**RECEIVE:101-6 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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As we begin tonight, I want to again emphasize the class schedule. This is the last lesson of unit 101, following Luke 9:23a “if anyone will come after me….” The emphasis of these first six lessons have been on the prevenient grace of God going before our life of full commitment to **Jesus as Savior and Lord.** I have tried to emphasize that the development in the life of a follower of Jesus varies. Some are able to jump in the pool with wild abandon to Jesus, others very timidly start to be a follower of Christ. God is patient with us at our level of maturity and faith and personal desires. But He does not leave us immature and to our own constructs.

As we move toward unit 102, “denying ourselves,” **the season of Lent** presents itself as an excellent opportunity to practice some spiritual discipline in our lives during these 40 days before Easter. I hope that you will select something—not always food, and that you will deny to give to yourself those things so that you can give more of yourself to God in prayer and meditation instead—using that time that you used to spend, or the money, etc. to seek God’s face.

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

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

Class 101-1: Deciding to Believe/ Trust…Class 101-2: Deciding to Hear/ Pray… Class 101-3: Deciding to Risk/ Receive…Class 101-4: Deciding to Continue, & Listen & Wait: 101-5 Deciding to Evaluate and Share…tonight:

**101-6: Deciding to Strategize & Belong:**

Note: Class Schedule: Next week (2/22) is Ash Wednesday, and a guide is given tonight! Of course, it is best if your church or friends can celebrate together.

As I explained last week, there will be no class next week (2/22) on Wednesday on Ash Wednesday, but classes will resume the Wednesday after that (3/1). If you are in the email group, lesson 6 is mailed out on Monday, February 13th. The first emailing for 102-1 will be on Monday, February 27th. Included in this mail along with the Ash Wednesday material is a class description and themes to be developed for the six classes in Unit 102, with dates attached for each Wednesday class.

**Unit 102 start the next week (3/1/23 - 4/5/23): a six-week schedule is available!**

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

**Strategize**

**Matthew 4:18-19 *“Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He \*said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of people.”***

It should be obvious that Jesus has his strategy for our lives as Christians. It is to be fishers of people. Anyone who knows anything about fishing—either deep sea fishing or stream fishing, there are some common elements. You bait the hook that will attract the fish. You display extraordinary patience waiting for a time when the fish come for the bait. You must be adept at setting the hook and then often it takes a lot of strength to pull in the fish. In the case of fishing with nets as these fishers of fish used, there was the strenuous casting of the nets, the difficult pulling of the nets in to the boat, and then taking them to shore to be separated from the nets. And the last step was the arduous mending of the nets. In any case, the process did require fishermen to go where the fish were and have a plan and ability to catch the fish and bring them ashore.

**Matthew 5:16 “*Your light must shine before people in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”***

The verse I like best in being a fisherman of people is this one—that it is to be a natural result of who we are. Jesus has said that we are the light of the world, and that we are not to hid the light but let it be like a city set on a hill. Lighthouses had a plan to clean the lenses so the light would shine brightly. They carefully did maintenance so that the light would not go out but would continue to shine. And this verse says that the purpose of the light is to glorify God our Father.

**Mark 5:19 *“Go home to your people and report to them what great things the***

***Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.”***

Here is one of the most effective tools. That we should go to people who know us very well and tell them of the change that the Lord has done in our lives. If they care about us at all, the will easily see that not only a change has occurred, but that it involved mercy—something we could not earn and did not deserve. That witness should help our friends consider the possibility that if Jesus did that for us, He might do that for them as well. Telling our story of a life truly changed by the grace of God is a good way to “fish!”

**John 6:47 *“I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.”***

(translation/ Present-Active: The one believing is the one having everlasting life)

One of the greatest hinderances for people to accept Christ and believe in Him is that it too often seems so hard. This verse makes it so clear that everlasting life starts and continues as long as one starts and continues to believe.

\*\*Choose a plan and pray for an opportunity.

In the Rench discipleship materials (lesson 11) there are full descriptions of the plans below. You may have a different one that seems right for you to us. The important thing is to have a plan and try to use it as you can.

\*\*Be Prepared as best you can:

…the Four Spiritual Laws

…the Roman Road to Salvation (3:23/6:23/5:8/10:8-12)

…The A, B, C’s of the Gospel (Accept, Believe, Confess)

(John 1:12/ John 6:47/ I John 1:9)

**Luke 21:14-15 *“But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.”***

It is natural for us to have a fear of failure, especially when we think of what may be the eternal significance of our witness and their response to what we do or say. But remember, Jesus wants you to succeed far more than you do—He loves that person more than you will ever love them. Go and witness in faith that He goes with you and that this is His plan. Not having the “polish” of a salesperson may be just what helps your friend realize your sincerity. Trust that He will give you words and wisdom for this significant task. Also remember that you are not the only one in His kingdom that He may use to draw this person to Him.

**John 15:12** ***“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.”***

There is nothing more valuable in a witness than your love for that person, and them knowing of your love not only for God, but for other followers of Christ.

**Acts 2:41-47*****“And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.  And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.  And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”***

These four aspects of the life of the early church cannot be improved upon. The centrality of teaching is found in the great commission (Matthew 28:20.) Some have identified 75 commandments that Jesus gave—others have found more than 300 commandments. I will be giving you some of these lists in the next unit, but the point is that we are to be learners—and that is what being a disciple means.

