to be one of the problems some of the disciples possessed…who was going to be great in the Kingdom of God. And it has not been eliminated from the church and the followers of Jesus in this century either. Very little will be more damaging to the body of Christ than for some to appoint themselves as the ones in control, rather than showing the humility that Jesus showed, and being willing to be the “least” (Luke 9:48.) Philippians 2 settles it for me, (Philippians 2:5-9)… *“****Have this attitude in yourselves*** *which was also in Christ Jesus, who, as He already existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men.* *And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross.”*

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**Sit Down, Shut up, Let it Go!!!**

**Jack Hayford**

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**John 15:1-11***"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit.”*

A further consideration of our walk with others on this path of discipleship and disciple-making…is our accountability not only to Christ, but also to His body, the church. It is clear in my experience that when a church is a “praying church”, more followers of Jesus will have an intense prayer-life. When a church is a “soul winning church”, more followers of Jesus will give attention to actions that will help Jesus through them lead souls into the kingdom. It is sad that so many of our churches in America seem to be “maintenance” churches…**just perpetuating what they have always done the way that they have always done it!** The words of Jesus’ parable in Luke 13:6-9 *“And He began telling this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree which had been planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and did not find any. And he said to the vineyard-keeper, ‘Look! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree without finding any. Cut it down! Why does it even use up the ground?’ But he answered and said to him, ‘Sir, leave it alone for this year too, until I dig around it and put in fertilizer;**and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down.”* If we are not satisfied with the “fruit” that is from our walk with Christ, and/or if we suspect that Jesus might not be satisfied with the results either, we should try not to resist Him when He tries to dig around our roots and put in some fertilizer! This is not salvation by works—**but it is a salvation that works**! God wants us to show the fruits of the Spriit (Galatians 5), and also the reproduction of His nature in others!

**John 16:23-24** *"And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full.”*

One of the questions we should ask of this verse is, “Is this verse given to persons alone or to the group?” Jesus was speaking in John, chapter 16, to His group of disciples. I am not saying that it is wrong for us as individuals to claim and to believe this promise for ourselves when we pray. God is often more gracious than He has promised. But the main thrust of this promise is to the disciples who will soon see their Lord crucified and need to wait in the upper room together for the promise of the Father. I have wondered what would happen in a church if we gathered in a room for 10 days and sought the Lord in prayer. We might well see the Pentecost that they saw if we chose to emulate their example.

**John 9:4** *"We must work the works of Him who sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work.”*

For we who have read the Bible, we understand that the time is short, and that when the “trumpet” will sound, life as we now know it will be over, and the chance to influence others toward Christ will be gone. Romans 13:11-14 says it well: *“Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now****salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed****. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore, let’s rid ourselves of the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let’s behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and debauchery, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”*

**Ephesians 5:15-16** *“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.”*

Anyone who has tried for even the briefest of times to walk with Jesus in life finds that these words are essential. Not any old thing will do in the life of the serious Christian. Sloppiness in our life will also affect the life of those around us who travel near us. It takes wisdom in this ever-changing world to know what is helpful and what is hurtful. The days are evil, and the evil one is always at work to try and have us spend our time, talent and treasure on things that are not of value for the kingdom. **The enemy of the excellent is always the good.** It is not enough to only think something is helpful, we must learn to make the most of our time.

**John 3:22** *“After these things Jesus and His disciples came into the land of Judea, and there He was spending time with them and baptizing.”*

There is no substitute for spending time with each other, especially with for the mature to be with the immature. Jesus did not form a class, pass out notes and take tests to establish learning. **He spent time with his disciples**. We must do the same. A mother would not think of taking her new-born baby, wrapping it in a blanket, placing it in a crib, and walking away, saying, “You are on your own, I’ll be back in a few days to see how you are doing.” Yet that is exactly what too often is done in the church with “babes in Christ.” **There is no substitute for time with others.** Romans 1:17, *“For in it* (the gospel)*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written: ‘But the righteous one will live by faith.”*

**Staff Relationships/ New Christians/ Struggling Christians**

**Acts 20:31** *“Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.”*

The Apostle Paul sets the standard for how he spent time with believers in the city of Ephesus, laboring during the noon-time siesta hours…even though he worked the normal hours as a tent maker. His was not a “distant relationship”, but one with tears and personal involvement. It is exhausting work, but it is fruitful work, and there is not a substitute. God sees our efforts, and he is either pleased or possibly displeased with what He sees.

