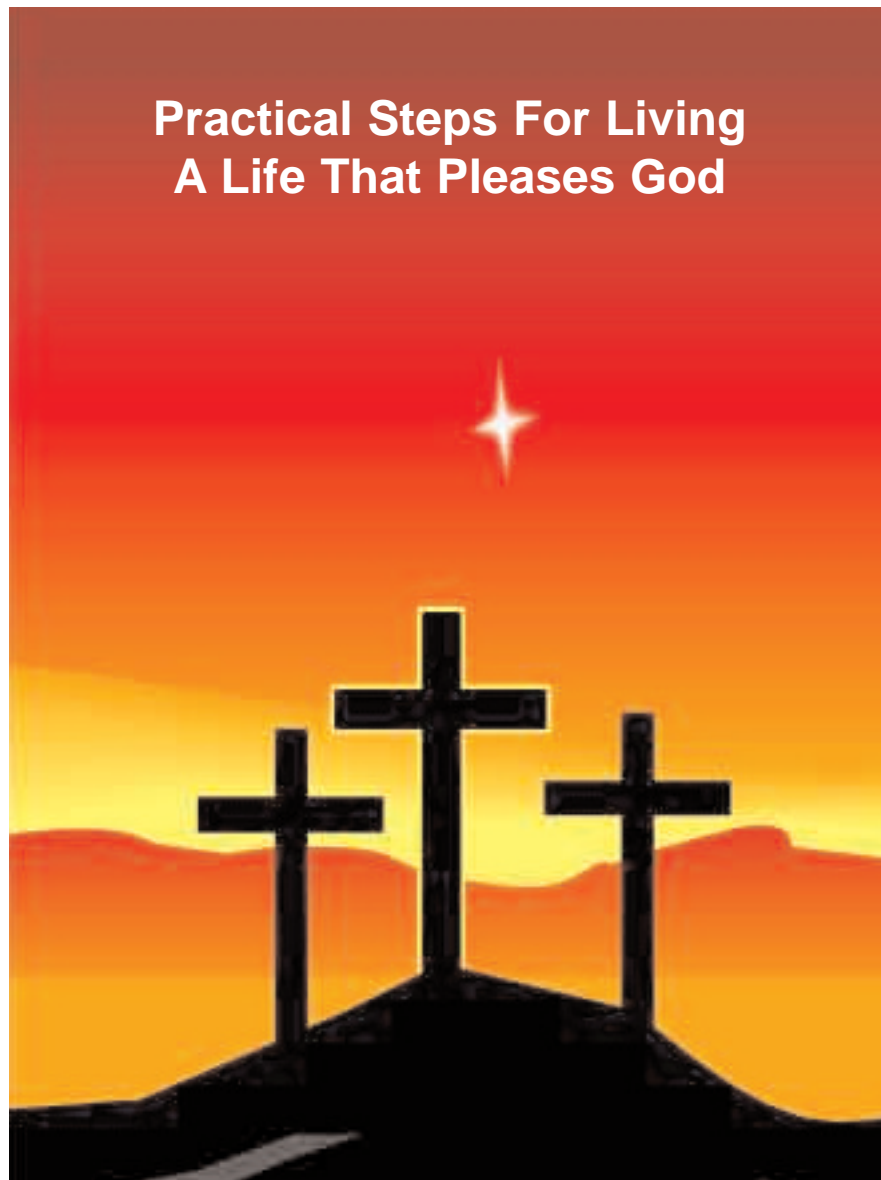


Lifebytes:

The Tale of Two Kingdoms (Part 2 of 2)

8. Resurrections Into KINGDOM Living



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Dear Friends,

We hope that as you've read Part 1, ***When Death Is Good***, you're perceiving the beauty of dying to the influence of strongholds that may have shaped your world view. And, may your ongoing willingness to repent when the Holy Spirit convicts you always be the determination of your heart as well. Both of these are your ***death instruments*** and will enable you to establish, maintain, and restore fellowship with our Father and His Son, Jesus.

Then from this fellowship, His KINGDOM can expand in your heart. And KINGDOM living — living for King Jesus — is what sets you apart from everything in the world, including religious systems.

In Part 2, ***Resurrections Into KINGDOM Living***, we want to help you think through what it truly means to be a follower of Jesus and live in His KINGDOM. The best way to do this is to review the biblical foundations for the KINGDOM. Don't lose sight that KINGDOM living has all to do with ***your attitudes, your motives, and your decisions***. You won't walk in KINGDOM freedom until you find the King's Spirit at work inside you.

Simply put,

**The KINGDOM is the reign of Jesus
in your heart.**

The KINGDOM of Jesus should increasingly rule your soul, that is, your mind, will, and emotions, as the character and motivation of Jesus Himself become yours.

This is the testimony of your deaths and resurrections into KINGDOM living!

**Living for King Jesus is what sets
you apart from everything in the
world, including religious systems.**

Resurrections into the KINGDOM: *Establishing Paths of Righteousness*

From the outset we want to emphasize that KINGDOM living is:

- centered on King Jesus.
- based on your *knowing* and *applying* the *righteous requirements* of the Bible for yourself.

Yes, we are declared "righteous" by the shed blood of Jesus, but that isn't where our salvation pilgrimage ends. We must still *live* righteously — and this is an *ongoing process*. In order to experience this KINGDOM, you must both *die to* your old motivations, attitudes, and goals, and be *resurrected into* KINGDOM values, motivations and actions.

The outworking of this transformation happens throughout your life as you are sanctified through many *deaths* and *resurrections*. Paul affirms this ongoing process when he tells us to "*...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*" (Philippians 2:12).

In essence, your sanctification is the process in which you set aside all the sinful motives and goals you acquired under the influence of spiritual principalities, especially "religious" ones, that once held you captive. In their place, you cooperate with the Holy Spirit to fill in those voids with righteous choices.

For the great many who have been steeped in the religious establishment in which others taught them about the Bible, their transformation requires ***greater responsibility*** than has ever been asked of them. Choosing to heed the Spirit and walk uprightly means that God's commands truly become COMMANDS that are personal *for you*, not just

biblical options. For many, this greater responsibility to now relate to God outside the net of religion and personally apply His commands to their daily life at first seems insurmountable. It isn't!

King David understood in his heart just how vital it was to cling to God's commands from a heart rightly motivated to please Him: "*I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you*" (Psalms 119:11; see also Psalm 119:23,48,78,97). The wise follow his example by earnestly appropriating the truth of God's Word through personal study and application.

For the great many who have been steeped in religious tradition and practices, their transformation requires greater responsibility than has ever been asked of them.

Steps in the Pathway of Righteousness

Is it your heart's desire to live righteously? Three major steps are involved as you learn, apply, and live out Bible truth:

1. *Study* of God's Word
2. *Discussion* of God's Word
3. *Application* of God's Word

And when you sin, respond uprightly:

Repent and Confess

1. *Study* of God's Word

Paul reminds us with simple yet direct assurance, "**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work**" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

If you have sat in pews for years listening to sermons, you may ask, "Why do I need to be personally responsible to become *thoroughly equipped* in handling the Word of God?"

