

Lifebyte 46

Don't Plant Old Tares With New Wheat

Living Righteously In The Days of Chastisement



*Jesus must remain in heaven
until the time comes for God to restore everything,
as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.* (Acts 3:21)



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Dear Friends,

Many of you who are attempting to start a home fellowship are struggling: it's not going as well as you'd hoped! Consider this: *perhaps your presuppositions about what you're endeavoring to do are faulty*. In other words, you're trying to walk a *new path* while you're still relying on your old *prior experience*. We'll discuss this shortly.

Just realize that the Hebraic foundations that our Father is restoring are "new" to all of us because we've all been ingrained with Hellenist, man-centered concepts of religious practice! For each of us to make His relational priorities an obedient, loving trust a *way of life* calls for intentional changes to our previous ways. Your old experiences will most likely be a greater hindrance than a help as you press on ahead.

Our God is absolutely sovereign in His timing and His orchestration of that which He chooses to reveal to His people:

'Now I am announcing new things to you, hidden things unknown to you, revealed now, not long ago; before today, you did not hear them: so you can't say, 'I already know about them' (Isaiah 48:6b,7).

Let's review a few key points that may be hindering you.

1. It's safe to say that your only previous experience of Christianity has been within the Nicolaitan religious system. The clergy domination, religious programs and scheduled meetings that were required to make the system run were the norm. However, a Hebraic home fellowship has ABSOLUTELY nothing in common with these unbiblical practices. So, you need to *deprogram* your expectations before you become part of a fellowship family. The old ways will only impede!

2. In *Lifebyte 42. Ministering Spiritual Freedom To Others*, we've written about the three different types of relationships you have: Positional-based, Activity-based, and Value-based. (Please read the Lifebyte for in-depth discussion of these.)

The most important and deepest type of relationships you can have are **Value-based relationships**. They emanate out of *your heart*, for you *choose* the people with whom you want to share relational closeness. These relationships are based on *mutual values* that are important to each of you.

Value-based relationships also involve a significant amount of personal responsibility on behalf of one another. The people in these relationships discover that in the midst of their deepening care they also find that they intrude on, inconvenience, and sometimes hurt each other. Yet doesn't this describe the *inter-connected reality* of the 54 "one anothers" commanded to followers of Jesus in the Newer Testament?

Three of the best examples of Value-based relationships are these:

- becoming a follower of Jesus,
- joining in a marriage covenant,
- becoming part of a Hebraic fellowship family.

Many of you have expressed difficulty in developing a sense of interconnect-edness as a fellowship *family*. In order for the extended spiritual family of a Hebraic-style home fellowship to be birthed and to prosper in the Spirit, you must develop Value-based relationships. This will come into being only if you have the same mutual goals and the willingness to work together to bring them into being. And, it's at this point that many of you have fallen way short.

Look at the people who are in your own life. Outside of your marriage, if applicable, how many Value-based relationships do you have? Most likely, few or none. Why? Because you're so accustomed to Positional and Activity-based relationships which require little from you.

For instance, your family is a *Positional* relationship because you were born into it without a choice in the matter. Your workplace is also Positional because the relationships there aren't the reason you go each day — your work (and paycheck) are. Whatever values you have in common with those in proximity are not the reason for the relationship to exist.

In *Activity-based* relationships you participate with others in whatever function or activity has been scheduled, whether a meeting, a sports endeavor, or even a religious service. You most likely have little or no contact with the other participants in a meaningful way outside of the framework of that particular activity.

The North American culture in general has increasingly become *relationally fragmented* as families have relocated from their place of birth and have not made the effort to fill in that gap with new relationships on a deep level.

And, while people may have *superficial* contact through Internet chats, intimacy and meaningful friendship have diminished as individuals find themselves "wired" in isolation from others with iPods, web surfing, and TV fixation. Even toddlers are now ear-pieced away from communication with others, growing into a generation clueless as to how to relate on a personal level!

Given these hindrances, do *you* have a thorough understanding of how to develop Value-based relationships? If

not, then some of you will try to start home fellowship group or a home church group as an *activity* rather than as a Value-based relational family who love and follow Jesus. In other words, you'll find yourself getting together for scheduled meeting times with planned events and agendas, but never enjoying im-promptu times together that people who *really care* about each other have.

Also, if your intent is to establish a home fellowship *group* or a home church *group*, all you have going for yourself is your prior **Nicolaitan experience**: you'll recreate a Nicolaitan system that happens to meet in a home instead of under a steeple. And remember, God *wars against* systems which put a hierarchical leader between himself and His beloved sheep (see Revelation 2:6,15).

