



An Example to Follow

Our focus this week is Philippians 3:17 and it says,

“Join with others in following my example brothers and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.”

What a blessing it is to have someone to follow. God calls us to faith, but isn't He good to give us people out in front of us who have been walking in faith long before we started, or people who have just soared out in front rather quickly and can be a good example for us. God gives us examples to look to so we can see faith displayed in everyday actions and moments. These examples spur us on. Many times we can look to their stories and testimonies and it encourages us in our own faith walk. We watch them and see the reality of God working in their lives and we know that if God can do work in them, He can certainly do it for us and through us and in us as well!

Paul is very clear in verse 17 that we are to follow his example. He has obviously learned a great deal about walking in faith and he wants to share what he has learned with anyone who is willing to watch. He also isn't so puffed up that he doesn't realize there are others out there also who have been following the pattern of faith and who can set a good example for believers too. His encouragement to us: purposefully look at someone who is deeper and stronger in their faith and learn lessons from them that you can practice in your own life.

You can't get much clearer than that – find an example of faith to follow. I love the picture that is painted about believers and their faith in Revelation 12:11. It says,

“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...”

What a great picture. It is talking of believers persevering in faith until the end and overcoming Satan through two things:

1. The blood of the Lamb – in other words through the sacrifice and power of Christ shedding His blood, the believers found victory
2. The word of their testimony – in other words through sharing their own stories of how God had been real in their lives and by seeing God being real in other lives too, the believers found victory

This directive in our verse this week is very important for us. We must not miss it! In the previous passages we have been memorizing, Paul has laid out some very challenging life patterns for us in regards to our faith:

- Counting all things as loss
- Becoming like Christ in His death
- Knowing Christ
- Forgetting the past and pressing on

Paul knows a life of faith is challenging and we need tools in our hands and hearts and minds to accomplish the goal of staying faithful to the end so that we too can overcome. So he challenges believers to find an example of faith and to follow it.

As we take this to heart, there are two things we must not miss:

1. We need to find an example to follow
2. We need to realize we are probably that example for someone else to follow

First of all, find an example – in this information age it can be very easy to do this because we have information at our fingertips. But I also encourage you to ask God to put people in your life who spur

you on by the sincerity and practice of their faith. There are countless examples. I personally have been so encouraged in my faith by watching many others who have lived out their faith in vastly different ways. God has had and continues to have huge amounts of people in His kingdom, doing great things, living out their faith in real ways. Read about them, study them, spend time with them and take lesson from how they practice and live out Truth in their lives. What a value that can be for us.

Secondly – realize we are probably that example for someone else to follow. God is constantly growing His kingdom. New believers are being born everyday. I recently heard a message about being a nurturer. We all should be aware that people are watching how our faith comes to life in our everyday moments. Someone else is looking to follow you, be ready to be a nurturer for someone else, setting that solid, deep example of a faith filled believer in Christ. The thing you do today, may be the thing that helps someone else overcome tomorrow!

This morning God gave me an activity lesson for our verse this week. He allowed me to get my heart, my mind and my body in on it... I pray I got the message loud and clear! Let me explain. You see this morning I started an exercising program. Praise the Lord, after much prayer, I finally submitted to His leading and got this body out of the bed this morning an hour early for exercise. (Pray for me tomorrow though, if God did it once, I know He can do it again ☺) Sadly to say, I have allowed my body to become very weak because I haven't been exercising like I should have been. I did get up this morning but I can't tell you how difficult it was. Some of the times I just laughed as I looked at the guy on the DVD and said, "Are you crazy, you want me to do what?" He didn't talk back but I knew he meant business so I tried and I was astounded at all that I couldn't do. My body was too weak. I looked at the lean, muscular, strong men and women on the TV and had two choices. I could:

1. Quit, it was too hard and I would never make it
2. Follow their example, knowing they too had to start somewhere

I wish I could say I never thought about choice number one, but I did think about it! I seriously contemplated it as I willed my body to do things it was screaming not to do... as I strained through it, the Holy Spirit whispered verse 17 in my head,

"Join with others in following my example brothers and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."

Obviously these exercisers were way out in front of me in regards to taking good care of their bodies. But you know what, it gave me a good clear picture of how some people feel when they come to Christ and look at some of us who have been following Him for years. They see the spiritual muscles and the life of faith and they too have a choice. We too look at other strong believers and we have a choice, we can press forward, following their example or we can say, "It is too hard."