In the KINGDOM you live for the King. His heart's purpose is that the world around you *see Him* in your motivations and actions. He has given you both His Word and His Spirit to accomplish this transformation so that you can be His agent in reflecting Him to a dark and needy world.

To be transformed calls for your personal exploration of the Word on a daily basis to guide your real-time needs and encounters.

You are a reflection of King Jesus to the world.

You are commanded to show the world the path of righteousness.

- Do you study the Bible daily, seeking applications for your life?
- If not, what adjustments in your schedule and priorities do you need to make time for this?

2. *Discussion* of God's Word

Discussing God's Word with others is His means of confirming the truths we apply to our lives. In our book, ***Restoring the Early Church*** (a free download at our website), we cite from our research that which the *Hebraic stream* of rabbis taught before the coming of Jesus:

Whenever two or three come together to study God's Word, the Holy Spirit is there to give understanding and application.

Confirmation by 'two or three' is a key requirement repeated often in the Scriptures. A few examples:

*"Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on **the testimony of two or three witnesses**" (Hebrews 10:28).*

*"But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by **the testimony of two or three witnesses**'" (Matthew 18:16).*

*"For where **two or three come together in my name, there am I with them**" (Matthew 18:20).*

*"**Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said**" (1 Corinthians 14:29).*

*"Every matter must be established by the **testimony of two or three witnesses**" (2 Corinthians 13:1).*

*"Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is **brought by two or three witnesses**" (1 Timothy 5:19).*

You can see from these passages the importance of *two or three*. The confirmation of two or three has two distinct purposes.

1. Confirmation is a *deterrent* to those who like to control others or misuse Scripture to serve personal ends.
2. Our Lord wants *each person* in His KINGDOM to be convicted about the truths by which they live. The person who affirms an application of scriptural truth is in fact proclaiming, *"Thus says the Lord."*

For husbands: The concept of discussing Biblical truths with the purpose of *applying them* is the intent behind Paul's instruction, "*cleansing [his wife] by the washing with water **through the word***" (Ephesians 5:25).

The Greek term for "word" here is *rhema*. Husbands are enjoined to purify their wives by teaching them to *live out together* as life partners the revealed will of God for their marriage and family. A man is called to express his love by leading his wife in applying God's specific guidance to their marriage and family. A husband and a wife create a natural two-some for confirming the truth of God's Word for specific life situations.

For everyone: Discussing biblical truths with the intent of application is not optional. If you don't make this a key part of your path to righteousness, you will walk in error. Your lack of diligence will keep you from maturity in the KINGDOM.

- Do you discuss biblical truths with others spiritually close to you?
- If you don't, what adjustment are you going to make?

Whenever two or three come together to study God's Word, the Holy Spirit is there to give *understanding and application*.

3. Application of God's Word

The earliest followers of Jesus were called "**The Way**" because others could

readily discern that these people lived for Jesus. For them, applying the Word of God to their lives was like building their faith practice on solid rock. On the other hand, knowledge of the Bible *without* application was like building a house on unstable sand. Jesus anchors this understanding when he teaches about the two builders in Matthew, chapter 7:

Foolish Builder

*“But everyone who hears these words of mine and does **not put them into practice** is like a foolish man who built his house on sand”* (v. 26). His life eventually collapses because he was a hearer only.

Wise Builder

*“Therefore everyone who **hears** these words of mine and **puts them into practice** is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its **foundation on the rock**”* (vv. 24,25). Note that even the wise face calamity. Yet their strength and stability come from practicing truth.

Applying the Word of God to life situations was the primary method of instruction in the earliest Church. These life applications were called “*halakhahs*”, from the Hebrew *halak* — to walk. Followers of Jesus applied the Hebrew Scriptures to their lives in order to *walk* in His righteous way of living.

Each individual application of the Word is like a stepping stone on the path of righteousness.

(For more on the steps that guided the early Church in living righteously, see pages 14-17 in our Book, *Christian*

Halakhahs, a free download from our website).

- Do you establish biblical applications by which you live?
- If not, what adjustments are you going to make?

KINGDOM Living: *Interpersonal Responsibility to Each Other*

**Jesus never came to start a religion.
He came to establish a KINGDOM!**

The KINGDOM of which Jesus is King has *nothing* to do with religion but EVERYTHING to do with **relational responsibility**. Those who live in the KINGDOM do all they can to live daily as KING Jesus Himself would live. This is a 24/7 lifestyle in which you live as a representative of the KING, an ambassador for Christ.

Again, the KINGDOM life which Jesus introduced and empowers by His Spirit calls for greater *personal responsibility* to reflect the relational intimacy you have with our KING.

Just a reminder:

Jesus refers twice to the “church” in Matthew, chapters 16 and 18, He is speaking about the *ekklesia*, the “**called-out ones**”.

His first mention reveals an important point: “*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not withstand it*” (Matthew 16:18).

Peter had just confessed Jesus as the

Son of the Living God, the initial point each of us has to grasp. In light of His KINGDOM, the emboldened passage can best be understood as, **“I am establishing my KINGDOM in the hearts of the righteous ones I have ‘called out’ of the world.”**

Peter is attempting to get this thought across when he encourages, *“As you come to him, the **living Stone** — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him — you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”* (1 Peter 2:4,5).

The priesthood in which we serve our King calls for sacrifices of praise, thanksgiving, and obedient trust. WE become the temple in which our King is worshiped!

Jesus also speaks of the *“called-out ones”* in terms of responsibilities to God and to each other. In Matthew 16:19 He confers to His followers *halakhic* authority to apply His Word to all areas of their lives: *“I will give you **the keys of the KINGDOM of heaven**; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*

Jesus is addressing ALL *“called-out ones”* as He affirms their right and responsibility to apply the Bible to all areas of their lives. Using the *halakhic* process we cited earlier, whatever applications those who trusted Jesus enacted in their lives would be respected in heaven.

“I am establishing my KINGDOM in the hearts of the righteous ones I have called out of the world.”

In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus addresses the *“called-out ones”* about their responsibility to uphold communal righteousness in their fellowship with others. They must confront the unrepentant. If he doesn't repent, he must be excluded from fellowship until he turns from his sin and is restored by our Father.

The KINGDOM that *“Jesus is building”* in the hearts of His followers requires personal and communal righteousness for true fellowship to exist. *Unrepentance stops all fellowship!* This KINGDOM is built upon the Cornerstone, King Jesus, and is manifested in the lives of those who live uprightly by His Spirit.

When two or three gather to confirm unrepentance and to expel the person who refuses to turn from his sin, the Lord promises to be in their midst. AND, their decision will be upheld in heaven. (See Chapter 11 of our Book *Restoring the Early Church* for more on communal righteousness.)