Some of you will try to start a *faith family gathering*. Your only previous experience has been with the **Positional-based family** you were born into. Based on conversations with many of you, your biological family is still sin-nature-based and stronghold-controlled. And, without some dramatic changes in your understanding of the **Value-based** relationships of a Hebraic home fellowship of extended spiritual family, you'll find that you replicate your own prior family experience — including the tolerated sin and generational strongholds that permeate it!

When you consider forming either a home fellowship/home church group or a faith family gathering, the people who want to be part of what you're doing will bring along their own prior religious and family experience. Each person will look to build off their prior experiences because that's all they know.

You need a Holy Spirit-breathed “paradigm shift”. Let’s review our Father’s criteria for biblical fellowship as family in Jesus:

1. **Your fellowship with others must spur you on to glorify our Father and Jesus through praise, worship, and living testimony** (1 Corinthians 10:31).
2. **Your fellowship with each other must spur you to grow in Christ’s likeness** (see Philippians 2:12).
3. **Your shared fellowship must spur you toward repentance and the narrow gate** (Matthew 7:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
4. **Your fellowship as extended spiritual family must spur you to reveal Jesus to the lost in your daily lives** (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

Prior to your regeneration, these criteria of authentic fellowship wouldn’t have been a part of your life. Even when you were born again, they probably were never presented to you as a *way of life*. So how will you learn to walk in fellowship according to this Scriptural path? You won’t, unless you’re *fully yielded* to the Holy Spirit and *intentionally purposeful* in making them foundational to your fellowship with others who wholeheartedly follow Jesus as Lord of their life.

Applying the Hebraic Foundations Is Like Going Through Boot Camp

Have you undergone any military training, whether through boot camp or officer training? In either case, the military establishment knew you needed *total transformation* to be fully equipped to serve — and those drill instructors persisted until you changed from a civilian mindset to a military outlook.

Transformation is also the foundational issue in becoming a follower of Jesus.

We cease to be lord of our own life and instead become a child and servant of the King of Kings. *His* purposes and goals become *our* purposes and goals.

When you responded to the convicting Spirit of Christ and entered Covenant with our Father through the shed blood of Jesus, you became a spiritually-armed participant in all-out warfare for the souls of mankind. This is the biblical understanding of your role in overcoming the sinful schemes and worldly compromise that imprison those who are still in Satan’s clutches.

Was that made clear to you in your previous Nicolaitan religious setting? Probably not, since most religious systems are “consumer focused” — putting on scheduled services and programs that make people feel good about themselves.

Attending “just as you are” despite whatever sin you might be entertaining is the prevailing atmosphere of most religious systems. There’s no call to *repent* — to confess your sins and turn from them so that forgiveness and cleansing can be gratefully received.

However, religious system practices are NOT of our Father! They emanate from men who want to evaluate their success by satisfied numbers of congregants rather than by total dedication to serve their King in the Kingdom of God. Our Father sees you as His “children”, ambassadors of His Son, and as His “soldiers” in the battle for souls.

Let’s take a look at the nature of the spiritual war that’s being waged within us *and* against us.

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul (1 Peter 2:11).

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict [at war] with each other (Galatians 5:17).

That they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26).

[Satan] was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation (Revelation 13:7).

Many more passages address the warfare readiness that's required of followers of Jesus: a battle against both their own sin nature and the schemes of the devil. Your loving and obedient service to God as a follower of Jesus and/or as one who shepherds our Father's children will be hindered if you don't fully grasp *His* purposes for fellowship in the midst of war.

True fellowship is a family of "military minded" brothers and sisters who have separated themselves from the compromise of worldly "civilian" values and goals. "Soldiers" in Jesus realize that hardship is a given, and that we need to be ready to face it without grumbling or complaining so that our Lord will find pleasure in our service to Him:

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier (2 Timothy 2:2-4).

How Do You Become A Soldier?

The Hebraic way of teaching is first of all a *way of life application* that's based on role modeling. You can't just sit around studying Bible content and expect people to change their lives because of what they've read or heard someone say. It just doesn't happen, especially among men!

Numerous studies have revealed that males are changed *not* by what they hear or read but by two interpersonal means:

- 1) *Personal interaction* with role models
- 2) *Personal confrontation* by older, wiser men.

Education only adds to a man's knowledge and puffs up his ego through information he's stored in his mind. He's *not changed* by what he knows.

God has created women differently, however, in matters of personal transformation. Women *are* changed by role modeling, education (such as what they read or hear), and, to a lesser extent, by confrontation.

In both the physical as well as spiritual sense, to be a soldier is a *way of life*. Endurance as a soldier who serves for a good greater than himself isn't taught in a classroom; it's acquired through both careful training *and* role modeling.

