**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…”*

In unit 103.1, we looked at the “Heart of Cross-bearing”...which was loving Jesus enough to take up the cross or crosses which He gives us. In 103-2, we looked at the mind-set of “Cross-bearing” which was having the same mindset that Jesus had in Philippians 2...denying ourselves and expending ourselves to help the Father complete His plan for our world...and complete it through us even though it would cause us grief or pain. In this lesson we will learn of the joy of cross-bearing as we continue to learn from Jesus as He guides us…even through painful circumstances.

**103.3 “The Joy of Cross-bearing”**

**Hebrews 12:1-3** *“Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let’s rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let’s run with endurance the race that is set before us,****2****looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith,* ***who for the joy set before Him endured the cross,*** *despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”*

Today we look at the joy of “Cross-bearing” which is the joy that is set before us as we pick up our cross and follow Him daily. Just as Jesus was motivated by the joy that was set before Him, you and I need to be motivated by what the Father has promised and will surely provide for us throughout eternity. “Keep your eyes on the prize!!!” We don't run our race for earthly glory as in a sports context, but we run for the glory of heaven that we will enjoy someday in God's presence. Please note again it is not just any cross; but it is **our** cross or crosses, what Jesus gives us to bear, not what a pastor or well-meaning Christian might suggest to us. And it is a **daily task** of taking it up. It is a decision we must make anew each day!!!

**Page Two**

The Roman world was very familiar with what a cross was, and so there was no doubt in the reader's or hearer's mind what Jesus was requiring in Luke 9:23. His own death on a cross had not yet occurred, and any reference to His death in such a way was rejected, at least in thought, by even his closest disciples. Rather than the original thought being the hearer's or reader's death by torture on a cross, probably carrying the cross for another to their death like Simon the Cyrene was required to do for Jesus was the initial understanding. But, **after Jesus' death,** and his initial carrying of his cross, though having been scourged, carrying our own cross to the place of crucifixion became the common understanding of first century Christians. It should certainly be our understanding as well.

Therefore, what cross or crosses has the Master told you to pick up and carry. This is different than one sentenced by Rome or a Roman soldier. This is our assigned task that requires suffering and the pouring out of our “life's blood,” Some of the crosses that I have noticed others carry in my fifty or more years of ministry is the cross of an unhappy marriage, the cross of delinquent children, the cross of health concerns, the cross of Christians and churches who do not reflect Jesus, and, of course, the crosses of ministries that are more than demanding. What makes these crosses so difficult is that it is not usually a one-time commitment, but rather the reality that daily we have choices whether or not we will continue to follow.

\*\* The Witness of those who have gone before bearing “crosses.”

Who have you known that has endured hardships and trials to remain faithful to Jesus and to be useful for Him?

\*\* The Witness of Jesus who bore our cross and the world’s “crosses.”

What crosses did Jesus take up in His lifetime before He took up the cross of Calvary that won redemption's battle? How did these smaller decisions to endure misunderstanding and rejection help Him when the big test confronted Him?

\*\* The Witness of Scripture that there are “crosses” for us to bear!

What Scriptures can you find to substantiate the concept that if we are faithful in following Jesus, there will be suffering for us to bear?

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**The Witness of Hebrews 11**

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**Page Three**

Recently I preached a sermon, “I Believe”, at Whittier College Avenue church. The pastor, Jason Tippitt, had just completed a sermon series on the Apostle's Creed which emphasizes “I believe” as it makes doctrinal statements. I asked the question, “What does it mean to say, 'I believe'”? To illustrate that concept that believing is more than getting the right answer on a test, but is acting and living according to our beliefs, I preached through Hebrews 11...and illustrated the lives of those in the chapter as the development of saving grace, sanctifying grace, serving grace, and sustaining grace, Unit 101,102, 103, and 104. I think you will find the sermon (attached file) interesting as we study discipleship together.

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**(confirming Scriptures) Psalm100:4-5** *“Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courtyards with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name. For the*

*Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His faithfulness is to all generations.”*

As we carry our cross and serve our Master in the assignment(s) He has given to us, our attitude is extremely important. We should be thankful for the chance to be of use to Him, even if it causes us pain. We should center our mind and spirit on the praise of His character and goodness. We should dismiss any thoughts of His unfairness to us proclaiming that He is good, He knows what He is doing. We should look in anticipation of good coming to us and others as we carry our cross for Him. His faithfulness will be what will sustain us in difficult times.

**John 4:23 “***God is ﻿spirit, and those who worship Him must worship ﻿﻿in spirit and truth.”*

Too often worship is considered in the context of how loud we shout, how much we move or dance, what emotion we experience, or other culturally expected experiences that are proclaimed worship. But God looks on the heart. We need to come with **openness, brokenness, and oneness** before Him. He knows us, and we cannot put on a happy face and think it will impress Him. He sees our spirit, and whether we are hiding from Him in some way, or if we are living and worshiping in truth. This is exactly why there needs to be confession in our worship. Psalm 19:

12-14 says, ***“******Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.*** ***Also keep Your servant back from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be innocent, an*d *I will be blameless of great wrongdoing.*** ***May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.”***

**Page Four**

**Hebrews 13:15-16** *“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”*

Here is the guidance for us that perhaps praise and worship when it is difficult for us and hard, perhaps even a life of sacrifice, is special in God's sight. And it is also true that doing good and sharing when it is not our first preference does not go unnoticed by God. It may feel like a “cross” to us, but it brings the power of God into our lives and into our world.