The KINGDOM ‘Jesus is building’ in the hearts of His followers requires personal and communal righteousness for true fellowship to exist. Unrepentance stops all fellowship!

Just a thought to remember:

In the pages to follow, as you go through the different facets of the KINGDOM:

- **Keep your focus on King Jesus.**
- **And, notice how interconnected the different facets are. This is because the KINGDOM is a *way of life* that emanates from the heart of His subjects and is evidenced in our daily lives.**

Thy KINGDOM Come

Jesus announced the coming of His KINGDOM. He neither intended nor inaugurated a church establishment. The religious establishment of His day had already proven to be a trap and a burden for the people.

Jesus heralded the arrival of His KINGDOM on earth — A KING proclaiming that His KINGDOM has come! “*Jesus went throughout Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues, **preaching** the good news of the KINGDOM, and **healing** every disease and sickness among the people*” (Matthew 4:23).

Notice that the arrival of the KINGDOM was accompanied by a love that intervened miraculously to heal. Keep in mind this connection between *speaking* and *actively caring* as we discuss other facets of our responsibilities to Jesus, our King.

Jesus Commands Us To **Actively Seek His KINGDOM**

“*But seek **first** [wholeheartedly, your main priority, perseveringly] his KINGDOM and his **righteousness**, and all these things will be given to you as well*” (Matthew 6:33). Nowhere in Scripture are His followers commanded to seek a “church” to attend. His people *are* His called-out ones! Nor should we hunger for the priorities and rewards of this world. Rather, He proclaims this directive: seek **His KINGDOM** and **His righteousness**!

When you seek His righteousness you’re not only to putting your trust in His shed blood for the forgiveness of your sins. You’re also endeavoring to live

righteously by applying the Bible to your daily life. (Please revisit 2 Timothy 3:16,17.)

Jesus assures the people, “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to **give them full meaning***” (Matthew 5:17). He is proclaiming that He came to give Scripture the meaning that our Father intended. The Good News had been proclaimed centuries earlier by the Prophets (see Revelation 10:7). Now it was finding fruition in Jesus.

Do you see? The Judaizers in Israel were epitomized by the Pharisees and Sadducees. These men kept a firm grip on the Jewish people by adding greater burdens of rules than God’s Law called for. Few of these religious rulers related to God in love-grounded obedient trust as He called for in the Older Testament. Rather, they established a religious system of *ritual and rule keeping* that distanced God from the people.

Yet, God made clear in the Older Testament that He longed for a love relationship. (See Deuteronomy 6:5,6; and Exodus 20:6.) He even referred to Israel metaphorically as His wife!

This heart intimacy is what the Hebraic Stream in Israel understood. Using the lens of love for God, they saw the Law as guidance for them to properly relate to a righteous, holy God, and to each other. God’s laws helped them understand the freedom of the covenant relationship He was extending to them, and the boundaries they shouldn’t cross as a sign of their love for Him and one another.

Because of the sacrifice, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the laws that applied to the Temple and the Levitical priesthood are no longer relevant. With

the inauguration of the New Covenant, followers of Jesus are under the Melchizedek Priesthood of Jesus. (Our March 2001 newsletter, **“Living as the Family of Melchizedek”**, discusses the difference between the two priesthoods at length.)

Our love for our Lord and for others makes the laws of God a delight to apply. John understood this beauty when he wrote,

*Here is how we know that we **love God’s children**: when we love God, we also **do what he commands**. For **loving God** means **obeying his commands**. Moreover, **his commands are not burdensome**, because everything which has God as its Father overcomes the world. And this is what victoriously overcomes the world: **our trust** (1 John 5:2-4).*

- What is your view about keeping the commands of God?
- Can you articulate the important distinguishing motivation of those who seek the KINGDOM and purpose to live righteously in it? Please write this down.

They saw the Law as guidance for them to relate to a righteous, holy God, and to each other. His laws helped them understand the freedom of relationship He was extending to them, and the boundaries they shouldn’t cross as a sign of their love for Him and one another.

The Quiet, Almost Imperceptible Nature of the KINGDOM’s Advance

*“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the KINGDOM of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The KINGDOM of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ **because the KINGDOM of God is within you**” (Luke 17:20,21).*

You can’t travel anywhere to experience the KINGDOM. It all takes place within you as you are sanctified into the nature, character, and motivation of Jesus. This is a wonderful miracle!

Our walk with Jesus is not a series of behavior modifications so that you can take pride in what you do or refrain from doing. Rather, it’s a heart modification in the unseen area of your soul. A new Rulership is taking place. That rule by Jesus will ultimately impact your behavior and life choices. (For more on this, see our January 1997 Newsletter, **Orthodoxy vs. Orthopraxy**.)

As you continue to trust your King, the KINGDOM expands in your heart in a wonderful transformational manner. Jesus describes this activity in several parables.

*‘The KINGDOM of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the **smallest of all your seeds**, yet when it **grows**, it is the **largest of garden plants** and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches’ (Matthew 13:31,32).*

*‘The KINGDOM of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it **worked all through the dough**’ (Matthew 13:33).*

As your heart is changed, your behavior will follow. As we'll discuss shortly, the poorer in spirit you become, the more rapidly your heart will change. As Jesus shared, "***The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks***" (Luke 6:45).

- Ask those close to you spiritually (plus a few unbelievers) what usually comes out of your mouth. This will give you good feedback about yourself!

The poorer in spirit you become, the more rapidly your heart will change.

You Need Intense Motivation to Enter Into the KINGDOM

Passivity is unacceptable if you want to experience the KINGDOM our Lord offers. You have to thirst for it and keep on thirsting for it. Persevering desire permeates Jesus's message: "***Keep asking, and it will be given to you; keep seeking, and you will find; keep knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps asking receives; he who keeps seeking finds; and to him who keeps knocking, the door will be opened***" (Matthew 7:7,8).

(For more on the determination you need for KINGDOM living, see "Stipulation 4. Your Salvation Pilgrimage Both Begins and Continues with Your Forceful Conviction and Steadfast Determination", from our Hebraic Article, "***The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation.***")

Poor in Spirit, The Key KINGDOM Virtue

Jesus seated Himself on the rocky hillside bordering the Galilee waters and addressed His disciples:

"***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the KINGDOM of heaven***" (Matthew 5:3). What does it mean for you to be "*poor in spirit*"?

It is a humble, dependent and vulnerable attitude that is evidenced by your utter dependence on God.

You may want to memorize this definition. ALL of the characteristics of living in the KINGDOM are based on being "*poor in spirit.*"

Jesus's emphasis on being "poor in spirit" apperceives Isaiah's words drafted centuries earlier: "***This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word***" (66:2b).

Because of your obedient trust in Jesus, you have a Father/child relationship with God in His KINGDOM. "***For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father"***" (Romans 8:15). Our Father delights in your humble, child-like, dependence on Him!