As we approach the subject of “belonging” in the last part of this lesson, you can not find a better example that the last part of this paragraph of Scripture. That they would care for each other enough to sell their property, that they would be close enough to each other to be of the same mind, that they would be observing the Lord’s supper in each other’s home and taking their meals together—all of this allowed the Lord to help them have favor with the people and to add to their number day by day people that were being saved.

Tom Goble, one of our previous District Superintendents, told me that he did not know of a church on our district that was growing that did not have a weekly meal together. There is just something about not only eating, but taking the time to talk and share life around the table that binds us together. Sitting in the pew for an hour together is a poor substitute. If you have ever attended a camp or a camp meeting, you probably would agree with me that some of the most precious times in the Lord occur in those times where we eat together in the cafeteria, or have desert and play games after the evening meetings. The services are great and have their proper place, but so does the fellowship of sharing our lives for a week—or even for a few days.

**Belong**

**John 12:26*****"If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.”***

In this idea of belonging, the most important part of the concept is a knowledge that we belong to Christ, and that He belongs to us. And it is that common commitment among believers that binds us together. If you would look around most churches, an overwhelming percentage of people in the church would have never even talked to others in the church on a natural basis. But our love for Christ overcomes the human elements until we have a love for each other and belong to one another in a powerful way!

Perhaps the greatest “victory” that has occurred in my ministry happened when I first went into the ministry in 1966 as minister of music and youth at our church in Brea. I was still in school, having just been called to preach the month earlier! In that assignment I met a young man who “bonded” with me. I later learned that the night before he gave his life to Christ, he had been chasing his sister around the kitchen table with a knife!

I really don’t recall the exact way he accepted Christ, but I do know that I made it a point to stay close to him. We would go out to eat, talk, and I even enlisted him as a helper in the youth ministry. He grew as a believer, and when I left to go to seminary, he continued as a youth leader in the church. Two years later, when I came back into the area after seminary to start as lead pastor at Wilmington, I realized that he was starting that year to go to college, and I invited him to come and be an intern with me at Wilmington. He and I swear that we ate more Mexican food that we should have—but enjoyed every bit of it.

I was a part of his wedding, I stayed close to him as he began to pastor, and move through many different ministerial assignments. But one thing continued, wherever he was, or I was, we tried to get together. For you see—we belong to each other in the Lord. It continues to this day! And we wouldn’t have it any other way. He has pastored larger churches that I have, he has had a significant influence in the church that I could never have, but we cherish our friendship, we belong to each other in the Lord. I think it is significant to deepen those relationships that God allows us to have. We need it—and so do they!!!

**John 8:12** *“****Jesus again spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."***

A part of our unity and belonging is that we live a different life than the world lives. If we walk with Jesus, we do not walk in the darkness. The darkness cannot put out the light, but the light puts out the darkness. Our common life in Christ as we “come after Him” takes us into the light, and we share that with each other gladly. People who do not know Christ don’t usually want to come to the light because it exposes things about them that they don’t want others to see, and even themselves to have to acknowledge (John 3:19-21). We have found our place, it is with the people who are honest and transparent and are not afraid of allowing the light of God to shine into them.

**Matthew 11:28-29** **"*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.”***

\*\*Continuing to come to Jesus—even when weary and stressed.

\*\*Find rest in Christ through prayer, His Word, fellowship, sharing.

\*\*Learning that Jesus is gentle and humble in heart and finding rest.

Here are three benefits for those that belong to Jesus and keep coming to Him in their time of need and issues of life. Even when we are weary and stressed by life we can find a rest in Him as we accept our place (His Yoke) and continue to learn from Him. In a world that is harsh, we find a savior who is gentle. In a world that values pride and success, we find a Savior who is humble in heart. In a full time of commitment of our life to Him, we find rest to our souls.

**John 21:22*****Jesus said to him, ‘If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow Me!’***

\*\* Not always liking the assignments of the Lord (John 21:19-21).

\*\* Accepting the assignments and places God provides for us.

\*\* Not comparing our tasks to what is assigned to others.

\*\* Continually believing in the Second Coming of Christ!

One sure way to forfeit our comfort, and also to compromise our oneness and unity with the Body of Christ is to compare ourselves to others. Even when our way may seem painful, there is a joy in knowing that the all-wise, all-powerful God has this place for us to be serving Him. And whatever we face, we have the hope of the soon return of that wonderful Savior to restore our world.

**Hebrews 10:25 *“…not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.***

Perhaps the greatest verse in the Bible about belonging to each other is this verse in Hebrews. We need not only to be a part of worshipping together with others on a regular basis for our own life and spiritual growth, but others in the fellowship do need us to be there for them! During COVID, I became very comfortable in my worship at home (in my pajamas with a cup of coffee). I would listen to three services each week, one at 9am, another at 10am and a third at 11:00 am. I tried to tell the Lord that I really worshipped Him better at home, than back at church. But unfortunately, Christ reminded me of this verse, and also of a sermon I had given based on this verse. I was back at church the next Sunday!!!

**(Belonging more important—word file)**

HAVE YOU INVITED THE SPIRIT OF GOD INTO YOUR LIFE?

**GO FOLLOW JESUS THIS WEEK!!!**