**RECEIVE: Text**

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…”*

We begin with the witness of prevenient Grace…the grace that goes before while God is working to draw people to Himself. Hopefully, we are drawn to Him and experience the grace that brings us into Salvation and begin born again.

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

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

As a born-again believer, we begin to experience Jesus drawing us into self-denial and the sanctified life. We have an initial sanctification when we accept Jesus as our Savior, but we soon realize that the pull of the world is contrary to the pull of Jesus in our life. Entire Sanctification is when we choose to accept that grace of His complete presence in our life that crowds our own self-centered ways.

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

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

As an entirely committed Christian follower of Jesus, we begin to realize that God not only required Jesus to commit His life “unto death, even the death of the cross” but that He requires us to lose our life so that we might save it. Every day we need to choose to follow, regardless of the cost He requires us to invest in Him.

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

*(Luke 9:23d) “and follow Me.”*

When Jesus first called us, He told us that he would make us *“fishers of people.”* (Matthew 4:19.) He may have told us in ways different than He told others, and we may not have understood what He had planned for us, but His goal for our lives was not for us to be “pictures of His grace hanging in the library”, but tools of His workmanship to accomplish what He knows is needed in redemption’s plan.

In our first lesson of this unit, (104.1), we have considered what it means to count the cost of following Jesus. In the second lesson of this unit, (104.2), we have seen some of the changes in our life that are needed to be useful followers of Him. In this lesson we are considering how we can conserve our strength and resources in order to marshal them to be effective under His leadership and guidance.

**104.4 “Following Frugally”**

**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.”*

\*\* Careful with your time, talent, treasure.

\*\* Careful with your witness

\*\* Careful with your responsibilities

It seems as if we tend to be frugal with many things in life, but spending time with those who are following Christ with you is not a place to constrict your time. Jesus had the most important assignment of any person who ever lived, and yet He spent time with His disciples, those that were following Him…the ones He had chosen. I think it is important to follow His example.

I am struck by how Jesus taught His disciples. Rabbis used memorization, but we do not see Jesus doing that. It is in this time spent with them that they begin to see what it means to follow Jesus and be a part of His life. As far as we know, there was no “school setting” with notebooks, lesson plans, information transfer. He was aware that the Holy Spirit would teach them after He left. We should have the same confidence and lead people to depend on learning from the Spirit.

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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.”*

I believe that Jesus greatly encouraged His disciples as He spent time with them. I would not be surprised to learn that He praised them far more than criticized them.

In two different places the Scripture tells us to “redeem the time.” This is not an act of frantic, fervent effort, but rather a conscious awareness of how important it is for us to be spending time in significant ways with those we are attempting to be an influence in their lives, **Ephesians 5:16** says *“Redeeming the time because the days are evil.* **Colossians 4:5** says, *“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.”* Both verses tell us that we should not waste time. Jesus did not waste time, but invested it in transferring His life to those around Him.

It may seem as if it is “down time,” time that is not accomplishing much, but my experience as well as this Scripture’s teaching is that it is a good investment. We can make these investments in the kingdom by just being a positive, sustaining presence in another’s life who is following Jesus. Time spent on our pleasures is probably wasted time for the most part, but time spend in sharing our life with other followers and encouraging them produces great rewards.

**Acts 4:32-37** *“And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each to the extent that any had need. Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), owned a tract of land. He sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”*

Here is one of the great passages of Scripture. The unity here among the disciples is extraordinary. O that it could be found in our fellowship of believers today! We tenaciously hold on to what we possess in this life, and the thought of sharing on this level is missed among most followers of Jesus. Notice that it was not a forced communistic or socialistic imposition on them but was out of a heart of love. They cared more about others than even themselves. This is the first reference in Acts to Barnabas. The next time he is mentioned is when the Apostle Paul comes back to Jerusalem after his conversion and Barnabas invites him into his house, despite his fears. Son of Encouragement was surely an appropriate name for him.

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**Luke 6:38** *“Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”*

While the main context of this verse is not money, but forgiveness; it certainly also applies to those who invest their lives in others, helping to direct them to maturity and discipleship. Anyone who has tried to teach a Bible class knows that they get more from the lesson than those who hear and try to learn. This principle of giving and receiving is just a part of life. God gave His Son Jesus, Jesus gave His life on Calvary for the atonement of mankind, and the Holy Spirit gives of His life and His Spirit to the believer to strengthen them on their path of righteousness.

**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.”*

Here is a favorite verse for those who are open to help others. Our task is to be one who strengthens; not to add burdens to the breaking point of the weak. To the one who is damaged so that their knees are weak, we should strengthen these people too! (I have a special love for that phrase since I have had both knees replaced.) I identify with making straight paths (the shortest distance between two points). When I was recovering from knee surgery, I did not want to take any extra, unnecessary steps. **God is in the business of healing,** healing the body and soul. I cannot understand why followers of Christ can be divisive, and not be at peace with others. Surely holiness requires all the above in order to see the Lord.