Hebraic teaching is analogous to military training, intended to impart *life change* to the disciple. And, the discipler serves more like a drill instructor than a clergy person who's removed from the trenches of personal and individual contact with the soldier.

A drill instructor is chosen to train others because of his experience on the battlefield. The best soldiers are sent to train the recruits. This is how every recruit in boot camp gets trained — by the best qualified *people of experience*.

So if you desire to serve our Father's children as an elder/shepherd, your training must flow out of your *ongoing transformed lifestyle* which can be seen and emulated by others. You can never lead merely by repeating facts. A way of life must be *caught*, not just taught.

Your qualifications to serve as a shepherd to nurture and guide our Father's children aren't based on the fact that you've arrived at some state of human perfection! Rather, as you consider the stipulations for elder leadership cited by Paul in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, these qualifications stand out in the man who has embraced the *process of sanctification* in his life.

What we mean is that you *role model* the biblical process of sanctification by willingly by His grace becoming more like Jesus in all your attitudes and actions. You ever increasingly yield yourself to the Holy Spirit at work in you, continuing to die to your sin-nature-controlled soul and becoming a person of the spirit who is led by the Spirit.

If you role model an increasingly sanctified life, you'll be helping others to do likewise. Paul made clear that it was more than his words that was intended to be impressed upon the ones he was discipling. They could readily observe and imitate his *way of life*:

Keep doing what you have learned and received from me, what you have heard and ***seen me doing***; then the God who gives peace will be with you (Philippians 4:9).

The Apostle revealed part of his own sanctification process of *embracing hardship* to encourage and strengthen the followers of Jesus in Corinth (see 2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Note that God permitted Satan to harass this faithful ser-

vant so that he wouldn't rely on his own strength but on God's power.

Paul was able to recognize God's mercy toward him because he was familiar with His ways to bring about change: "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,*" says the LORD Almighty" (Zechariah 4:6). The Apostle wasn't ashamed to let others whom God was constraining from relying on their own strength know what he himself was enduring.

So role modeling is one biblical method of effecting change. Now ask yourself: *If* you are leading others in the faith, and *if* you are rendering account to God on behalf of others (Hebrews 13:17), what lifestyle and life choices are they observing in you? A life that's actively being transformed and becoming more like Jesus? Or, a complacent "I've already arrived and am satisfied" type of life?

Do you hide from others the suffering and hardship that sanctification is bringing into your life? Are you *ashamed* that others may think less of you if you're suffering — that there's something *wrong* with you if you're having to endure hardship?

Role modeling isn't our Lord's only means of transforming His people into Christ's likeness. Another method of helping people change is through *interpersonal discussion*, an essential way of applying the Hebraic foundations to your life. Only through discussing with others close to you the varied facets of the Hebraic foundations with the intent to make them a way of life will you be changed. Discussion that leads to application is the Hebraic method of pursuing truth.

In fact, the rabbis of the Hebraic Stream taught that whenever two or three discussed God's Word, the Holy Spirit was

with them to give understanding and application. As we've written before, Jesus commends the connection of mutual discussion and agreement by promising His particular presence when this takes place:

*I tell you the truth, **whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in My name, there am I with them*** (Matthew 18:18-20).

The presence of Jesus in your midst as you pursue a life that's pleasing to Him makes all the difference in the world! Jesus Himself stirs you to put into practice a way of life that befits service in His Kingdom! You can't just *read about* the Hebraic foundations; you need to discuss with others that which our Father is restoring, with the intent to make them your way of life.

We're aware that few of you men who are going through the materials we present are discussing them with others to help one another walk in loving and obedient trust as a way of life. Even fewer are role modeling ongoing transformation into Christ-likeness so that others may learn from your example.

How do we know this? Because in your phone calls and e-mails, you never refer to any of the Hebraic foundations as your starting point. You initiate your call or e-mail from the perspective of your *Nicolaitan religious experience* or your *biological family background*. Men, these are the wrong foundations!

The generation that doesn't understand the mistakes of the past will live to repeat the same mistakes.

Another hindrance for many of you men is your own *laziness* about wanting to become more like Jesus. You overflow with excuses and rationale about why you'd rather complain than take action in response to the Holy Spirit's nudge. You're like an insubordinate recruit in boot camp who is always resisting the drill instructor. These guys ultimately get tossed out of the military if they don't yield to change.

Few of you are *deliberate* about making the time and effort to discuss the Hebraic foundations with others, including your spouse. Neither the complacency of your prior religious experience nor the experiences from your biological family life are going to dislodge you from lethargy or your personal comfort zone!

