



## Something That Will Last

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

### John 15:16

*[Jesus said] You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

Back when I was in high school, I looked forward to going to some of my classes. History class was always my favorite. It was a joy to go there. I enjoyed shop class when I got to work with wood. And, I always liked band. While I had classes I liked, there was one class I really hated. I never wanted to go to physical education class.

I didn't want to go, but I had to go, every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The worst part of phys. ed. class came once every six weeks. Report cards came out every six weeks. How was the phys. ed. teacher supposed to grade us every six weeks? He used three criteria.

First was attendance. Did you go to class? Some boys would just cut the class. They never showed up. I always showed up. Second was attitude. Did you use excuses to get out of class? Some boys would show up, but they'd say, "My elbow hurts," or "I twisted my ankle," or "My stomach's upset." I never used excuses to get out of participating.

So far, my grade in phys. ed. class was perfect. I always showed up and I had an "I'll try it" attitude. The trouble came with the third criteria. It was a physical education test.

My grade every six weeks came down to that test: how many sit-ups could I do, how many push-ups and pull-ups could I accomplish, how many cartwheels could I perform before falling on my head, how long could I stay up-right while hanging up-side-down on the pommel horse, how high could I

jump on the trampoline, how far up the rope could I climb, and how fast could I run around the gymnasium.

That test was murder. I couldn't do any of those things very well.

Coach Eskay, the phys. ed. teacher (he also happened to be the coach of our championship football team), kept individual records for all the boys. But to make the test more interesting, he decided to make them into competitions. He divided all the boys in class into five teams. The teams would compete against each other to see which team was best.

Let me brag a little bit about my high school. Back then all the high schools in Ohio were divided into two classes: big schools and small school. Every school with more than 500 students was considered a big school. Those with fewer than 500 were small schools. My school had 501 students. So, we competed with the large schools, schools like Canton McKinley, Columbus Upper Arlington, and Cincinnati Moeller. We were the smallest big school in the state. But, we were winners! Every year I was in high school, we won our league championships in all the major sports: football, basketball, baseball, track, and golf. We were ranked in the Ohio top ten in football. We lost the state championship in basketball by two points. I tell you this to let you know the boys in my school were really good athletes.

Almost all the boys were really good, except me. I was not. I was the shortest, smallest, weakest, slowest, least athletic boy in my class.

Every six weeks, Coach Eskay would divide the boys in my class up into five teams. He did it by selecting five of his favorites to be team captains. They were always boys like Todd Snyder, Dick Adams, or Randy Harkness (the three boys who went on to have careers in the NFL). The captains, in turn, would take turns selecting all the other boys to be on their teams.

I was always one of the five boys selected last. Nobody wanted me on his team. I was the one he had to take because there was nobody else to pick. I was always picked last. Always, except one time.

One time when Bill Stanson (another of our star football players) was the captain with the first pick, he pointed his finger at me and said, "I'll take Jerry." Everybody laughed at him, but he chose me first. And with each subsequent pick, Bill chose one of the boys who was always chosen last.

When the choosing was over, Bill's team, my team, was filled-up with all of the un-athletic, un-coordinated, slowest, weakest boys. Everyone in the gym knew we were going to be the big-time losers in the competition.

The biggest event in the competition was the relay race, where each boy would run one lap around the gym. Since I was chosen first, I had to run first. I was so proud at having been chosen first that I was determined to do the very best I could. When I ran that day, my little legs pumped harder than ever. I ran faster than I had ever run in my life. I ran so fast that I beat the other four boys from the other teams who were running against me - and they were all the best boys!

You may think I'm telling a fib, but it's true. Every boy on my team excelled that morning. Every boy on my team won his leg of the race. It was amazing, un-expected, un-believable! Coach Eskay was dumfounded. He checked and double-checked his stop watch, but our time was the fastest time recorded in that relay race - the fastest time ever.

At the end of that school year, Coach had the names and times of the winners painted on the gymnasium wall. There they would stay until the records were broken by other boys. At the end of that year, my name was painted on the wall of the gym as the fastest runner. That was back in 1965. The last time I was in that gymnasium was about fifteen years ago. My name was still there. That record-breaking time had not been beaten in all those years! The paint was faded and flaked, but the record still stood.

That's the only time in my life that I have won an athletic event against my peers. And I am convinced that the reason I won was because, for the first time in my life, I was chosen first. I wasn't just some left-over the good boys had to take at the end. That time, I was the chosen one - and I performed like one.

It's great to be the chosen one. When you know you've been picked out from all the rest, it can make all the difference in your world. Being chosen means you're somebody special.

Look back to the Gospel of John, remember what Jesus said, "It was not you who chose me; it was I who chose you!"

Think about that. Jesus chooses you. He looks down on all the people in this world, and he picks you out from all the rest. He says, "You're the one that I want."