**Colossians 1:28-29** *“We proclaim Him, admonishing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, so that we may present every person complete in Christ. For this purpose, I also labor, striving according to His power which works mightily within me.”*

What a powerful statement that we do not travel alone on this pathway, but that we have a responsibility to “every person” to present them complete in Christ. What would happen in our churches if those attending on Sunday morning had that sense of responsibility, and acted on it? Could it be that we don’t accept responsibility because we do not have “*the power that works with me*?” How many people claim to be followers of Jesus, but are not willing to be taught, or see the urgency to be taught, and are not involved in teaching others? How many leave the Sunday morning service with an attitude, “I was not fed,” rather than “I did not have the opportunity to give myself to others for the sake of the kingdom of God?” The growth of the kingdom of God cannot happen if we view our role to be listening to one proclaim truth for thirty minutes, listening to songs and perhaps joining in singing, and **then leaving satisfied as a spectator.** We must “also labor….”

**John 17:17-19** *"Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth. As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.”*

If there was ever anyone who did not need to be “sanctified”, surely it was the man Jesus. Yet He was so involved with his followers, that He set this example of His personal sanctification for their sakes. The main force of the word sanctify is to separate. Jesus is saying that He is hoping that they will be separated from the lies of this world, and cling to the word that is truth. In this age where there is so much clamoring for our attention, and it is usually not more than “garbage in, garbage out,” it is important to separate ourselves to the word of God. It may not win us many friends, it may even not be understood by fellow-travelers around us, **but it is still that which makes us useful for the Master.**

**I Thessalonians 4:3-8** *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;**and that no one violate the rights and take advantage of his brother or sister in the matter, because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you previously and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in sanctification. Therefore, the one who rejects this is not rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.”*

Paul speaks bluntly to this church that was not as “noble-minded” as the Bereans that he visited right after Thessalonica (Acts 17:11). We do not know if sexual issues were some of the struggles of this city, but it is certainly the focus of this word from Paul to this church, and through them to us also! Notice that lustful passion is rejected even under the banner of marriage. It is impurity to take advantage of someone sexually, even a marriage partner. The Holy Spirit should make this plain that were are to be kind in all relationships. (Ephesians 4:32) *“Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”* The one who rejects this does not reject a pastor or a teacher, but the Holy Spirit of God. **The Lord is the avenger of these things, and we need to make that plain to the people of God.** Hosea 4:6, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”*

**Hebrews 12:12-14** *“Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb, which is impaired, may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”*

My heart rejoiced when I memorized these verses. I was recovering from knee surgery on both legs, and any “extra steps” were challenging and usually very painful. I immediately thought of how too many Christians try to give “extra steps” to new Christians, when it is such an effort for them to take their first baby steps! God’s focus is that the limb might be healed. Rather than “blame the lame”, we need to strengthen weak hands and feeble knees, always focusing on what is health and healing for those on the path with us. Our pursuit should always be peace and holiness, rather than human efforts that are divisive and ultimately destructive.

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**Who do you know that needs encouragement?**

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**John 14:1-6** *“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you also will be. And you know the way where I am going.’ Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going; how do we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

Finally, this wonderful promise should guide and instruct us. Just like Abraham who obeyed and went out not knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8), you and I are a lot like Thomas in this portion of Scripture **who hears the promise of God but does not have a “clue” where Jesus is going and what is the “way” that he is to walk**. In a few days Christians will be known as people of “the way” (Acts 9:2, etc.), for the most impressive part of their life together was the way they loved each other and the way they lived their lives before others. As we walk with each other, it is not terrible to be without all the answers. A great response when we are without answers is, “I will try to find what the answer is and get back to you.” We don’t know when Jesus Christ will return, but we do know He is the way to live, and He is the truth to believe, and He is the life to enjoy. If we do that, then we will be ready to meet Him when He does appear.

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“If I can help somebody as I pass along,

Then my living will not be in vain…

If I can do my duty, and

In the night sing God’s song,

Then my living will not be in vain!!!”

(Paraphrased by F. H. Lacy)