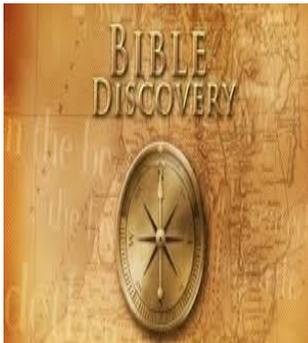


15 Feb 15

Matthew 16:24-28

Living Intentionally through Hope in Jesus



I want you to think for a second and ask yourself, “What do you believe it means to live an intentional life?” Living with Determination; Living with Purpose; Living with Boldness; Living with Steadfastness - each has been used to define living “intentionally”.

Saturday we celebrated Valentine’s Day. February 14th is set aside to spread love and exchange affectionate gifts with one another. Valentine’s Day gives us an example of living intentionally. We bring determination, purpose, sometimes boldness and I hope steadfastness into our relationships as we set our hearts on showing we care. We spend time personally with those we love; we give cards, maybe even homemade, which express how we feel; we show we care with chocolates and flowers. Whether you express yourself with words, a rose or chocolates, the main thing is you’ve demonstrated intentional expressions of your love for others on this day.

I think being intentional - living through determination and purpose while displaying boldness and steadfastness - is essential to living a life in Christ. Jesus commands His disciples to live a life in Him. But what does this mean? For me – and for you - our challenge becomes understanding that living intentionally for Christ is up to us not God. Yes, Jesus is always there. But it is up to us to choose to live intentionally in Him.

Jesus set the pattern when He said, “*I and the Father are one*”. We too must live as one with Christ. I think it’s fitting at Valentine’s we remember as writer Tim Gustafson writes, “*Our heavenly Father yearns for our affection, though He never forces it. We can raise a defiant fist of independence against Him. Or we can look to the One who died to save us from ourselves and from our many sins. He leaves the choice to us.*”

Living intentionally for Christ is up to us not God!

If we’re not intentional in our relationship with Jesus, how can we love Him as we say we do and how can we know Jesus loves us? How can we be in step with His perfect, divine will for us? I ask you, if we don’t regularly communicate with God, how do we know what He’s even saying to us? So first, intentional living requires a life of prayer whether kneeling at an altar, pausing in the morning, or just talking to Him while driving down the road, working at your desk, or shoveling snow.

Of course, it’s always easier to simply react to life rather than to live it intentionally. We always say we want to respond well to all life throws at us, following as God gives us help to choose the direction of our lives - to live intentionally for Him. The good news is God’s given us freedom to always make significant choices in spite of our circumstances – making choices which bring Him glory! Remember, our Lord lived as a model for choosing to live intentionally and bringing His Father glory. However, living intentionally for God doesn’t mean cloistering yourself in a monastery choosing to leave mainstream society to live your life in constant prayer and contemplation. Living intentionally for God occurs amid life choices – finding what you enjoy doing and doing it for the glory of God to the best of your ability.

God has given us freedom to always make significant choices in spite of our circumstances.

So because we know following Jesus *must be* a choice - an intentional act– we understand why Jesus said, “*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*” [Matthew 16:24] meaning following Jesus must be an intentional, thought-out decision leading to a new way of life. To

a life centered in Christ and following in his footsteps. Intentional choices made today become the seeds of hope that blossom into wonderful fruit for tomorrow. Don’t expect Christian life to be experienced without any pain or suffering, but allow God to work in us and lead us, in spite of what we endure, so that we may

discover the depth of God's blessings. So then, in addition to a life of prayer, intentional living means we must be actively involved in a relationship with God, never choosing to be passive in our faith, embracing the opportunity to receive what God offers at that particular moment in time for our life, trusting Him and being enriched by His blessing.

Making our faith intentional means a real investment for followers today, but we're not alone. Jesus taught this lesson first to Peter, James, John and the other disciples, and the message has been heard throughout all ages since. Jesus isn't speaking here about becoming a follower; He's inviting disciples into a deeper, more serious form of discipleship. It's a call to respond with commitment and dedication. If you're someone who's not invested in the Lord's work or has been minimally committed, not really choosing to live as a disciple of Christ, then perhaps this message is urging you to get invested today.

