**(TEACHER’S NOTES) “RECEIVE”101-1 GF**

**Decisions that Encourage Discipleship:**

Choosing to intentionally grow into Christlikeness

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

Welcome to this class which I hope will become an exciting adventure for both me as the facilitator…and for you as learners. Some of you may not know me very well and I have copies of my resume on the table if you are interested in where I have ministered and what my academic background is. I do not consider myself as a theologian or a Bible scholar, but as a local church pastor. My calling from God was to nurture and help sustain the people of God as I was able through preaching and evangelism. I hope to make the Bible and Christian nurture a major part of our time together.

Our meetings together will be videotaped and available live and on the website of the Whittier College Avenue Church (<https://cacnaz.org>) Because this material is commissioned by the Anaheim District Discipleship ministries, we will during the class need to keep questions and discussions to a minimum so that the content of the teaching can be available electronically to others. I will plan to stay after the sessions to address any of your questions. For those of you who want to receive all the material electronically, I will be able to send the written text of the lessons as well as the handout material to you through my email account. If you are watching live or later watching the video on face book or the CAC website, and have a question, or want the material by email, contact me at [fstone7777@gmail.com](mailto:fstone7777@gmail.com).

I assume that all of you have the promotional material for the class which shows on the back the dates and times of these first six sessions of material, and the concepts that will be covered each week. There are some on the table if you did not receive one. Also, it will be available by email to those who request it. It shows the class content not just for these first six lessons, but also shows the next three units which I hope many of you will want to consider. You will notice that each of these four units of six classes will follow the pattern of the words of Jesus in Luke 9:23, *“if anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”* This first unit will look at and try to recall what it **was like for** us to “come after Jesus,” in the first place, and what were the circumstances and influences that enabled you to do that? This will hopefully help us understand our own walk with Christ and also give us insight of how we can help others with their journey with Christ. As we discover things about our own walk with Christ, and about the walk of others, we very well may find that many of our challenges are not unique at all!

The bedrock Scriptural background for all of these lessons is the Scripture at the top of the page of your handout, the words of the **prophet Hosea: God’s people are often destroyed for lack of knowledge!** Hosea was not concerned that the people of Israel had stopped going to the temple, or being circumcised, or acting like they were committed Jews, but that they had missed the point that all of this was **to enable them to know God**. Most of us have seen people who have made a commitment to Christ in a revival, at a youth camp, in a large arena gathering or elsewhere…only to have it not take the effect Christ would desire for their lives—and to forget their intensions in just a short period of time. I have come to believe that a major problem in this scenario is a misunderstanding of how much their life is dependent on God’s Grace, rather than their efforts.

I believe a key to this problem is found in John 1:11-13—from which I classes derive their title—**receive:** *“He came to His own, and His own people did not accept Him.****12******But as many as received Him****, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name,****13****who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but of God.”* The key question is: “What does it mean to receive Christ today into our lives?”

To start to answer that question, we need to consider the concept of **Grace.** It is commonly and simply understood as God’s influence in our lives to inspire us toward His will for our lives, and to impart to us the ability to respond to those desires. For Christians, it is understood that the significant action of God that did allow this to be accomplished in us was what Christ did on the cross. The verses of Scripture that most accurately show this to us is Ephesians 2:4-10 *“**But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,****5****even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),****6****and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,****7****so that in the ages to come He might show the boundless riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.****8****For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;****9****not a result of works, so that no one may boast.****10****For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”*  I think you will see in these verses that God’s grace was not just for our salvation, but also for our own development in **Christlikeness**—and even for us to be seated with Christ in heaven someday.

As I have spent hours in prayer trying to assimilate various materials, and to listen to the Holy Spirit about how He has worked in my own life, I have become aware that God’s grace had previously prepared me for decisions I have made, and how His grace has sustained and enabled me to make other decisions of commitment to Christ throughout my life. As you think and pray about your life in Christ, you may also come to a new understanding about the fulness of God’s grace in your life.

**Diagram of Grace**

Because many of us are visual learners, I wanted to present this diagram of God’s grace in our lives—which comes from A. W. Tozer. Notice that before **circle 1** which is salvation, there is this thing theologians call, “Prevenient Grace,” which means the grace that comes before. We will use this diagram in later sessions to discuss the further actions of God’s grace in our lives, but for tonight we want to focus on what has happened for us before salvation. As we get started on the material for this first session, I want you to think about the questions on your handout today…what do you remember about your life when Christ first found you, …when you discovered that Jesus was more than just a name, …when you began to regard yourself as a Christian believer?

To do that—think of the stories in the Bible of how the twelve disciples were called to follow Jesus. They were all busy with their lives before they met Jesus. They were probably good Jews but were not ones that were regarded as leaders by their culture and some of them had some serious flaws (Matthew: the tax collector; Simon: the zealot, one who would try to overthrow the Romans by violence; and Judas Iscariot who was a thief…John 12:6 and a betrayer). They all were challenged to leave what they were doing—fishing nets, tax collecting booths, etc. to go on a journey with Jesus. But they decided to “come after,” to begin an exciting journey of following Jesus. I would like for you to try and recall what was happening in your life when you began to “come after” Jesus.