I tell you what, I am going to get up and exercise tomorrow, I am, I really am. See now that I told you I was, I will have to do it! I am going to follow the example of people who have done a better job than me in regards to physical health. I have to start somewhere! As believers, we too must take this lesson to heart: follow the example of other believers who are living out their faith. We just might be amazed at the spiritual muscles we will develop...

As I close this week, I want to encourage you to keep reading. Below you will find great examples of faith to follow. Throughout this project many have been contemplating what God is calling them to "count as loss" for the sake of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7-8). Below you will find a listing of many of these things. These are written in the participants own words and thoughts. Some are longer, some are shorter, but they all represent people who are having real relationships with Christ; counting these things as loss for the sake of knowing Him more. What great examples to follow!

Following with you...

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Counting as Loss... so we may know Christ more:

1. The world's "view" and "things" and Satan's attempts to get me off track...(maybe they are one in the same).
2. Having my own idea of - my identity, security, being someone who matters or is important, doing "good" things... and instead having all these things in Christ! Also, being in nursing school, living at the beach, knowing the right people, getting good grades, and being a good person... they all are nothing without Christ!
3. Wrong expectations
4. As I memorized this verse I was going through dealing with this huge scar on my forehead and Skin Cancer and I felt like God was telling me that what I look like is not important but what is inside that counts - and He is changing that day by day!
5. My control, my desires, my will.
6. The bitterness inside my heart, the hurts and the desire to be affirmed by people
7. High(er) paying job
Relationships
Watching TV
8. As a 54 year old divorcee, most of my children are raised and out on their own, just 1 left at home, I felt this urge to meet someone to share my life with. I have only just learned in the past 2 years how to be "alone" and like myself, finding interests that I enjoy doing, and throwing myself into my church and yet still in my heart I kept feeling this void, that I thought only a mate would fill. After 3-4 disastrous dates, and one even with a minister, I finally realized that perhaps I should consider this a loss, and recharge my focus on my spiritual life, and that God probably just doesn't have this in store for me right now. And once I made this determination, I felt almost a sense of relief. I can be truly good by myself, and give more to my Lord, grandchildren, children, jobs, etc. by letting this go.
9. I've always thought of this as things you've done or do well, not "junk," although I guess it is all junk compared to knowing Christ. All of Paul's accolades and his respected Jewish background he counted as loss in comparison to knowing Christ.. So....I count my successes (last years' play, classes I've taught, people I've influenced, my cute Christmas cards and letters) as loss compared to the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. It is all meaningless without relationship with Him and the purpose He gives. What I leave behind is equating my worth with these accomplishments or leaning on them to define who I am.

10. Education level or knowledge (which really says nothing about wisdom anyway). This is the one thing that the world needs me for over others and it helps me in no way to know Christ. In fact, the world is unaware of how much my relationship with God plays more of a factor in how well I meet their needs than my brainpower does.

Church positions...Children's Church Leader, Teacher in a Christian School, Pianist, Soloist, Choir Director, Women's Bible Study teacher, Pastor's wife. This is what my church family needs me for. However, not only does it not get me closer to God, there are times when it comes between me and God because I mistake studying for a Bible study that I'm giving as spending time with God or practicing music as worship. There's a difference between the two that can be subtle sometimes and blatantly obvious other times. Even memorizing Philippians 3:7-21 cannot be a substitute for knowing Christ. It's not going to save me.

Denomination...believe it or not there aren't denominations in heaven! There isn't one denomination that has a hold on God.

Any of my roles as a church member, mother, wife, daughter, sister, employee, teacher, tutor, speaker or friend. Most of these roles help others in some way and are fulfilling. These are good roles. Even God thinks that our roles are important. These roles cannot replace a real relationship with Christ. All of the things I have mentioned are temporary and fragile and none of these things can give me eternal salvation. Knowing Christ is the only way to receive that.

11. Unhealthy relationships

12. The Lord is making clear to me I am to count as loss bitterness, anger and unforgiveness that I have for my mother-in-law (and in-laws). I have been and still am having such a hard time forgiving and letting go, and letting God, and I know it is toxic to my walk with Christ.

13. My pride

14. God is showing me things as loss that I thought were the "right things" in my life---such as my daily JOB that is convenient, easy and allows me to be there for my family. The job is draining me as there is zero challenge and God has MUCH MORE in store for me and my family. ALSO--my kids and I have been active members of a church family for eight years==trouble is we have no relationships from that church family outside of church functions. God is moving us to a church with his people that we can do life with!! It is not easy leaving our church family-but God has MUCH MORE in store for us. We are moving and making changes in faith.

