

He Forgives. We Follow.

When was the last time you took a few minutes to consider the divine enterprise of God in your life?

In Luke 8:1-3, the Gospel's writer, presents the followers of Jesus. The disciples are introduced as "the Twelve", three women identified by name, and "many others." These complete Jesus' band of devotees. At first glance this is simply a recognition of those that are following and supporting Jesus. It is but a list - nothing more, nothing less. Yet, this introduction comes on the heels of four dramatically scandalous stories compiled in chapter 7. The One who claims to be the Light of the world and has come to "seek and save the lost" is shining into the dark and reaching out to the unworthy, the grieving, the questioning, and the desperate. It is clear that the first three verses of chapter 8 are an extension of the arresting snapshots that Luke describes in the previous chapter. The point is quite clear - those who come to Jesus, surrender everything, and commit to following Him until the end. They are those who grasp the despair of their past plight and are overwhelmed by its glorious redemption! As Jesus so pointedly said in connection to the sinful woman, "... her many sins have been forgiven; that's why she loved much. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little" (Lk 7:47).

Just like us, the three women Luke mentions by name - Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna - have a past. Being victims of demonic possession, physical ailments, mental affliction, or spiritual sickness undoubtedly was heartbreaking, embarrassing, and burdensome. Yet, in the midst of sin, failure, pain, and guilt, Jesus met them without pretense, but with the offer of grace and forgiveness. Similarly, our **past** is a powerful reminder of how much Jesus loves us! Our **present** is a constant indication of Jesus' commitment to use us in meaningful and consequential ways. And our **future** is a glorious hope of the certainty of Jesus' promises. Not unlike "the Twelve", the three women, and the "many others", we are called to labor for the Savior's cause. The Giver of the great commission invites us to be participants in His redemptive plan and grants us authority to carry it out successfully. Not unlike those who faithfully followed and served Jesus before us, we have a hope that is secure in His unchanging promises. He will hold us safe and sound (Jn 6:37). He will give us rest in His grace (Matt 11:28). He will help and be near us through the Holy Spirit's presence (Jn 14:16). He will use us to reach others (Matt 4:19). Our future is fruitful!

As Paul concludes his final epistle prior to his martyrdom, he has tender and inspiring words of encouragement for his spiritual son, Timothy: "... I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well" (2 Tim 1:4-5). Paul points to the power of godly models, in this case, Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice. Their sincere faith, completely surrendered to Christ, pioneered a path for Timothy to follow and set an example for him to emulate. The ministry of Jesus and the foundation of the early church was bolstered by godly women and men. Believers that followed Jesus, because He saw them, healed them, and gave them purpose and hope. They loved Jesus, supported His ministry, and spread the gospel. Would you be the next beautiful link in the Christian legacy that magnifies Jesus and brings Him glory? Begin by looking for godly mentors. Then thank those who have modeled Christlikeness for you. And, finally, become an example of Jesus worth following. In short, become a participant in making disciples.

Ephesians 2:1-7 (ESV) - *"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**"*