"ALL of the characteristics of living in the KINGDOM are based on us being "*poor in spirit.*"

Keep reminding yourself:

Being "*poor in spirit*" is key to all else you seek in the KINGDOM!

People who have unresolved bitterness toward parents, and those who entered into ministry at a young age, find it very difficult to obtain this all-important character quality.

- Would you describe your life as “utterly dependent on the Father”?
- Ask three or four who are spiritually close to you to describe your dependence level vs. your self-sufficient tendencies.

People who have unresolved bitterness toward parents, and those who entered into ministry at a young age, find it very difficult to obtain this all-important character quality.

KINGDOM Life Proclaims, “Keep Pressing Forward!”

If you’re “*poor in spirit*”, you’ll repent when you are convicted of your sin. You’ll also **press on to bring glory to our Father**. The “*poor in spirit*” doesn’t dwell on the past, trying to make sense of all the wrongs done to him. Nor does he dwell on past sins he has confessed. Instead, he looks forward to the beauty of God’s miracle-working power and, as a result, sees the KINGDOM advancing in his heart.

So much of “Christian” psychology causes people to dig into their past to find someone to blame for their problems. But blame only leaves people *victimized*, never experiencing the freedom

of KINGDOM living that Jesus offers.

Dwelling on the past reveals your lack of confidence and trust in that which our Lord can do both now and in the future. KINGDOM living beckons you to keep pressing forward, the crux of Jesus’s warning that “*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the KINGDOM of God*” (Luke 9:62). All the beauty you would experience in the KINGDOM is found now and in your future, not in your past.

Paul, a violent persecutor of those who followed Jesus, clearly understood the principle of casting off past regrets: “*Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 3:13,14).

- Have you tasted KINGDOM freedom?
- Do you dwell on your past with regret or blame for others for what has gone wrong in your life? Yes or No?
- What would others say dominates your conversation: your past, your present, or your future?
- What evidence indicates that you are “straining toward what is ahead to win the prize”?

He does not dwell on the past, trying to make sense of all the wrongs done to him, nor does he dwell on past sins he has confessed.

Fruit-bearing, The Sign of a KINGDOM Heart.

KINGDOM truths *are* going forth, and all kinds of people are hearing them. But, it is their *heart's response* which separates those who experience the KINGDOM and bear fruit from those who don't. Only those with ears to hear have aligned their hearts with KINGDOM purposes.

*When anyone **hears the message about the KINGDOM and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path.***

*The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who **hears the word** and at once receives it with joy. But since he has **no root**, he lasts only a **short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.***

*The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who **hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.***

*But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who **hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown***" (Matthew 13:19-23).

Understanding the cost of following Jesus is a lifelong pilgrimage relationship that stirs you to persevere and bear fruit that lasts all along the way.

Bearing fruit is a critical characteristic of those who live in the KINGDOM. A wise person once said, "**Fruit-bearing is the only sign of life.**" Connection to the Vine keeps KINGDOM branches productive. Conversely, fruitlessness indicates separation from the Vine.

"Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8).

"So you will recognize them by their fruit" (Matthew 7:20).

"Therefore, I tell you that the KINGDOM of God will be taken away from you and given to the kind of people that will produce its fruit!" (Matthew 21:43).

Fruit-bearing in service to King Jesus is an ongoing responsibility of ALL His subjects. (See James 2:14-26 for corroboration.)

- Do you have the courage to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what nature of 'soil' *your* heart is?
- Describe how you are *bearing fruit* for the King.
- Ask others who are close to you spiritually to describe how your life bears fruit for the King.

KINGDOM Seeds and Evil Weeds

How carefully we need to distinguish the “seeds” of the KINGDOM from the weeds of the Evil One! The Deceiver lives here on earth and can even lead followers of Jesus astray. Both Peter and Paul issue solemn warnings because we can be deceived:

“Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you — guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Timothy 1:14).

“Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position” (2 Peter 3:17).

Jesus cites an important parable to convey the problem we face as His followers: “Seeds” of the KINGDOM are being spread throughout the world, but evil weeds are being sown at the same time (Please read Matthew 13:24-51). We today need just as much alertness to detect and discard evil weeds as Jesus’ disciples did. Eternal deadly consequences await those who accept the lie of the evil seed:

“So it will be at the close of the age — the angels will go forth and separate the evil people from among the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where they will wail and grind their teeth” (Matthew 13:49,50).

Contemporary pluralism proclaims that all roads lead to heaven. How can we discern the truth from lies? By studying and applying the Bible to our lives. As Jesus beseeched His Father, **“Sanctify**

them by the truth; Your Word is truth” (John 17:17).

If our Lord doesn't find His Father's will being done; if no righteous fruit is being produced — He'll find others who will fulfill His purposes. Jesus warned the “religious” of His day, **“Therefore I tell you that the KINGDOM of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit”** (Matthew 21:43).

- Do you believe that there are consequences for not discerning truth from lies in your own faith practice?
- What are these consequences?
- Do you believe that it's possible to be thrown out of the KINGDOM? Prove your answer from the Bible.

Righteousness Attracts Persecution

Jesus announced that the KINGDOM faithful would suffer and be persecuted.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the KINGDOM of heaven” (Matthew 5:10).

A close bond exists between the “*poor in spirit*” and the persecuted in the KINGDOM. That's because the poor in spirit, utterly dependent on their Father, are prepared to endure anything because of their love for Him — even persecution.

None of us in our flesh likes the

thought of suffering or persecution. But, as the KINGDOM grows in our hearts, such an honor becomes more desirable. ***“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps”*** (1 Peter 2:21). Following King Jesus is no easy matter. ***“We must go through many hardships to enter the KINGDOM of God”*** (Acts 14:22).

The apostle John intended a brotherly identification for his readers to clearly grasp the intensity needed to cling to Jesus. ***“I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and KINGDOM and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus”*** (Revelation 1:9).

John suffered persecution for keeping God’s Word and testifying to Jesus. Our persecuted family in Jesus around the world are suffering for His Name. Can we do any less?

If you want to live in the KINGDOM, you can’t avoid persecution to some degree: ***“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”*** (2 Timothy 3:12). If you’re not suffering or being persecuted (or excluded or mocked or slandered) for your faith by those who live for this world’s esteem and riches, then you aren’t living for the King. It’s that simple!

Denying yourself (or dying to self) is prerequisite for taking up your cross each day. That cross is your particular opportunity to daily decide to put to death the vestiges of your old sin nature. According to KINGDOM realities, ***“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it”*** (Luke 9:24). We must

embrace all that taking up our cross entails. To the ***“poor in spirit”***, however, this is not a burden.

On the other hand, can it be that those who avoid persecution by keeping their mouths shut about their relationship with Jesus will have no part in the KINGDOM? Are these the people Jesus warns about? ***“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels”*** (Luke 9:25,26).

