

“Resting, Investing And Loving”

Psalm 124

James 5:13-20

Mark 9:38-50

Jesus teaches that anyone who is not against him is for him. What a promise.

What an encouragement for us to live the words and deeds of Jesus.

Re’na Garcia is a 24-year-old wife and mother of two preschoolers and a full-time nanny for two other children. She leads a busy life, but her favorite part of the day is when she goes out to RAOK somebody’s world—as in performing “Random Acts of Kindness.” She and her husband, Aaron, are part of a growing network of Christians who seek to anonymously bless other people in the name of Jesus.

Some of those ideas include: • Leaving a roll of quarters at the laundromat • Paying for the person behind you at a drive-thru • Leaving grocery gift cards in mailboxes • Paying rent for a family in need • Handing out water or sports drinks on a biking trail. Garcia also hands out a RAOK business card that explains her motivation, information about her church, and that there are no strings attached. “People were drawn to Christ not because he stood on a mountain and preached,” she says, “but because he filled their needs.”¹

When I ponder the impact of random acts of kindness, they plant seeds of God’s love, in a non-threatening way, and may open doors for future conversations about loving God and others.

Jesus teaches that anyone who is not against him is for him. Do you see the beauty of this statement? If a person is not against God, they are for God. We each have people like this in our lives. We know these folks. We spend time with these folks. And our words and deeds can move some from apathy about God to a realization that they are really for God as Jesus promises. In this regard, Bobby Schuller in *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World* writes, “Investing in you gives you fresh vision. Sabbath

¹The source of this story is John W. Kennedy, “Winning Them with Kindness,” in *Today’s Christian* (Nov/Dec 2005), 10-11.

Rest. Rest isn't a luxury, it's a necessity. Investing in you helps relationships. Investing in you is good stewardship. Most problems are knowledge problems. Receive the love God has for your whole self."² Rest, invest, and love. You rest, you invest in yourself and others, and you love God, yourself, and others. Therein lies the significance of thinking and self-examination: Learn. Evaluate. Plan. Dream. Get back up after a fall. Press through the pain.³ Make resting, investing, and loving normalized behaviors in your life.

The Psalter, Epistle, and Gospel Readings articulate that if God is not looking out for all who are not against God, the enemies of such people would prevail. Psalm 124:2-3 reads, "... If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us...." James 5:15 reads, "The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven." And Mark 9:41 reads, "For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward." Followers of Jesus would do well to invest in and love others, unconditionally. Follow God's path of being a servant to all.

Mark 9:38-50 drives home the point that empathy for others is a most powerful witness to the good news of Jesus. Losing your impact as a follower of Jesus is as absurd as salt losing its taste. How we welcome children, outsiders, and seek peace are powerful ways of impacting others with the good news of Jesus. Basic Christian discipleship

²Bobby Schuller, *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books, 2019), 113-115, 117-118, 123, 139.

³Adapted from Bobby Schuller, *Change Your Thoughts Change Your World*, 33.

implies the ability to live in peace with one's neighbors and doing good for them. Your impact as a follower of Jesus will often happen during and through your daily activities.⁴

Rest in God, by being content and finding nourishment from God in a rhythm of Sabbath. Sabbath is intentional "time off" from the busyness and hecticness of life to think and to do self-examination. Invest in you by taking care of yourself with exercise, eating as healthily as possible and sleeping enough hours per night. Invest in others by being present, empathetic and a good listener. Love God by moving in more dependency on God for God alone knows you the best and loves you the most. Love yourself and others by being freed from judging, criticizing, shaming, and ridiculing yourself and others. The more we consider doing what is good for anyone and everyone through random acts of kindness, as individuals and a community of faith, we demonstrate in word and deed that we take following Jesus seriously. We are undeterred by the cross we carry, thus witnessing to the saving power of God. Jesus' words, "I am the way, the truth and the life," the words of the Greatest Commandment, and the words of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 outline what resting in God, investing in yourself and others, and loving God, yourself, and others looks like. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (In-Person with COVID-19 protocols and Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 26 September 2021
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⁴In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Kimberly Bracken Long, Osvaldo D. Vena, Michael Lodahl, Benjamin P. Masters, and Peter J. Paris in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 341-342, 343-345, 346-347, 348-350 and 350-352.