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Believing Is Seeing: Love's Vision

Day 1—Letting Our Lights Shine

Read Matthew 5:16, 44; Mark 12:28-33; John 13:34-35; 17:20-23; and 1 John 4:9-11,19-21. What is to be the hallmark of one who follows Jesus? Is the call to love the Lord, love fellow believers, and love others outside the faith (even our enemies) easy? Does this mean we must all think alike or that we wink at sin? Pause and consider how our witness to the world is tarnished when we neglect to demonstrate love, compassion, and forgiveness. Talk to Jesus about what this means in your life and relationships. Tell him you want his love to shine in you.

Day 2—Read in Context and Note the Bookends

Our Matthew 18:15-20 text deals with conflict detrimental to the faith community. However, before we read or study the text, let's note its context. Read the texts/parables (*Matthew 18:12-14, 21-35*) that form the bookends to the verses addressing how to handle problems with a fellow believer. What do you learn about how God views people/sinners in these bookend texts? How has God shown love for you (*Romans 5:8*)? Now prayerfully read Matthew 18:15-17. What is the goal of the confrontation(s)? When you must confront someone, do you do so with a heart of love and the goal of restoration and reconciliation? Ask the Spirit to make you teachable.

Day 3—Sin Is Real and So Is Grace

Jesus isn't naive, nor is Matthew, who records the discussion about issues in the church. There will be sin and conflict, even in the faith community. Read Matthew 7:1-5; 18:15-17. How do we reconcile these texts? Is there a difference between judging a person and discerning a sin that creates a real problem in die church or between believers? Why is it important for the health of the church that we are circumspect in keeping an issue private and in, initially, going alone to approach another about his/her sin? Consider also that this text is not about addressing trivial issues, yet there are times when we must live Ephesians 4:15-16. Pray you will live truth, love, and grace.

Day 4—Hope for Tax Collectors, Gentiles, and Sinners (Like Us)!

Life in the church must be rooted in humility and devoid of self-righteousness (*Luke 18:9-14; Philippians 2:3-5*). Reflect on Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, as you read Matthew 18:15-22. How might the boundaries set in Matthew 18:17 become a bridge to reconciliation and restoration? How does Jesus view tax collectors, Gentiles, and sinners (*Matthew 8:5-13; 9:9-12; 21:31-32*)? In Scripture, we see that sincere faith, genuine repentance, and a heart turned toward God are vital. Pray you will have a heart turned toward God and others.

Day 5—Two or Three

What are the promises and the conditions in Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 18:18-20? Do you delight in Jesus' promise to be with us as we gather in his name? Is the phrase "in his name" important in understanding verses 18 and 19? In Bible times, names were more than markers of one's identity; names were reflections of one's character, one's very essence. What insights do you glean about using/praying in Jesus' name as you read John 14:13-14; 15:16-17, Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 7:24-26; 1 John 5:13-15; and Revelation 19:11-16? Tell Jesus you treasure being able to pray in his holy, precious, powerful name. Ask for greater understanding.

Day 6—Connected to the Vine

The Epistle lesson for the week is Romans 13:8-14; as you read it, consider how it complements the truths taught in Matthew 18:15-20. Psalm 133 and John 17 also speak about the importance of healthy, loving

relationships among those who trust in the Lord. Love is to be the standard and hallmark of Christians; we are to love our fellow believers, and we are to allow the love of Jesus in us to spill over and bless the world in his name. But we are so very human; how is this life of love possible? Paul says we must clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (*Romans 13:14*), and Jesus tells us we must abide in him. Pray as you read and meditate on John 15:4-6.

Day 7—“If We Are the Body”

Jesus is honest with us; there will be conflict in the church (*Matthew 18*), yet he prays for unity among his followers (*John 17*), and he challenges us to live lives of love and grace through his presence in us and for God's glory (*Matthew 5:16; John 15:4-6,8-13*). Paul shares similar thoughts in Colossians 3:12-17. Pondering Mark Hall's lyrics, pray about how you will live this life of love: "...if we are the body, why aren't His arms reaching, why aren't His hands healing, why aren't his words teaching? And if we are the body, why aren't His feet going, why is His love not showing them there is a way? There is a way.. Jesus is the way!" (SWECS Music).