

This morning, we are continuing in our journey through the Book of Ephesians.

We are continuing to look at **Ephesians 4:7-16** *But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men."⁹ (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) ¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

We have been talking about the Function of the Church (God's intent) versus the Form of the Church (What man has created and established in the "name" of the Church). I often refer to the latter as the "Western industrialized 'Cottage Industry' call Church".

Last week we talked about the Clergy and Laity myth in context of Function versus Form.

I closed out last week's notes with this statement:

"We'll talk about the Biblical Principles behind this next week and some of the Spirit-led Procedures that we sense the Father is leading us to put into practice in order to function in a healthier manner as a local expression of His Church."

My plan was to lay out some of the ways we feel the Father has led us, here at KMC, to put into practice the "priesthood of the believers" and share some of the Spirit-led procedures of biblical decentralization of ministry.

As I was praying this week about this message, I had a divine "check" about jumping right into some of those things right now. I have been reading Ephesians 4:7-16 numerous times each day and meditating on the context and content. Wednesday morning, as I was meditating on these verses again, I sensed it helpful to talk about what a healthy Body/Church would look like before I talked about what a healthy leadership structure would look like. At the end of the day, if we have a healthy, Spirit-led procedure for leadership and the Body/Church isn't healthy, we are still not able to fulfill the Father's intent and function for the Church.

As a result of this time of contemplation, I believe it would be more beneficial for us to explore what a healthy Body/Church is described as in the Bible and go from there. Of course, a healthy Body/Church is really an accumulation of healthy parts. We see this in **Ephesians 4:16** *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

So, let's spend some time looking what a "healthy" Jesus Follower looks like. Is there a biblical framework that describes what a Jesus Follower would look like if they were walking in the fruitfulness that the Father intends for them?

Of course, for those of us who are somewhat process oriented, the temptation would be to reduce this to a checklist and work hard to make sure our outward image reflects a "mature" and "fruitful" Christian.

I believe the Father wants us to go deeper than a well-groomed façade.

One of the easiest ways to envision what this looks like is to ask the question, "What does a Jesus Follower look like?" Not an outward description of their appearance or public behavior but a snapshot of their character, motives, attitudes, core beliefs, and their Christ-like/Spirit-led behavior.

In a nutshell:

"Why do I do the things that I do and who do I do them for?"

The honest answer to that question reveals the core values/beliefs that motivate you. It exposes your actual worldview. If we are disciples/followers of Jesus, obedience to His word/principles/truth motivates us as we live to serve Him.

Let's start with a 30k foot view of what the Bible describes as a Jesus Follower/Disciple that isn't based on a list of specific behaviors, performances, and "dos and don'ts".

This topic is so multi-faceted and layered that it is hard to reduce it to a "bite-sized chunk" to talk about, so I decided to think of it as a puzzle. Many individual pieces, combined and interlinked, create a beautiful picture.

When I start building a puzzle, I first look for the four corner pieces. After all, there are only four of them and they are easy to spot 😊

The challenge with describing a healthy journey of following Jesus, it's hard to choose four things as corner pieces – I can rotate topics to fill these pieces forever, but here are the four we are going to start with:

1. Puts Christ first before relationships, self, possessions, and convenience

Luke 14:26,27;33 *"If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple...So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions."*

In order to be a healthy Jesus Follower, we can't have a lifestyle of Jesus...AND

Yes, we still have to navigate real life with rent, mortgages, bills, families, jobs, etc. – the difference in the life of a growing and maturing Jesus Follower is that these things are

intentionally woven into the tapestry of who we are in Him and not separate entities (often times competing with Him).

Hale Pule Question:

Think about Jesus' statement here in Luke 14. Ask Him to show you any areas of your life that you need to rearrange your priorities in order to grow more mature and healthier in your relationship with Him. Share with some trusted Jesus Followers so they can pray for you and help hold you accountable.

2. Abides in and obeys the Word

John 8:31 *So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;"*

Maturing Jesus Followers intentionally align themselves to the principles of His word. We will explore some of this in a practical manner in the next few weeks. Many Christians say they believe the Bible is God's word, but the reality is many modern-day Christians not only don't know what the Bible teaches but aren't intentionally and purposefully aligning their lives to the Word.

Hale Pule Question:

How can you align your life more intentionally to His word? Ask the Father if there are any areas of your life that are currently out of alignment to His word. How can you take steps to adjust your life to His teachings?

3. Loves one another

John 13:34,35 *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Love is a huge theme in the God story of Mankind. In fact, Jesus wrapped up all the law and commandments to Love: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."* **Luke 10:27**

Hale Pule Question:

How can you practically let Love for God and Love for others be more interwoven in your life?

4. Bears fruit (Christ-like character and ministry)

John 15:8 *My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.*

Hale Pule Question:

What fruit of the Spirit do you see operating in your life right now? Pray about how the Father wants to mature and multiply His fruit in your life.

This prayer from Paul summarizes his thoughts concerning what a Jesus Follower/disciple should “look like”:

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, ¹⁰ 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; ¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.*

Since we see that being a “healthy” part of the Body/Church is more than acquiring biblical information, we “measure” the growth and maturity of a Jesus Follower by the fruit produced in their lives as they desire to follow Jesus and obey His teachings. It is a journey of applying the truth of God’s word to our life so that we are changed from the inside out in such a way that it transforms our worldview and alters our behavior.

We’ll spend the next few weeks exploring what it looks like to be a maturing and growing Jesus Follower.