- Describe from the Bible what it means to you to deny yourself and pick up your cross each day.
- How does your definition fit your life? What priority does walking in Jesus’ steps of self-denial and faithfulness have in *your* life?
- Do you readily identify yourself with Jesus among your unbelieving acquaintances? If not, why not?
- What do you think Jesus means when He says, ***“The Son of Man will be ashamed of him...”***?
- Describe your personal reaction to suffering and persecution, whether that which you’ve endured personally or only read about.

- Does the thought of suffering and persecution frighten you? When have you avoided persecution, even discomfort, for Jesus' sake? What will help you change your outlook or response?

If you are not suffering or being persecuted for your faith by those who live for this world, then you are not living for the King. It is that simple!.

KINGDOM Living: A Way of Life Built On Grace

Grace is no bandaid for willful defiance of God's ways. Nor is it license to custom-design your own parameters for "righteous living". Jesus warned those who served the Evil One through false teaching that excuses sin, "*Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the KINGDOM of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the KINGDOM of heaven*" (Matthew 5:19).

Two factors stand out in this passage:

1. The *warning against* breaking the commandments of God and teaching others to do the same.
2. The call to **first practice** yourself what you then teach others.

Our research about the rabbis of the Hebraic Stream of Judaism before the coming of Jesus confirmed both these points: *Their lifestyle was foundational to*

their teachings.

The Hebraic Stream understood God's true meaning of grace:

Grace is both the *desire* and the *power* to do God's will.

KINGDOM life is empowered by God's grace. It enables you to not only live obediently but to demonstrate righteousness by your life pattern. A life that's built on grace and empowerment exhibits the foundations of true discipleship. When Jesus commands us to "**go and make disciples**" (Matthew 28:18-20), He is commanding far more than quoting the Bible.

In the KINGDOM a disciple is someone who follows your way of life — not a robot, but one who knows that wisdom comes from not having to make mistakes! This is why Paul could confidently maintain, "*Therefore I urge you to imitate me*", and, "**Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ**" (1 Corinthians 4:16; 11:1).

Again the pattern is clear: "*And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others*" (2 Timothy 2:2).

The Apostle Paul clearly depended on grace to model for others a life being changed by following Jesus:

*I became a servant of this Good News by **God's gracious gift**, which he gave me through the **operation of his power**. To me, the least important of all God's holy people, was **given this privilege** of announcing to the Gentiles the Good News of the Messiah's unfath-*

omable riches, and of letting everyone see how this secret plan is going to work out” (Ephesians 3:7,8).

We who live in the KINGDOM *need* the same grace from God that Paul depended on. Then by grace, we can demonstrate an empowered lifestyle to others. Dependence on grace brings about a life that glorifies our Lord.

- There are 1,050 commandments in the Newer Testament that we who live in the KINGDOM much teach others. Have you applied these commandments to *your* life by His grace?
- Of whom are you aware who would claim they follow your example in Jesus?
- If you do name someone who recognizes you as a godly role model, ask him or her to describe to you what they see in your life that’s worth emulating.
- Do their words describe you as someone who is dependent on grace and living in God’s power?

A life that’s built on grace and empowerment exhibits the foundations of true discipleship... In the KINGDOM a disciple is someone who follows your way of life.

The Minimum Standard of Righteousness For God’s KINGDOM

You can never earn points on a tally sheet to add to the righteousness you have in Jesus. Certain ones among the Jewish religious leaders tried that tactic by adding rules to every law — a heavy load that no one could bear. That’s why Jesus called instead for obedient trust that flowed from a relationship with Him. He castigated the rule-mongers:

“For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the KINGDOM of heaven” (Matthew 5:20).

As a minimum, our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees, according to Jesus. He then describes the religious motivation and practice of the Pharisees, pointing out that religion without relationship focuses on slavery to the impossible. (Read Matthew 23:13-28.)

Before you consider instructing others, are you sure that you won’t be confronted by our Lord for shutting off the KINGDOM? *Do you* speak from a religious point of view, or *do you* represent the KINGDOM as a way of life? *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the KINGDOM of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to” (v. 13).*

No matter how well-meaning they are, people who peddle rule-keeping, religious practices and forms point their listeners to hell. *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are” (v. 15)*

Jesus's worst criticism of the Pharisees is that their lifestyle didn't match their teachings. He insulted them on purpose, revealing their true identity as "hypocrites!"

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean...In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness (vv. 25-28).

Many religious leaders of Jesus' time also sought recognition. They never perceived themselves as either servants to God or servants to the people of God. How dangerous for those in the public eye who have never learned to be "poor in spirit"!

"Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets" (Luke 20:46).

- Ask those spiritually close to you whether you speak from a KINGDOM perspective or from a religious point of view when you discuss spiritual matters.
- Your *motives* will always be scrutinized by our Lord. Is yours like His, or is it self-serving? Does your walk match your talk? Ask others what they think.

Love In Action, The Motivation of the KINGDOM

Before you continue, please read "Stipulation 2. Your Salvation Pilgrimage both begins *and* continues with your *agape* (ahav) Love", from our Hebraic article, ***"The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation"***. This will clarify our definition of loving both God and one another.

When we are commanded to "love our neighbor", we are given an important responsibility that affirms our position in the KINGDOM. Love must be put into action for it to be real. Jesus taught the parable of the ***"Good Samaritan"*** in response to being questioned about how to inherit eternal life. (See Luke 10:25-37.)

The Samaritan is a man whose actions of love cause him to go "*the second mile*". In His conclusion, Jesus commands all of us, ***"Go and do likewise."***

Meeting the Seven Needs of Others

Our book, ***Demolishing Strongholds***, (a free download at our website), addresses the seven needs God instilled in every human being. These needs are a compelling force in each person. In other words, needs *need to be met!*

Each person is made in the image of God, and each has a need for:

- Dignity
- Authority
- Blessing & Provision
- Security
- Purpose & Meaning
- Freedom & Boundary
- Intimate Love & Companionship

[Please see Chapter 1 of *Demolishing Strongholds* for an in-depth discussion of these needs.]

Our Lord intends that each of us in His KINGDOM be His instruments to meet the seven needs in others in ways that He intended. This goal causes us to become personally concerned with others, so that we can reflect the love of Jesus to them.

Until people have their needs met within the will of God, the potential for strongholds to form (or re-form) is very great. Helping to meet the needs of those around us is one way we can express our love for them. This is particularly important for married people, and for others who share close fellowship.

You are “Jesus with skin on” when you bless the people to whom you reach out to help meet their needs. You also affirm our Lord’s faithfulness to meet needs the way He intended. This is vital because one source of strongholds in people comes from trying to meet one or more of their God-given needs *apart* from God’s will. Your loving help, in fact, helps them in more ways than they can imagine!

- How attuned are you to the needs of those around you? Ask them for feedback regarding your sensitivity and responsiveness.

Our Lord intends that each of us in His KINGDOM be His instruments to meet the seven needs in others in ways that He intended.