15. Things that make us "of" this world -- earthly distractions and material possessions or wants.

16. Controlling attitude

17. Shopping in excess of what I really Need vs what I want

Events-I once thought were important

Recognition

Perfectionism in my body

Perfectionism in my home :) (whew I was glad to give that up.)

Materialism

Wealth

18. It is hard to admit, but I guess I would have to say that something that I am currently struggling with is body image issues and being comfortable and satisfied with the skin I'm in. That leads me to another struggle which is the time I spend exercising. I feel like I sometimes put it as a higher priority than my time spent with the Lord.

19. Through memorizing God's word, I have a new boldness to speak the things of God in love and not worry what people think. I have come to terms with the fact that by being a believer in Christ Jesus, I am going to be viewed as weird by many in my family and some friends who do not know Jesus. As I consider this very real loss in my life, I have chosen to let go and give it all to God in prayer. I trust Him with my relationships, there is great peace, comfort and hope that one day, those I love will come to know Him. This hope allows me to move forward, and walk the journey God has for me".

20. Through meditating on this scripture, I chose to count returning to work after being a stay at home mom a loss. Soooo, here I am still at home!

21. A desire to have circumstances as "I" would prefer.

22. I count as loss my selfish needs -- time to do things I thrive on and enjoy, like exercise. I feel that making time for exercise is my goal each day and God is a lower priority. I love my Lord and talk with him frequently, but I need to make time for quality time with him over other things in my busy (like most women) life. I need to lose control, surrender and allow Him to move in me through his will. I need to stop focusing on food and how I look on the outside. If his will is that I gain a few pounds and go up a size so be it. My heart is what he is concerned about - right? (and not how fit it is). Ok, so that is more than you asked for. Just sharing this out loud makes me realize how foolish I am and that there is nothing eternal in my selfishness. I am forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead!

23. I had a small list all typed with explanations. Then it hit me, and I deleted everything to write to you the following: Honestly, I would have to say that I would count everything as loss... everything. Truly, we know that God wants us to be able to give up everything for

Him at a moment's notice. Thankfully, He doesn't ask it of us. I praise Him that He doesn't ask it of us. But have you ever really considered what it really means to count everything as loss? If God spoke to you, face to face or directly into your heart, and said He wanted you to leave everything behind, to walk out the door of your house right now, not say good-bye to anyone you love, not pack a stitch, not take food or water, no last hug and kiss for your children, just walk away from everything without a word... could you do it? I believe that is what is meant by counting everything a loss that we may gain Christ. I would not want to do it. It would be nearly impossible to do it. But I love and believe in God and His Son, Our Savior Jesus Christ; therefore, I would do it out of obedience. I praise God that He does not ask such things of us, but we can see historically where He did ask it of others. Where He says, 'come with me, and I'll teach you to be fishers of men.' Those men dropped what they were doing, walked away from all they knew, everyone they loved, and walked with Christ. Therefore, to answer your question, I truly count everything as loss for Christ. From inside of me, that is the most honest answer I can give to your question.

24.Count as a loss:

- time to soak in the tub
- the right to be disappointed with other's actions
- my career achievements
- my health
- my desires
- my dream home
- my personal time
- my educational degrees

25.My independent nature

26.Bad language and unclean TV. I grew up using harsh language, and it has been a struggle everyday to curb my urge for using it again. As for TV, I always liked big action and sultry movies and TV programs (The Shield and Sex and the City, for example). Now I really can't seem to watch them. I sit and ask myself if God is proud to see me watching that kind of production. I feel Him saying to me that there is something better I could wrap my mind around that isn't unclean.

27.Pity parties and being in control

28.Good works and worldly success

29.God has my husband and I in the military (he's the active duty one) and there are some domestic things I have spent years longing for: a garden, some farm animals, a house that we actually own where I can paint a wall or make a structural change, some permanence (possibly being closer to my family - this is our 11th move in 14 years of

marriage :-).as I have grown in my walk God has truly helped me to let go of these things. I still would enjoy them, but they no longer have a hold on me. As I have worked on memorizing these verses, I would count them as loss. Also, there is a special quiet time in my house in the afternoon when my children are down for naps or rest-hour and I would have a treat and watch a video. However, God has seemed to gently tug at my heart to be in His Word more than just my quiet time in the morning. I really wrestled with this, but I have taken a few afternoons a week to get into His Word and feast on it, and have put the videos aside on those days. It has been a REAL joy and I find myself wanting more, yet before I begin my flesh really wants to wallow in me-time....I found I am very attached to my "relax time." I have had to pray and ask for His help and He has helped me to just sit down and open the Bible, just come to Him. So some of the video time I simply count now as loss so I can grow.