Your love for Jesus must be seen in the willing and intentional determination with which you desire to become more like Him. Your militancy as His shepherd must be seen in your earnest pursuit to help others do likewise.

Special Instructions for Older Men Who Would Serve Our Father's Children As A Shepherd

I (Mike) am eager to help older men serve as biblical shepherds of spiritual families. But I've been frustrated by many older men, especially those who have already retired or have been in key positions in religious systems and feel they're beyond any need for further transformation. In their resistance to change, they act more like Hardened Fools than as servant-leaders who are growing into increasing Christ-likeness.

If you're an older man who's reluctant to be changed, you're jeopardizing your own pilgrimage to salvation. How?

Picture what you're really doing:

In denying your own need for ongoing sanctification by the Spirit, you're role modeling **stubborn resistance** for younger followers of Jesus. Leading vulnerable lambs astray is grievous to our Father:

*And He said to His disciples, 'It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but **woe to him through whom they come!** It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should **cause one of these younger ones to stumble**' (Luke 17:1,2).*

My greatest area of fruitfulness has been among men generally in their late 30s through 40s who are either in the Wounded Stage or just approaching it. These men realize they no longer want to be the striving warriors of the past who weren't there for their families. They're eager to be transformed into Christ's character no matter what the cost! Sadly, most look around their relational sphere for older role models but find none.

[See *Lifebyte 22. Obedient Trust versus Reasoning*, for more on the stages of male development.]

You've probably discovered that so many older men and women are *inflexible*, unwilling to cast aside old patterns of thinking for fresh encounters with the Spirit. In other words, their concept of discipleship is based more on studying Bible verses for information's sake rather than on being role models of ongoing transformation that conform to and apply God's Word to their lives.

Sharing their lives with younger people through regular *ongoing, meaningful interaction* is foreign and frightening to them.

And what the younger people really need is the *whole life experience* of a role model as were Jesus and Paul with their disciples.

In our own extended spiritual family, Mike intentionally interacts with the men and boys in particular through walking, hiking, swimming, golfing, biking and fishing together. (Some of these endeavors require aspirin and arthritis rub afterwards!) But these times include wonderful, purposeful conversations filled with teaching moments.

Mike also gets up very early at times to meet the men for breakfast and pointed discussion of matters pertaining to their families and workplace. He's *proactive as an older servant of Jesus in making himself available to the faith family for which he renders account to God.*

Sue gets together with the other women as well as the young people to walk, hike, bike, shop, or just to sit and converse. Again, these are times of intentional discussion as well as prayer together and lighthearted conversation.

Both of us are proactive in initiating contact throughout the week with our fellowship family. In fact, we're sharing in the home schooling and character development of all the children as the onsite "Grandpa" and "Grandma"!

Keep in mind that if you're an older man who is seeking to serve our Father's children as an elder/shepherd, you're saying to both God and to them:

"By God's grace I purpose that my lifestyle and motivation are going to help you grow in greater Christ-likeness and complete your pilgrimage to a heavenly welcome."

An important feature of discipleship is often overlooked. It's NOT a one-way

street in which everything flows from the discipler to the disciple. On the contrary, in biblical discipleship your ability to influence others is directly related to your willingness to let others influence you. Even the children in our faith family have shared things that have changed us!

- You need to be willingly transformed by cooperating with the Spirit in growing in the character God wants in you.
- You need to be joyfully willing to change as needed to meet the needs of others and bring praise to our Lord.
- Your love is seen in your welcome willingness to be *intruded on, inconvenienced, and hurt by the people you serve.*

Nothing less than your willingness in *at least* these areas to be changed will do if you want to represent our Father's care for His people. But, if you're self-satisfied and complacent, alter that attitude — don't discourage the hopes and eagerness of the younger people around you to love and serve their Lord with all their might!

We've written our **Going To The High Places** Study Guide based on Hannah Hurnard's *Hinds' Feet On High Places* to help you bring about the changes you need to reflect our Father's compassion and righteousness.

We've been grieved to discover that some of you who've gone through the study guide neither discussed the truths with others nor answered the questions in each lesson with the desire to be changed. Still others have dallied, put off going through the material or slogged through academically but not allowed

their heart and spirit to be touched.

Just as Much-Afraid had lessons to learn in order to be free of her own self-will, you too are in a similar classroom. Keep in mind that you're not prepared to lead others onward until you're willing in complete trust to 'jump off the cliff into the mist' as she did. In other words, you're not equipped to lead and guide God's people if you won't, through faith, *allow yourself to be changed, and to go anywhere and do anything* that the will of God requires of you.