Love-In-Action: Our Brother’s Keeper

Our Lord approached Cain to ask him the whereabouts of Abel. (Obviously, God was well-aware. But He was offering the first murderer the chance to confess and repent before Him and find forgiveness.)

Cain, however, replied, “*Am I my brother’s guardian?*” (Genesis 4:9). For Cain and for all of us, the overwhelming evidence of Scripture is YES, we *are* our brother’s and sister’s guardian!

KINGDOM love is seen in action. Pause now to read James 2:14-26. Note the apostle’s firm conviction that love-in-action verifies our faith: “*In the same way, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead... You see that his faith and his actions were **working together**, and his faith was **made complete by what he did*****” (James 2:17,22).

The minimum criterion our Lord requires in our love for others is this: “*So in everything, **do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets***” (Matthew 7:12). To treat others as you would want to be treated is acceptable. In fact, as you go through the Hebrew Scriptures in which we find the Law and the Prophets, you find this principle as an underpinning.

Yet Jesus expands this requirement by setting an example for those who love as He loves in His KINGDOM. True love is defined: “*Greater love has no one than this, that he **lay down his life for his friends***” (John 15:13). Only if you are “*poor in spirit*”, filled with the motivation of the King, can you willingly lay down your life to benefit others.

KINGDOM love isn’t some warm fuzzy feeling. It calls for action, action which can likely involve your possessions. If you have something and someone needs it, you are responsible to help

that person. *“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”* (1 John 3:17).

Your welcome at the Judgment Throne depends on your loving action to aid those who can never pay you back. Does that sound extreme? Read Matthew 25:34-40 with that thought in mind. For the *“poor in spirit”*, loving action toward whoever needs it is a wonderful expression of grateful love for Jesus. Don’t you long to be among those praised by Jesus?

“I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

Love-in-action is the supreme expression of KINGDOM living. This calls for active pursuit of your heart as your *way of life*. And, because love-in-action validates the genuineness of your trust, it’s also the criterion on which you will be judged. Paul tells us plainly, *“For in Christ Jesus... the only thing that counts is trust expressing itself through love”* (Galatians 5:6).

- KINGDOM love is an observable quality in our daily lives. How do you demonstrate love for others?
- How can you increase your love-in-action?
- Are you ever fearful that God may ask you to give something away something that’s precious to you?

- What possession(s) are most dear to you? Could you be open-handed with any of them?

Love-in-action is the supreme expression of KINGDOM living.

Prayer in the KINGDOM Is Intimate Communication With Our Father

The disciples of Jesus were very familiar with prayer. It was something they did several times a day at set times with generally set words.

But in Jesus they found an intimacy of communicating with the Father. That was something they yearned for. Jesus told them to approach God in humble trust:

‘Our Father in heaven! May your Name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us the food we need today. Forgive us what we have done wrong, as we too have forgiven those who have wronged us. And do not lead us into hard testing, but keep us safe from the Evil One. For kingship, power and glory are yours forever (Matthew 6:9-13).

This prayer has so often become a formula, memorized words of petition that leave no footprints of real thanks in the heart. Yet, in this prayer our Lord was giving us the proper focus of priority and attitude we need as we approach our Father:

- Glorifying His Name;

- Longing to see His KINGDOM;
- Expressing our total dependence on Him;
- And affirming that we hold nothing in our hearts against any person. This is a key realization — each person is made in His image, and Jesus died for each one. (We expand on this in “Stipulation 5, Your Salvation Pilgrimage Both Begins *and* Continues with You Forgiving Others”, in the Hebraic Article, “*The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*”.)

Note the direction Jesus points those in His KINGDOM: to seek our Father for every need. Keep in mind that our *prayer* affirms our dependence. When our will is aligned with His, He promises this: “*I will do whatever you ask in my name [which represents His authority, His power and His Kingship] so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it*” (John 14:13,14).

Yet so many prayers never rise beyond the ceiling. What keeps them from being heard? Approaching God with unrepentant sin in the heart. And our Father is true to His Word. “*For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil*” (1 Peter 3:12; see also 1 John 1:9, James 5:16). Our Father *won't even look* at those who erroneously think He will respond while they're intent on continuing in sin.

How *shouldn't* we pray?

“*And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.*

But when you pray, go into your

room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Matthew 6:5-8).

Don't pray for show in front of others, and don't pray using prayer formulas or memorized chants. Your Father wants, first of all, intimate communication *with you* alone. Then your private communication with our Lord will enrich your prayer times with your spouse, your children and your extended family in Jesus. But intimate communication *starts* with you and Him alone in your heart.

The hallmark of your relationship with our Father is ***love-based intimacy***. He's pursuing your humble, vulnerable dependence on Him. To the “*poor in spirit*” belong His KINGDOM.

- Describe your prayer life.
- Describe the prayer life your Father desires with you.
- If they are different, what do you need to do to change?

“For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer”

Recognizing the KINGDOM's Advance

We are told that, “*Jesus went about all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and weakness*” (Matthew 9:35). As He shared the Good News of the KINGDOM with all who would listen, *signs* accompanied Him. Signs *point the way* to a specific goal, or offer *necessary details* for your safety.

Therefore, we who are seeking His KINGDOM need to ask ourselves some questions:

- Are there *still signs today* that the KINGDOM has come to us?

The signs that accompanied Jesus are intended to accompany those in His KINGDOM for all time!

- Is the ministry work of Jesus still a ministry work for all of His followers today? Does Isaiah's prophetic passage below not only apply to Jesus, but to all who follow Him?

The prophetic ministry work that pointed to the coming of Jesus in Isaiah 61:1 is for all who follow Him:

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.”

When Jesus “*called his twelve disciples to him and gave them **authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness***” (Matthew 10:1), He was extending that authority to *all* who live in His KINGDOM for *all time*. Those who want to experience the KINGDOM need to trust and put the authority of His Name *into practice*.

And when Jesus joyfully declares, “*Yes, indeed! I tell you that whoever trusts in me will also **do the works I do!** Indeed, he will do greater ones, because I am going to the Father*” (John 14:12), He is speaking to us today. Yes, He is!

If we believe this, then why don't we see this happening? Where are the promised “*greater works*” that testify to trusting Jesus?

Perhaps you can understand the pain in Jesus' heart when He visited His home town: “*And he [Jesus] did not do many miracles there because of **their lack of trust***” (Matthew 13:58). So why aren't we seeing glorious works in our midst that bring praise to Jesus? Our *own* lack of faith hinders us from confidently doing the *greater miracles* our Lord has promised those who live in the KINGDOM.

The miraculous is one way that God confirms who are really His, and separates the talkers from the walkers: “*My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but **with a demonstration of the Spirit's power...** For the KINGDOM of God is not a matter of talk **but of power***” (1 Corinthians 2:4; 4:20). Is our Lord with us any less than He was with Paul? No! We only need to exercise the same trust as that faithful apostle did.