**Luke 8:4-8** *“Now when a large crowd was coming together, and those from the various cities were journeying to Him, He spoke by way of a parable: ‘The sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell beside the road, and it was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the sky ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky soil, and when it came up, it withered away because it had no moisture. Other seed fell among the thorns; and the thorns grew up with it and choked it out. And yet other seed fell into the good soil, and grew up, and produced a crop a hundred times as much.’ As He said these things, He would call out, ‘The one who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

The focus of this parable is that we should not be overly concerned that all our efforts don’t bring success. Instead, we should focus on that part of God’s favor in people’s life that is bringing growth and spiritual victory. Not everyone who heard Jesus decided to follow Him or accept His teaching. There were many who were even offended by Him. But the growth came from those who did respond. And we should be overjoyed if 25 % of what we plant grows with this magnitude!

**Galatians 6:9-10** *“Let’s not become discouraged in doing good, for in due time we will reap, if we do not become weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let’s do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”*

It is easy to become discouraged with the 75% that do not allow the seed to grow, and it is also wearisome to see that magnificent growth does not usually occur. But like a parent who sees their child remain physically small, and then suddenly have a “growth spurt”, we should be people of faith expecting the same.

**II Corinthians 1:8-10** *“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead….”*

Notice the desperation here of the Apostle Paul. Was it this excruciating life that caused Him to be so effective as you look back on His accomplishments? Could it be that one of the reasons Christianity is spreading rapidly in “third world” areas is that they have the same desperation that Paul had, while we in more comfortable areas of the world don’t have that desperation? Not trusting our ability but trusting in the God who raises the dead gives the necessary faith for miraculous results.

Once you have seen God do “exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we ask or think (Ephesians 3:20), you can never settle for a complacent attitude in faith. I imagine that every time Paul was in prison, he was believing for deliverance like he had experienced in Philippi. History records that this was not the usual result. But His faith was no doubt pleasing to God. May our faith also be pleasing to God whether or not we have seen God raise the dead, or release you from prison.

**II Corinthians 4:7-11** *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”*

These verses present to us the conflict of being citizens of heaven and citizens of earth at the same time. We are so human…and yet as “born again” followers of the Lord, we are conflicted with the realities of this life and the realities of the life that is within us. We refuse to abandon the treasure that is in our earthen vessels, and yet everything in this life tries to force us to preserve and protect this earthly life. Jesus seemed not to struggle with this conflict. Perhaps it was his memories of the life he had before coming to earth—we will never know for sure. But it is surely true that the more time we dwell focusing on the eternal life within us, the easier it will be to win this conflict. The most powerful witness we can have is for others to see the life of Jesus manifested in our mortal flesh. So often that witness appears as we are not perplexed when crushed, not destroyed when struck down, etc. We must not run from the witness of carrying the “body of the dying Jesus” in our life.

**I Corinthians 15:57-58** *“…but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”*

What a person is steadfast, immovable, and “always abounding in” shows the real values they hold in life. I have seen too many people that held those traits over the insignificant things of life, and even the things of the church. It really doesn’t matter what the building looks like, or what the music of the service is, what matters is the death and the resurrection of Jesus. That is what always gives the victory. That is what will make our toil not be in vain.

**Ephesians 4:29-32** *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you .”*

How much has been lost to the kingdom because these words were not followed or even sometimes known as the way to follow Christ. My mom used to say, “If you can’t say something good, don’t say it.” I never knew until later in life that there was Scripture like this on which to base those words. Our eyes should always be on not grieving the Holy Spirit by our words or actions. Bitterness, wrath, anger, and clamor have no place in the Kingdom of God. Yet too often we find those things in the life of those who proclaim to be followers of Jesus! Is there really any cause that is worth the damage that our actions cause? Real discipleship is in the atmosphere of kindness, tender-heartedness, and forgiveness. Discipleship is the transfer of the life of Jesus from one to another…especially in our forgiveness.

**James 5:16a** *“Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed….”*

The therefore here in this verse is in the context of relieving suffering, of our expressing praise in cheerfulness to God, or seeing the sick healed and restored (vv. 13-15.) The goal of seeing God’s restorative work in our world should be enough for us to be honest about our own failures, and our own needs. Too often in a prayer for healing the one praying will assume and express no need in their own life for God’s sustenance. Our honesty brings the healing power of God to others.

**II Timothy 3:16-17** *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*

Finally, we should not try to be frugal with our embrace of the entirety of the Word of God…that which we understand, and that which we still do not fully come to understand. We should not be afraid to say the words, “I don’t know—but I will try to find out!” Some of the most dangerous people in the Kingdom of God that I have met have been those who thought they had all the answers. Some of the most helpful souls to my life have been those who were ever growing, ever learning, and searching. May we never try to rationalize a part of Scripture because it does not fit “our understanding,” or eliminate a Scripture from our consideration because it challenges our thinking. The inspiration of God is beyond our understanding, and you have to be omniscient to fully understand God or His Word, or His Spirit.