**I Thessalonians 5:16-18** *“Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

which one of these three 1) rejoicing always, 2) praying without ceasing, or 3) thanking God for everything is the most difficult for you to continually do?

**See also: Psalm 33:1, Psalm 95:6, etc.**

**Bearing our Cross by Loving our Friends**

**Matthew 18:18-20***"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."*

For whatever reason, it appears in this Scripture and throughout God's revelation that there is power in the body of Christ coming together in unity. We should be aware that it is in this oneness that we will be with all the others who are in heaven eternally. There is an old saying, **“To be with saints above, O—that will be glory, but to live with saints below—now, that's a different story!”** And yet, just as parents in this world take great joy in seeing their children love each other and support each other, so does our Heavenly Father. Whatever divides followers of Jesus in this life is used not only to harm His kingdom but is also so often used to prevent others from even wanting to consider being a part of the His followers. You might want to ask yourself what you have seen divide Christians from one another, and what have you seen unite them. It is not always enjoyable to be with those who see things differently than we do, but Christ is revealed in the midst.

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**The Illustration of Mike Moore**

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**Page Five**

**(Confirming Scriptures) John 14:12-14** *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”*

If this verse does not keep us humble and aware of our inadequacies, perhaps nothing will. As we bear our cross in love for our friends, we find that God does do some things, but we fall short of doing the works that He did, and certainly do not usually do greater works unless we rationalize what the entire body of Christ is doing at any one time. Who among us has not asked intensely in prayer for some relief for a friend, a follower of Christ, only to find ourselves needing to continue to ask. We come to that part of the 14th verse that it is in His name, His authority, that we ask in our humanity, yet we do not comprehend His full authority. And so, we often suffer alongside one we love and “bear the cross”, not fully knowing why we have not received what we ask, but “tortured” in the unseen result of what we have ask and pleaded to receive.

Of course, prayer is not the only cross we bear when we love our friends. We may be grieved by seeing them make wrong or unworthy choices. We may have them ask us for financial or physical support, often wanting us to do what they refuse to learn to do for themselves. Loving our friends, especially the way Christ loves them and compels us to love them, can be far more than an inconvenience. It is sometimes a torture for us to say no to them when they do not understand that we believe that our response of “no” is for their own good.

**John 15:7-8** *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”*

Here is a special verse for me in my prayer-life, especially loving my friends and caring for their needs as I wait before the Master to do what only He can do. I choose to begin my prayer, my “cross-bearing,” by trying to cleanse my mind of any lack of abiding in Him. I specifically ask the Holy Spirit to show me any way that He sees that I am not fully abiding in Him in order that my prayer might be heard. I continue by asking the same thing of His words, the Bible, abiding in me. Is there some portion of Scripture I do not embrace? How have I presented His words to others? If I believe that I have cleared these two requirements, then I believe I can claim it will be done for me. I think this is especially true if God knows that it is not my desire to have anyone credit me with any result, but rather that God be glorified, and that His Kingdom be advanced.

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**John 16:23-24** *"In that day you will not question Me about anything Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”*

Here is another emphasis from Jesus like John 15:7-8. Much of the same can be said of these verses. But few of us can say with sincerity that we have not had questions that we struggle with—and that is some of the “cross-bearing” we endure in this life. I have not found it comforting to find in these verses that my asking is apparently minimal, and that more might be asked so that my joy might be made full. I think God continues to challenge us, **so that we will not be comfortable** and complacent in our walk with Him, but totally dependent on Him and His response to us. In short, our humanity sees it as a “cross to bear” to be submissive.

**Matthew 7:7-12** *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.* *For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or what person is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf of bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? So, if you, despite being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.*

Here is one of the greatest lessons I think I have learned in my prayer-life and my “cross-bearing” as I have tried to love my friends...and some who I don't know very well. This portion of Scripture (vv. 7-8) seems to intensely state that if we continue to strengthen our asking to seeking, and then even go beyond that to knocking, we have a pattern of instruction of how we should pray and keep on praying. I had memorized this portion of Scripture sixty years ago, but it was just recently that while I was saying the Scripture and coming to verse 11, I was startled by the thought that Jesus does not say how much more will he give you what you have asked, but instead He says what is good. Could it be that He knows some of the things that we ask for are not that good for our friend to receive...that it might even be a stone or a snake in their life? I choose to keep on praying and asking, confident that God will give good things in response. And I keep on rejoicing that I know my Father gives good gifts!!!

**Page Seven**

I especially try to apply verse 12 to my prayer-life in bearing a cross in love for my friends. **I want to pray for them the way that I would wish for someone to pray for me if I were in their situation.** If I were in significant need, would I want them to just “breathe a prayer” and then forget my need, or to diligently record the need and often pray for it. I use the notes on my “I-phone” to diligently record requests that come to me so that I will not forget them in my prayer time…long after I have received the request and prayed in the moment.

**Philippians 2:5-10** *“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 bondservant 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. For this reason, also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name, which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

**I think I see the following progression that is helpful in “cross-bearing”:**

1. having the attitude of humility—it is not about me, but God’s kingdom.
2. emptying myself of any desire to be known for my “cross-bearing.”
3. As a bond servant of Jesus, asking myself: how can I best help my friend?
4. Am I willing to take the full measure of obedience to bear this cross?
5. Do I fully believe that the result God gives is more important than my will?

**See also: I John 5:14-15, James 5:13-18, Daniel 9:3-11, Matthew 18:19-20, etc.**