Don't leave this section about recognizing the KINGDOM's advance with-

out being burdened to see it happen in your own life. Don't let this be said of you: *"They did not do many miracles because of their lack of trust."* Our trust is our visible expression that we are indeed *"poor in spirit."*

- Do you truly believe that Jesus's promises to do greater miracles applies to His followers today?
- If you do believe this, have you seen the miraculous happen in response to your prayers?
- If you haven't, can it be that you need to cry out to Him to help you become *"poor in spirit"*?

Same Spirit, Different Gifts and Call

Each follower of Jesus has been given unique Spirit empowerment in the KINGDOM. And Jesus told His disciples that not everyone has the same call. Using marriage as an example of His prerogative to orchestrate different life paths, Jesus assured His disciples, *"For there are different reasons why men do not marry — some because they were born without the desire, some because they have been castrated, and some because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever can grasp this, let him do so"* (Matthew 19:12).

Paul expands this teaching on the unique calling and empowerment of each follower by relating his own state to the believers in Corinth: *"I wish that all men were as I am [celibate, apostle and*

evangelist]. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that" (1 Corinthians 7:7).

Because understanding the reality of spiritual empowerment was so necessary in order to serve God's purposes, Paul further elaborates on this subject for His family in Jesus in Rome:

But we have gifts that differ and which are meant to be used according to the grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, use it to the extent of your trust; if it is serving, use it to serve; if you are a teacher, use your gift in teaching; if you are a counselor, use your gift to comfort and exhort; if you are someone who gives, do it simply and generously; if you are in a position of leadership, lead with diligence and zeal; if you are one who does acts of mercy, do them cheerfully (Romans 12:6-8; see also 1 Corinthians chapters 12 and 14 for more on spiritual gifting.)

All spiritual gifts and empowerments are given by the Spirit in order that a Jesus follower may bless others, deepening their service to their King as they serve one another. Paul points to the reason for the Spirit's empowerment: *"Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the [called out ones]"* (1 Corinthians 14:12b). Again, looking to the needs and interests of others calls for the humility of heart that only one who is *"poor in spirit"* has grown.

(See our book, *"God's Instruments For War"*, a free download from our website) for more on the communal interconnectedness of spiritual gifts.)

KINGDOM Power: *Delivering Others From Demonic Captivity*

We discussed delivering *yourself* from demonic strongholds in the last Lifebyte, ***When Death is Good***. Yet, KINGDOM people also have the responsibility to help others walk in freedom.

With the initiation of Jesus' ministry as recounted in the gospels, a considerable increase in demonic activity shows up. The Newer Testament makes very clear that deliverance from demonic oppression is a work of those who would live in the KINGDOM:

*“So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and **driving out demons**”* (Mark 1:39)

*“He appointed twelve — designating them apostles — that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have **authority to drive out demons**”* (Mark 3:14,15).

And because the disciples trusted His power at work through them, *“They **drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them**”* (Mark 6:13).

Is there any less demonic activity today than when Jesus sent His disciples out? If you are free from demonic influence yourself, you'll easily recognize strongholds at work in others. The issue is, will you help free them in the Name of Jesus by testifying to His loving power and encouraging them to cast down the agitating servants of Satan?

- Have you ever encouraged someone to trust in

the authority of the Name of Jesus to evict unclean spirits that are hindering their spiritual walk?

- If not, what has deterred you?

If you are free from demonic influence yourself, you'll easily recognize the work of strongholds in others.

KINGDOM Leadership In Your Home and Faith Community

Leadership in the KINGDOM emanates from humility and a heart to serve. These two virtues are the opposite of leadership traits prized by world systems! One of the most profound reversals of human rationale in the teachings of Jesus is found as He uses *children* to describe the character of those who can enter His KINGDOM and lead.

For men in particular, especially those who have ministered within Nicolaitanism, the leadership criteria of childlikeness is hard to embrace. The transition from being in charge and in control to being humbly faceless and servant-hearted is impossible if you're not ***“poor in spirit”***.

Even the disciples perceived leadership as something to be grasped. They asked Jesus,

*‘Who is **the greatest** in the KINGDOM of heaven?’ He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he*

said: *'I tell you the truth, unless you **change and become like little children**, you will **never enter the KINGDOM of heaven**. Therefore, whoever **humbles himself** like this child is the **greatest in the KINGDOM of heaven**'* (Matthew 18:1-4).

This lesson was one that bore repeating, as the world's way was so unlike KINGDOM leadership. (The same misperception permeates religious systems today.) Jesus wanted to make sure the distinction was clear:

*You know that those who are **regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them**, and their high officials **exercise authority over them**. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to **become great among you must be your servant**, and whoever wants to **be first must be slave of all*** (Mark 10: 42-44).

Wow! These are difficult words to accept — becoming like a child, becoming a servant and slave for others. Can you see how your humble, utter dependence when you're "*poor in spirit*" enables this necessary transition to occur in your heart?

There is no other option, either for those in the KINGDOM or for those who would lead. Paul states succinctly, "**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves**" (Philippians 2:3).

Humility is the foundational thought when Paul commands husbands to *agape* love their wives (Ephesians 5:22-32). To love a woman with the love that only the Holy Spirit can give can only be accomplished by a man who is dead and resurrected — a husband who is "*poor in spirit*."

Peter as well directs husbands to

regard their wives in a manner that requires poverty of spirit:

*You husbands, likewise, conduct your married lives **with understanding**. Although your wife may be weaker physically, you should **respect her as a fellow-heir of the gift of Life**. If you don't, your prayers will be blocked" 1 Peter 3:7*

Spirit-empowered leadership in God's faith communities can only be fulfilled by men who have experienced years of dying to self, and have undergone the resurrections that repentance and confession bring. These men are the biblical elders (Hebrew *zaken*, gray-bearded) whom our Father uses to represent His heart of compassion in pastoring His flocks. (See our book *Pastoring By Elders*, a free download at our website, to explore this idea at length).

Very few men have died sufficiently before they turn fifty. Personal goals, responsibilities and concerns generally occupy men in their earlier years. In most cases our Lord uses a man's forties as a season of intense dying. The resurrection lessons he learns during this painful period equip him to later be the *zaken*, the biblical elder our Father is recruiting to represent Him to His children.

- Describe an individual who is actually leading you in your faith pilgrimage:
- Does the character of this person differ from the character of leadership that Jesus calls for? In what ways?

Very few men have died sufficiently before they turn fifty. In most cases our Lord uses a man's forties as a season of intense dying.

A Warning: *Those in the KINGDOM are Susceptible to Captivity*

Part of KINGDOM requires you to guard yourself against being entrapped by Satan. The most common form of captivity is to entice you to “become religious” again — to be snared in the net of religious form and practice.

In the passages below, keep in mind that Paul is writing to *followers of Jesus*, and to those who *thought* they were:

“Some have in fact *already turned away to follow Satan*” (1 Timothy 5:15).

“and do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27).

“and 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).

If you aren't endeavoring to live in His KINGDOM by our Lord's standards, you WILL be taken captive.