I want you to set aside everything else that you know about religion and faith, Jesus and God. Set it all aside and think about this one thing: Jesus chooses you.

He chooses you to love. He chooses you to forgive. He chooses you to give you a new life, a new future, to make you into a person of value and great worth.

Oh, what a mystery it is. Jesus chooses you.

He chooses you - even when you mess up and make mistakes, even if you run the race with half-an-effort, even if you come in last. Jesus says, "That's O.K., I choose you any way."

He chooses you - even if you're selfish and make up excuses, even if you're thoughtless and disloyal, even if you're scared and act like a chicken. Jesus says, "We'll work on that together; I still choose you."

He chooses you - even when you're a miserable failure and wallowing in a pit of despair, even when you slip down to the end of your rope and don't have the foggiest idea whether or not you can hang on, even when you've strayed so far away from home that you can't find your way back. Jesus says, "I love you just the way you are. I choose you to be my brother - or my sister."

He chooses you - even when you've fallen back into that secret dark place known only to you and your lord. Jesus says, "I see you there, and it's all right. Come out into the light with me."

He chooses you, and you don't have a word to say about it. He chooses you, and the only thing you can do is accept it and start letting him turn your life around.

Oh, what a puzzlement it is. Jesus chooses you!

Will you step forward and be on his team? Will you give it your best? Will you take your place at his banquet table? Will you make him proud?

Jesus chooses you on purpose. He's got something in mind. He's got a plan for you. Go back to the Gospel of John. After Jesus chooses you, he says, "Go and bear fruit... fruit [that] abide[s]."

That's your task. Will you do it?

That's your assignment. Will you complete it?

That's your leg of the race. Will you run it?

You're chosen for a purpose: to bear fruit that abides. Jesus wants you to be a winner, a man a worth, a woman of value - a person who makes a difference long after you've left this earth.

He wants to paint your name on the pages of glory as a person of lasting value.

In my previous church, down in Narrows, Virginia, I had a friend by the name of J. Talbert Blankenship. Everybody called him Mr. Tab. When I knew him, he was an old man nearing the end of his days. He was slowing down. His eyesight was dim. His hands were gnarled and stiff. His body was weakened. But Mr. Tab had a gift.

He was a furniture maker. Even though he was almost ninety years old when I knew him, he still went to his wood-working shop every day he was able. I visited him there some times. Every time I went, he would pick up a piece of wood, rub his hand over its raw surface, and tell me what it would become.

One day he picked up a plank of wood. It didn't look like much to me. He said it was a wonderful piece of cherry wood, the best he had had in years. "I chose this for you," he said, "this will be yours." He didn't tell me what it would be.

That Christmas, Mr. Tab gave me a present wrapped in pretty paper. When I opened that gift, it was this lovely little tea caddy, with an in-laid top.

Mr. Tab died a little while after that. But look what he left behind. He left a thing of beauty, something of lasting value. All throughout the New River Valley in Virginia, in homes and churches, are pieces Mr. Tab created - things of beauty and utility.

A hundred years from now, two hundred, or maybe more - generations unknown will be able to rub their hands across the smooth surfaces, appreciating the craftsmanship, marveling at the beauty of those pieces. They will be able to open them up, or turn them over, and marvel at this person, "J.T. Blankenship," whoever he was, who chose a piece of raw material and made out of it something of lasting value.

You my friend, you have been chosen. Jesus chose you. What are you making out of your life that will have lasting value?

You may be wondering how you can live up to the choosing, how you can make out of your life something of lasting value.

It begins by planting seeds. You don't need to worry about the harvesting right now, if you're not here, somebody else will tend to that. Your job is to plant some seeds that will last.

You can begin by planting some seeds of goodness in your every day dealing with others. Be honest. Be trustworthy. If you're that kind of man, your acquaintances will call you "friend."

You can plant seeds of kindness. Be understanding. Be caring. If you're that kind of woman, your family will call you "blessed."

Plant seeds of Christian service. Help people out. Be regular in your prayers. Forgive people's wrongs. Open up doors to second chances. Be open to the winds of change. If you're that kind of person, people will call you a "treasure."

And in all your dealings with others, plant seeds of love. If you are a loving person, people will always remember you with love. And that's something that lasts.

You go out there in the world and plant those kind of seeds in the hearts and souls and memories of all the people you meet in life. Plant those seeds, let them mature through your tender mercies and your watchful care.

What is true for you as an individual is also true for us as a congregation. We are standing on the threshold of building something of lasting value together.

We are building more than a new church. We are building a community - a place where the elderly can find a peaceful, secure home; a place where little children can grow and mature, a place where together we can reach out to the community with the great, good news of God's amazing love.

Oh, what an opportunity we have. Oh, what a marvelous tomorrow is dawning. We who have been chosen, have chosen to follow our Lord's path.

Let us continue to live as God's chosen ones.