For some of us, we will remember a time of real crisis in our lives when we were confronted with conviction. Others will remember a time when a gospel plan was presented to us—privately in our homes, or perhaps in a large arena. For others it was a conversation with a parent or close friend. Some of us may not even remember a time of change, but that we grew up in a Christian family or church and it always just seemed natural to believe and follow Christ. Elmer Towns used to say, **“There is no wrong way to win someone to Jesus Christ!”**

On your class handout, there are five parallel lines. **(Try to remember) where you were, at what age you were, who, if any, were the ones with you to help you to decide, and what did you leave behind to follow Jesus: (let’s take a few minutes to write down some answers)**

**Three Minutes**

We do not want to worship any method of our coming to faith, but to celebrate that we have come to believe. And it is important that we understand that there may be many ways Christ would help someone else that we care about to come to faith. The Billy Graham evangelistic association in their training says that it takes seven positive influences to help a person come to faith! If we had time in the class, we could all be encouraged to hear each other’s story of how we began to open the door of our lives to Christ when we discovered that He was knocking and wanted to come in.

**A special verse** I would like for you to consider and even meditate on is the verse **John 6:44** *“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”* I think it can be profitable for us to recover our memories of how God drew us to His presence—for He is likely still using many of the same ways to get our attention and our love today. Knowing how he’s related to you can help you **sense how** he’s relating to others. Stop for just a moment and give God praise that he put circumstances and people in place to draw you into a life of following Christ. And it has been my observation that He continues to draw people to Himself all through their lives.

**Deciding to Believe:**

Our key verse for this session is probably the most familiar verse of the Bible, **John 3:16,***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.”* The key thought of the verse is that God loved the whole world, that His love sent Jesus for us, and that everyone who believes will not perish but have eternal life.

**John 10:27** tells us that Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”* I was amazed one night when I was watching a travelog that showed a contest in Great Britain of shepherds calling their sheep into the fold—and the winner was the one who could do it in the shortest time. The sheep did not follow in a straight line but just in the general direction of the shepherd in the fold. And each shepherd had a “sheep dog” that would run at the back of the sheep and “nip at their heels” to get them go faster and in a more direct path. Perhaps some of you as you think of your life with Christ identify with those sheep, and even with the idea that the Holy Spirit has “nipped at your heels” from time to time.

Believing in Jesus biblically is not the same as thinking it is true—it is believing that causes action in our lives. It is somewhat like believing that this room is on fire. (Let me be clear—there is no fire!) But if you came to believe that there was a fire, it would be irrational not to stop everything and do whatever we could to get people out of the building, to put out the fire if we could, and to save whatever might be valuable. To believe and not act begins to question whether we believe!

John 3:18, the verse just two verse after our key verse for this session that we find so much comfort in, tells us that not to believe means condemnation in the eyes of God.

Another special verse is **II Peter 3:9** which says that God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to eternal life. I believe from this verse and others in the Bible, God is knocking on everyone’s door, wanting all to believe. An additional verse, **I John 2:2** tells us that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross was for all people of the world. *“…He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”*

**Deciding to Trust:**

A second major verse for this lesson is **Proverbs 3:5-6,** *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”* This verse says that it all starts with us beginning to trust. Think of how a new-born baby is seeking to be able to trust those around their lives for food, warmth, and protection. New-born infants in Christ (I Corinthians 3:1) must learn to do the same. Scripture is clear that we trust not just in the goodness and the love of God, but especially in the victory that Jesus obtained by his death on the cross at Calvary. His resurrection from the dead is our proof that He has power to help us in our lives, to forgive us for anything wrong we have done and to live in a way that pleases God the Father.

A good verse to meditate on is **Galatians 2:20** *“**I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”* Notice that as believers we identify with the crucifixion of Christ on the cross and it is that powerful, resurrected life that lives in us. Perhaps the most powerful part of the verse is that by faith in Him He lives in you and me!

These issues of believing and trusting are ones that continue to be important at every stage of our maturity in Christ. On a scale of 1. (being the least possible) to 10. (being the most possible) grace yourself on each of these four aspects:

\*\* Trusting in the Lord with all your heart: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*\* Not leaning on your own understanding: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*\* Acknowledging Jesus in all your ways: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\*\* Allowing Jesus to direct your paths: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**As we come to the end of this first session, I hope that you will understand that success in all of these areas is found in receiving the grace of God to help you do these things in a more satisfactory way.** Whatever number you have given to yourself, praise God for how much you are doing—and for His grace that wants to help you do even better in the days ahead. **Receive His grace to bring you closer to His help for your life.**

Jesus said in **Matthew 6:26-27** *“Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather crops into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more important than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single day to his life’s span?* **I encourage you to not be worried about whether or not you are growing in Christ adequately or doing enough to have God’s favor in your Christian walk.** God wants you to succeed as a Christian more than you will ever want to succeed. Unless you are directly disobeying what the Holy Spirit is saying to you, or has said to you in the past, relax in His love and trust that He will guide you in your development as a Christ-follower.

As a part of these classes, I will be making available each week electronically some material developed by Pastor Craig Rench when he was lead pastor at our Anaheim church. It is far more intensive than this class will be but would be a good resource material for those of you that are interested in being challenged.

He entitled his material, “The Mandate of the Master. His first unit is called the “Followers Course.” If you want the 13 lessons electronically, email me at [fstone7777@gmail.com](mailto:fstone7777@gmail.com) and I will send them to you. If you are not able to receive the material electronically, but want it printed for you, there will be a printing and delivery charge of approximately $20.00 for the 116 pages. There will also be a word file explaining the program which is sent with the first lesson.

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Let’s pray.