**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.**

We continue our theme of developing our walk with Christ by remembering where we have been and where we want to go! **Prevenient Grace** was around us before we committed to following Jesus. **Grace for Salvation (101)** was a mixture of God’s Spirit drawing us (John 6:44) and our decision to follow and make Him our Savior. **Grace for Sanctification (102)** came as His Spirit showed us not just the penalty of sin that we have been delivered from, but the power of sin that still was trying to draw us from inside back into our own ways. The work was completed as we chose to deny ourselves and let Him have full control (I Thessalonians 5:23). **Grace for Service (103)** was embraced when we realized we had a cross to take up as we followed Jesus (Luke 14:27). It is this investment of our lives sacrificially that brings many results to the kingdom that we did not envision. And now in this unit (104) we find **Sustaining Grace** that helps us to continue to follow.

**104.2 “Making changes to Follow!”**

**Matthew 18:15-19** *“Now if your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that on the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, he is to be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector… 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…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.”*

This verse alone should put to rest the teaching that those who believe in Jesus do not sin. The words of the Master Himself allows for the possibility that a brother could sin and gives the remedy for what should occur if one of us sees another who is failing in His walk to follow Christ. What is interesting is that Jesus talks only of the sin of having “faults.” The debate in Christianity has been over whether that includes transgressions, rather than “just” falling short of the glory of God. I think that since this person’s refusal to change course even after being confronted three times, the last one in front of the whole church, this is surely something more than a minor infraction. What is of greater concern to me is how often I have seen the church ignore this teaching. One will go to the pastor, rather than confronting the issue ourselves. One will tell others in private and damage the reputation of the accused without them knowing it has happened. Such actions not only show a lack of love toward our brother, **but also shows a disobedience toward Jesus.**

**II Timothy 2:1-7** *“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust these to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.* *Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him. And if someone likewise competes as an athlete, he is not crowned as victor unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”*

Another course correction that I believe Christians often need to make is one of not grasping how we need to be training others to continue the work of the kingdom in the future. Paul was painfully aware at this time that he would probably not always be the missionary church planter he had been, for he was in the Roman prison, awaiting trial with his future in doubt. Too often I have seen church leaders and mature Christians wait until the last minute to begin this vital work of passing on the leadership to other faithful people who can help carry on the mission. I believe part of the problem in this area is that we don’t really let people know the hardship and sacrifice that is necessary to carry on the work of the kingdom. Like parents who overprotect their children and later see them flounder trying to mature into adulthood, the church often does not adequately challenge people **to responsibility** that comes with receiving the grace of the Lord. He has not saved us to **“sit”** and enjoy the gospel, but to **“serve”** and “make Disciples and Disciple-Makers”

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In some of the churches that I have led as Pastor I have had competent and mature Board members, but they did not have the vision of passing their place on to some of the younger leaders who need the experience of development as leaders to lead in the days ahead. Sadly, I have seen some of these younger leaders choose to go and be a part of other churches where their potential could be developed. The day came when these older, mature leaders eventually came to resigning because of health concerns, or choosing to move away to be with their children. The churches were left with an empty space of leadership and talent that put the future of those churches in jeopardy. At least one of these did not survive and has closed.

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**I John 5:13-15** *“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.”*

Another change most Christians must make as they mature to become followers of Jesus is that His will is not always our will. We do not always know what the will of God is for each circumstance, and what we may think would be good may not be **what God who knows the future** understands. He is omniscient in his being of what is good not only for the need, but also for the kingdom of God at large.

**Proverbs 27:17** *“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”*

Have you ever consider how it is that iron sharpens iron—it is usually with a lot of friction!!! Could it be that some of the friction that happens in the body of Christ is meant to sharpen our life in following the Master and to make us a “sharper axe” so that we can “cut more wood” in the task of evangelism and discipleship.

**Romans 1:16-17** *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* *For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written: “But the righteous one will live by faith.”*

One of the most special verses in Scripture about the gospel of Jesus is followed by one of the most neglected verses in Scripture—that this righteousness is revealed from another’s faith to ours, and our faith to another’s. One of the most basic tasks of discipleship is to be willing to learn from another’s experiences, and also being willing to share our experiences on a deep level with another fellow traveler.

**Colossians 1:3** *“We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you…”*

One of the changes that we always need to make is the change to our nature, **so we keep on when we do not see results**. “Praying always” is a challenge not only when we have requests that don’t seem to be being answered by God, but also the reality that we need to be praying for one another when we are not aware of any particular need or crisis. “Always praying” is a challenge to our human nature.

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**Eddie**

In my first church, the wife of one of our leaders asked us to pray for her brother, Eddie. We all joined in with his name on our prayer list. One night I realized that he had come to a district church service at a nearby church. I did not think much about it until at the end of the service I was scheduled to sing a song about the second coming and the rapture, “The king is Coming.” Toward the end of that song, several started to come and pray at the altar, and Eddie was one of them! I prayed with him there, and

he had a wonderful conversion. He spoke Spanish, and I spoke English…and we did not understand each other except through the Spirit. Eventually his sister translated his testimony of how he had definitely made a decision to follow Jesus.