30. My cherished, precious, valuable home

31. I'm counting my family as loss. I moved to South Korea about 3 and a half months ago and I miss my family so much. I am very close to them and I have great relationships with my parents and all my siblings. And so being far from them is so difficult. I treasure the time that I get to talk to them. But I know that compared to Christ and my relationship with him it is all loss. Although it is so hard, I never want to put my communication with my dear family higher on the list than communication with my Beloved Savior and Comforter

32. I think my "counting as loss" was socializing with friends who were interested in drinking to get drunk. I can remember being convicted about attending Bunko with my neighborhood friends. It was a situation where I was one of the few not drinking...enjoying myself thoroughly & they saw it...which I thought was good. But, I was surrounded by others that were drinking heavily which ultimately led to them getting drunk. I love them dearly but it's just not the environment that I want to be in. I will also share that God blessed my decision and provided me with a Keno group that is filled with God loving women. It's my favorite day of the entire month. We can come together and have an awesome time without the usage of any alcohol. It's awesome! Isn't that just like him?

33. For a while now, music has been a weakness of mine. I have always prided myself in enjoying all types of music. However, for the last few months God has been leading me to spend more time worshiping Him through Christian music. And, over the course of this project, I have found that my desire to listen to secular music is gone. I feel so blessed and encouraged when I spend time worshiping God through music that focuses on Him.

34. Mentioning about some losses, to gain Christ, for me is a choice to discipline myself and my time to know my priorities and act according to them.

35. Impatience and a lack of trust

being right/winning the argument

popularity /pleasing people/ being respected

accomplishing my list

my definition of success

living to be happy instead of unconditionally joyful

getting my husband to meet my needs

always appearing "together"

making my family look perfect

being in the perfect church

having the perfect theology

not admitting my weaknesses and sins

36. I believe I have been avoiding this question and am glad that you have been persistent in seeking out our answers. I finally took the time to think about it and I have come to the conclusion that I need to count financial worries and my selfish desires as loss. I am a freshman in college, and my parents have always talked about their financial troubles in front of me, I need to get rid of this road block. I'm glad I took on this memorizing challenge. Thank-you for your persistence :)

37. not giving in to selfish sexual desires

38. For me, I believe God wants me to let go of a former boyfriend leaving him solely at the foot of the Cross. I also believe he desires for me to set limits on my time and "my schedule", knowing that I am not meant to do everything.

39. I have been pondering, for the last few weeks, about what I am counting as loss. What I keep coming back to is worry. I don't mean worry to the point where I can't function, but I often find myself thinking about things, and ways to try to fix them. When I should be focused on God, and letting Him have my worries. I have really been working on trusting

and Faith. I would like for my wondering mind to focus more on above, and how I can be more like Him.

40.TIME: I count as loss "my time" because it was never really mine and only He know how much time I really have. Not my time but His. MY DESIRES: I count my desires as loss, because they can never compare to the desires He has for me

41. the excuse "I don't feel like trying"

42.Plan A, keeping up with the Joneses', fitting in, the ability to not care about things that don't directly concern ME, control

43.Since spring of this year, God has been pulling me ever closer to him, peeling away the good things to leave my hands free for the better things. It has been a long process, and still is not complete, and even a longer story, but some of the things he has asked me to give up (my idols) are: leading worship, being on our creative arts team, women's ministry, well, most any church ministry actually. He has told me that all my "good" things, my Christian service, were good, but they were keeping me from knowing Him better, as I invested my time in doing His work for Him. Bluntly put, He said He didn't need me to sing or to make sure the service went well. He wanted me to stop being Martha and sit at His feet like Mary, and to spend the time pouring into my children. So I have done these things He asked, and He is really teaching me. And like Paul, I would give it all up again, and more besides, to know Christ!

44.I count all of the material possessions that I thought I needed to be content, as loss- I am not struggling, I feel as if I am feeling like Paul did when he wrote it. There is NOTHING compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Even if I had a lot of "stuff" now (and I do compared to most of the world), losing it helped me to realize that it really is a loss compared to knowing Christ. Some of us have to lose things in order to appreciate their value, others of us have to lose things in order to realize they are not valuable at all.