Making our faith intentional is a call to respond with commitment and dedication.

Again though, Jesus is the first to warn us such investment comes with a price. We learn more about the cost of fully committed discipleship as we're confronted with challenges and problems every day. Jesus though understands such commitment, walking with us even as He walked with disciples here on earth. Whether it was his resolute walk through his years of ministry to teach the disciples, preparing them for the passion He demonstrated on the cross – dying for our sins as the Lamb of God - or His wonderful encouragement on the shore as the risen Lord, we've the assurance Jesus has walked this way before. For instance, as Jesus preached in Galilee, "*news about Him spread throughout all Syria.*" Not only did travelers take the news north into Syria, but they also took it by other roads into "*Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan*" [Matthew 4:24-25] Jesus was intentional knowing the effect it would bring. Today Jesus walks with us through His Spirit which He gives to live within His disciples. We are not alone!

It seems the more involved we get for Christ, the more we truly see its cost for the way we live. More than just a decision which must be made, we discover self-denial as an attribute of Christian life enabling us to stand in contrast to our self-centered culture. We say no to ourselves so we can say yes to God. I've used the illustration before that it's like a traveller arriving late to the airport for his flight. He's loaded down with luggage and is hurrying as he hears again and again his flight is loading. As he runs for the flight which is most important to him, he continues to discard excess baggage – leaving it without much thought so his load is lightened and he can meet his flight. So to, when we fix our hearts on Jesus, living intentionally to serve him, our choices to abandon behaviours, to change our ways, becomes easier.

Making the most of our life in Christ involves an intentional choice which, from a human point of view, means we make sacrifices. Each day we've the opportunity to choose whether or not we follow Christ. In this decision fellowship with like-minded believers helps us live intentionally, not only with prayer, worship, ministry, even in hospitality but through intentional choices on how we spend our time realizing when we're more intentional about our time with God, we pursue spiritual development giving us strength and perseverance in our walk with Christ. It means by living intentionally we become more aware of God strengthening our hope giving us encouragement.

When we're more intentional about our time with God, we pursue spiritual development.

Jesus always knew His Father's will and chose to live according to God's direction for His life. David Livingstone, the Scottish medical missionary/explorer in Africa, said, "*I will place no value on anything I have or possess unless it is in relationship to the kingdom of God.*" Dr. Livingstone also professed, "*I am willing to go anywhere, provided it be forward.*" We must do the same! For some of us, it will require a major shift in our thinking requiring us to align with Christ so that His kingdom really becomes the goal for our life. To help you in your pursuit of living intentionally for God this week, I've two questions for you to consider...

- 1. What represents the best use of your time each day so it brings glory to God in your life?** Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever. Glorifying God is realized through four things: *appreciation; adoration; affection; and subjection.* The Lord has sent us into the world, as a merchant sends his agent

beyond the seas to trade for him. God has given each of us talents; and when we do not hide it in a napkin, but improve it for God, we make the best use of our time for God. But it also means we glorify God by walking cheerfully, standing up for his truths, praising him continually, and being zealous for His name. We glorify God by labouring to intentionally seek to convert others, so they too may be instruments of glorifying God.

2. *In what way will you choose to serve the Lord this week?* May your prayer this week be, “Dear God, I know You’re alive and true! I intentionally choose this day to follow You and You only. Help me get rid of distractions that have crept in and to embrace You in all things. I am yours!”

Living intentionally means you’ll look for ways in which you can be of service to the Lord as you interact with others in your daily activities. It’ll require sacrifice but the rewards are out of this world!

If you would like to learn more about living intentionally which is only found in the Lord Jesus Christ, give us a call at **Mt Brydges Baptist Church** 1-519-317-8659 or contact us via our website email address office.mbbc@xplornet.com. We would love to hear from you.

May God richly bless you!

Pastor Dave