This willing preparedness is the nature of a true soldier who desires to please those over him. His will is to obey their commands just as Jesus declared that His brother, sister and mother were those who *did the will* of His Father (see Matthew 12:50).

Certainly the Father we lovingly serve is our gracious God and Master, not a demanding and roughshod general. And because of the wonderful presence of the indwelling Spirit, those who would truly "**follow Jesus**" are people who willingly yield to Him in love and walk as He commands. In order to *follow* someone, you need to walk in the steps of their will. As you follow Jesus, the Bible makes plain that you WILL become more like Him!

If you're an older man or woman, we strongly encourage you to get out of the box of complacency and jump wholeheartedly into transformation by the Spirit — even if it means stepping into the previously unknown. Just as Much-Afraid found, the Shepherd is at the bottom of the cliff waiting to change you.

These questions are especially for you older people to discuss with each other, and with the younger people who are close to you:

1. What do your spouse and the young people who know you think about your faith walk and how you represent Jesus to them in your attitudes, actions and lifestyle?

2. Is your Christian “faith” based more on Bible knowledge, or on a trust-filled way of life in Jesus that others can emulate?

3. If you’re married, does your marriage relationship exude such Christ-like character that younger couples seek to be like you and your spouse?

4. As an older man or woman, are there younger men and women, respectively, whom you are helping to serve the interests of King Jesus? Yes or No. If No, why not? If Yes, how are you accomplishing this?

5. If you do have younger people in your life whom you’re spiritually leading, ask them to list the positives and negatives about their relationship with you. What would they like to see changed in you that would help them in their own walk?

6. In what ways have you had to change to make yourself more available to disciple others? For instance, have you taken up activities that are more suitable and engaging for them? If not, why haven’t you made any adaptations to accommodate and encourage them to interact with you?

7. Review the criteria for the different types of home groups listed below (Hebraic home fellowship family; faith gathering; church in a house). Put a check mark next to the criteria that best describes your fellowship group. Compare and discuss your answers with others in your fellowship. What changes do you need to make? List them for yourselves.

<p style="text-align: center;">Goal: To Have a Hebraic Home Fellowship Family</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Criteria</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Love of God and others paramount; strong interpersonal relationships; acceptance and forgiveness vital <input type="checkbox"/> Frequent scheduled and impromptu contact throughout the week <input type="checkbox"/> Elder is a role model and guide; leadership is by personal example aligned with God's Word; mentoring and discipleship indispensable; leader is a facilitator to help with Christ-like change <input type="checkbox"/> Size of fellowship family limited to elders' ability to render account to God for each person; outreach encouraged and expected as fellowship family multiplies <input type="checkbox"/> Demonic strongholds demolished <i>before</i> entry into fellowship <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing repentance and confession critical for maintaining communal righteousness; fellowship together calls for communal righteousness <input type="checkbox"/> Live as doers of the Word; guided by "What would Jesus do?" <input type="checkbox"/> Growth in increasing Christ-likeness a vital parameter <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual gifts cherished and nurtured <input type="checkbox"/> Active participation in fellowship family; no passive spectators <input type="checkbox"/> "How to serve others" is vital <input type="checkbox"/> Seek to produce active, mature followers of Jesus serving their King in His Kingdom 	<p style="text-align: center;">Goal: To Have a Faith Gathering</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Criteria</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> That everyone <i>feels good</i> is key measure of success <input type="checkbox"/> Fellowship times most often based on social rather than spiritual reasons <input type="checkbox"/> No outreach so that group membership stays the same <input type="checkbox"/> Mutual toleration of each other's ongoing sin allows unrighteousness to continue <input type="checkbox"/> Any form of leadership discouraged; gathering is a free-for-all to satisfy social desires <input type="checkbox"/> Confrontation of any sort is dissuaded <input type="checkbox"/> The Bible and its application not a major concern beyond academic approach <input type="checkbox"/> Demonic strongholds entertained <input type="checkbox"/> Produces passivity and lethargy about the interests of God 	<p style="text-align: center;">Goal: To Have Church in a House</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>Criteria</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Clergy-type leader in control of the group <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy reliance on scheduled meetings (some only once or twice a month) <input type="checkbox"/> Minimum daily contact with each other <input type="checkbox"/> Bible studied without application; produces belief without personal cost <input type="checkbox"/> "What you know" not how you live is vital <input type="checkbox"/> Often relies heavily on prepared materials to study <input type="checkbox"/> Demonic strongholds entertained <input type="checkbox"/> Unconfessed sin tolerated and ignored <input type="checkbox"/> Can grow into large impersonal groups; size equals success <input type="checkbox"/> Produces passivity and lethargy about the interests of God
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