And worst of all, those who are taken captive will inevitably turn against people who stay true to Jesus: **“At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other” (Matthew 24:10).** The greatest suffering for the followers of Jesus in the Last Days will come at the hands of family and friends who once enjoyed fellowship with them.

- Is your faith practice wrapped securely around a relationship with our Lord? Or, is it hidden in crowds, practicing religious forms and rituals?

- An old worship song declares, “Though none go with me, still I will follow.” Does this REALLY apply to your faith walk?

The most common form of captivity is to entice you to “become religious” again — ensnared in the net of religious form and practice.

Trust In Wealth Shatters KINGDOM Living

The net of religion is only one of many nets set to trap the spiritually lazy. Dependence on personal wealth and ability nets many others. What is it about money that inspires such grave warnings in the Bible? Listen to Jesus:

***I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the KINGDOM of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God* (Matthew 19:23, 24).**

The love for money, and the never-satiated quest for more of what it can buy, is a slippery slope, especially if you think it will bring you security, prestige or acceptance by others. The consuming drive for the things money can purchase can slide you right off the KINGDOM

path. Paul warns, **“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”** (1 Timothy 6:10).

It isn't the money in itself. Money is necessary to provide for ourselves. No, the real pit is when you *trust* in your wealth. If you put your trust in what you *have*, you nullify your utter dependence on our Father.

This is why we're cautioned, **“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”** (Hebrews 13:5). If you doubt the words, **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,”** you'll wander away from the KINGDOM. That reasoning is saying that God can't be trusted.

You're diminishing God's character by your doubt. Ongoing trust in God is one of the stipulations for life in the KINGDOM. (See “Stipulation 3, Your Salvation Pilgrimage both begins and Continues with your Obedient Trust”, under Hebraic Articles, **“The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation”**.)

Never lose sight of KINGDOM priorities. Absolute confidence in our Father as Provider is your only sure security here on earth!

Seek his KINGDOM and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the KINGDOM. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth

destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Luke 12:31-34).

“Our trust is our visible expression that we are *“poor in spirit.”*”

Only a transformed heart can motivate you to hold all you own with open hands to please your Father. As Jim Elliot, a young man who gave his all as a martyr for Jesus wrote, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”

There is no other standard for KINGDOM living. What you treasure is where you place your devotion. Our God competes with no one or nothing in the form of idolatry. Perhaps those in reduced circumstances are less distracted by all that money can buy. *“Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are **poor in the eyes of the world** to be rich in faith and to inherit the KINGDOM he promised those **who love him?**”* (James 2:5).

(Our September, 2004 Newsletter, **Lesson From the Feasts**, discusses removing idols from our lives).

- Don't be slack in scrutinizing your life as to your level of trust in God and your trust in money. Whom or what do you treasure?
- Would you be devastated if you lost all your worldly goods and personal belongings?

- Ask 3 or 4 others who are close to you spiritually what they believe you treasure. Do you agree with their evaluation?

When people put their trust in what they have, they nullify their utter dependency on our Father.

True Worshippers Reverence God in the KINGDOM

Worship comprises far more than praise songs and hymns. It's the joyful and exuberant expression of a humble heart. Can you see how much easier it is for a person who is *humble, and utterly dependent on the Father* to worship Him, than for one who is not? Gratefulness even in times of trial permeates the heart of a KINGDOM worshipper.

When you worship with others, don't concern yourself with the quality of your voice. Focus on whether our Father is pleased with your heart. *"Therefore, since we are receiving a KINGDOM that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire"* (Hebrews 12:28,29).

Again, the entire consideration of worship in the KINGDOM is whether our Father is pleased with our heart's expression. Jesus presented us with the criteria that matter to His Father: *"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:23,24).

Isn't it wonderful to know that our Father is seeking your worship? A spirit that's aligned with His brings Him great joy!

Consider this:

If the Bible warns that our Father doesn't hear the *prayers* of the unrepentant, do you think He accepts their *worship*? Remember, unrepentance severs fellowship until that person confesses his or her sin. (See 1 John 1:9.)

- Are you a worshipper according to our Father's standards?
- If not, what do you need to change?

If the Bible warns that our Father doesn't hear the *prayers* of the unrepentant, do you think He accepts their *worship*?

The Good News of the KINGDOM Will Reach the Ends of the Earth

Jesus offered a simple yet profound promise: *"And this gospel of the KINGDOM will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"* (Matthew 24:14).

If you want to experience the KINGDOM in your heart, you have a divine task set before you: to take what is in your heart and share it with those you encounter. Remember, **you** once lived in darkness and were an object of God's wrath. Now, you are His child, *"called out"* to live in the KINGDOM of light.

All of the subjects of the KINGDOM live to see it expanded in the hearts of all mankind. Their love for their Father compels them to want others to live for King Jesus. We are a people with a purpose!

*But you are a **chosen people**, a royal **priesthood**, a holy **nation**, a people **belonging to God**, that you may **declare the praises** of him who **called you out of darkness into his wonderful light** (1 Peter 2:9).*

A wonderful and awesome thing was accomplished on your behalf to enable you to experience His KINGDOM. Paul sums up your responsibility to your KING — a privilege reserved for those who have been rescued from darkness to serve our King:

*“And we pray this in order that you may live a life **worthy of the Lord** and*

- may **please him in every way**;*
- **bearing fruit** in every good work,*
- **growing** in the knowledge of God,*
- **being strengthened** with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have **great endurance and patience**,*
- and **joyfully giving thanks** to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the KINGDOM of light.*

*For he has **rescued us** from the dominion of darkness and **brought us into** the KINGDOM of the Son he loves, in whom we have **redemption**, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:10-14).*

And, we want to add:

*“For **you were once darkness**, but **now you are light in the Lord**. **Live as children of light**” (Ephesians 5:8).*

All of the subjects of the KINGDOM live to see it expanded in the hearts of all mankind. Their love for their Father compels them to want others to live for King Jesus.

Final words of exhortation

There is so much more that we could include concerning KINGDOM living. We’ve presented only some of the foundational considerations for you to pray into your own life. Remember, the KINGDOM belongs to the **“poor in spirit”** — a condition of your *heart*.

To grow in KINGDOM living, you must rid yourself of ALL the religious thinking and motivation which that principality imparted into your mind. Religious thinking will always keep you feeling distanced from God, having to earn something He has already freely given you.

**No one can practice religion and experience the “KINGDOM”.
They have nothing in common!**

We who have accepted the true Gospel and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit are the ones our Lord has called out to live in the KINGDOM He is establishing. We are the **called-out ones** our Lord is building up to be His living stones, His royal priesthood.

The heart motivation of the KINGDOM is to *live daily* to glorify King Jesus. The sooner you acquire the KINGDOM in your heart, the sooner your mouth and actions will reflect that you truly are in His KINGDOM.

**KINGDOM life is truly
life in the Spirit.**