It was only two weeks later that his sister told us that he and his family needed to move up to Northern California, over 300 miles away. We wished him well and told him we would continue to pray for his new life in Christ. I put his name in my prayer book along with many others that I had helped in their walk with Jesus. That was in 1973, and in 2020, 47 years later I had still been praying for him and was invited to a family celebration of that wife who had requested prayer. I did not think that Eddie would be there—but there he was and when he saw me, he came over right away. His English was much better now, and he told me the story of how he had continued to walk with Jesus, had been led into the ministry and was now pastoring a church of over 300 people in Salinas. What a joy to remember that his name was on that list in my book, and that I had continued to pray.

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**Colossians 1:9-12** *“For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously   
giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.*

Not ceasing to pray is an amplification of the presentation of the last verse we considered. Jesus told the story of the widow and the unjust judge in Luke 18:1-8 to illustrate how we should keep on praying when there seems to be no answer.

**Ephesians 6:18-19** *“With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel….”*

This verse amplifies the previous verses that we should pray “at all times”, and not just go through the motions or “punch the timeclock,” but with perseverance and with petition for everyone who is a follower pray in the power of the Spirit. What an expansive view of the meaning of being a follower of Christ—to carry this burden in prayer for others, many of whom we may not know very well or who are in fact are facing the challenges and needs of which we are told.

**I Timothy 2:1** *“First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men….”*

Here is another verse confirming and perhaps even amplifying the previous verse. Our human nature would not cause us to naturally be this attentive or to invest this much of ourselves in the needs of “all men (persons)” on a constant basis. Have you considered these four areas of praying, 1) Entreaties, 2) prayers, 3) petitions, 4) thanksgivings, as an outline for your prayer concerns. Rather than just listing names, take those names and be led by the spirit which one of these four, and it may be that all four could be needed for those around you. All men should include those that want us to pray for them, and those that perhaps would be upset if they knew we were praying for them.

**I Thessalonians 1:2** *“We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers…”*

Always for all of you doesn’t leave much room for exception to not consider ones who may not be favorable in our sight or easy for us to extend the love of Christ toward. The more our love and prayer for everyone regardless of our natural love for them or lack thereof, moves us toward resembling the Master we follow. We may find an opportune time to tell someone that we are praying, or the Spirit may show us that the one who sees in secret will reward openly (Matthew 6:6).

**Colossians 4:12** *“Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondslave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.”*

Here is a witness of one who followed Paul on his journeys and endured hardship with him, ministering to his human needs and yet still in this time of testing and struggle with human issues, carried a constant prayer life for those that he had left behind in his hometown. How true is it that the bond of fellowship and prayer is not broken by the miles of distance between us in our living. One of the great joys of Christian fellowship is that we can “just take up where we left off” in our life with others…and prayer for one another is a big part of that reality. Notice that his prayer is not one of telling others what they should be doing, but hoping and praying that the will of God would be done in these lives that he loved.

**Romans 15:30-32** *“Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,**that I may be rescued from those who are disobedient in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may prove acceptable to the saints; so that I may come to you in joy by the will of God and relax in your company.”*

Paul shares the human side of the faith that is in Christ…that we can request and even urge others to pray for difficult things we are experiencing. Paul is aware of the likely future for him and his ministry, although he always had the memory of being delivered from the Philippi jail. Paul knew the power of prayers that he had prayed for others and was confident that their prayers for him could bring forth a favorable result to the situation he faced. His request was not so much for personal comfort, but for the hope of continued ministry—to see them and enjoy fellowship.

**Galatians 6:6-10** *“The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.**Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a person sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. 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.”*

This final passage for the lesson today is packed with ideas of how God may want to change us as He guides and matures us in His kingdom. Carrying for those who minister to us; realizing the principle of sowing and reaping—especially to the flesh or the Spirit; not becoming discouraged or weary; and understanding the great importance of each opportunity: especially to those in the Kingdom of God.

These Scriptures do not start to exhaust all the ways God might want us to change as we follow Him. **Little did we know** when we first began what He had in store for us, not just in the wonderful things of His kingdom that we are able to enjoy, but also in the personal development of our lives as we become useful to His kingdom. How sad it is that too many Christians come to a stopping point in their walk with God and live in the past, rather than allowing God to continue to help them change and for them to develop and grow for a preferred future.

May God help us to listen to His voice and understand that the pain of growth is only superseded by the pain of stagnation. Let’s continue to listen to His call to allow Him to change us.

*“Little by little He’s changing me,*

*In every way He is changing me,*

*Line upon line He is changing me,*

*Jesus is changing me!!!”*

**God guided and changed my prayer life: \*\*Dad’s walking while praying,**

**\*\*College…Conversational prayer; \*\*K.C.… “cup of coffee with the Lord”**

**\*\*Camarillo…Episcopalian Retreat (listening) \*\*9/11/01 Whittier, waiting…**

**\*\*Retirement: Notes, trusting, seeking silently….privacy…**