

TODAY!

What Would Jesus Be Doing If He Were You?

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

Insight 14. Collectively Becoming The Family Of Lord Jesus (Part 3)

“Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well”

(Matthew 6:33).

Our workbook, *Demolishing Strongholds* (a free download at our website), discusses from a scriptural viewpoint the **seven needs** which God has created in each of us to be fulfilled His way:

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

These seven needs have both “vertical” and “horizontal” dimensions to them. For example, •when you *collectively* seek our Lord’s kingdom and His righteousness with your family and faith family, you are meeting the greatest source for purpose and meaning in your lives. •When you discover and begin to walk in His purposes in obedient trust, you find that His blessing and provision to meet those purposes are available to you as well. •When you and those who are journeying with you pursue His Kingdom as a life priority, intimate love and companionship flourishes. •When you carry out your Father’s will *His way* rather than according to your own fleshly inclinations or the way everyone else is living, you experience His freedom and boundary. •All this adds up to dignity and security as you individually and collectively experience how wonderfully precious you are

to our Lord as your Father’s child.

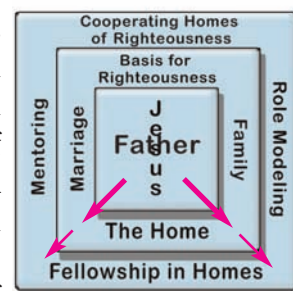
Authentic biblical fellowship is founded on our Lord Jesus’ purpose and intent that each of His followers seek His Kingdom and His righteousness. His foundation of *love* contains both “vertical” and “horizontal” dimensions:

“ [vertically] *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*’; and, [horizontally] *‘Love your neighbor as yourself’*” (Luke 10:27).

‘Loving your neighbor as yourself’ is the basis to **relational load-bearing**. It’s a heartfelt commitment to others to lovingly and willingly be inconvenienced by them, suffering with them and alongside them when necessary.

You’ll find that as individualistic *self*-oriented motives fade in your fellowship family, *relational load-bearing* increases. That’s how you fulfill our Lord’s command to His followers: “A **new command** I give you: **Love one another**. As I have loved you, so you **must love one another**” (John 13:34). Living out His command of love-in-action means that the people within your home fellowship family share a *relational responsibility* both to God and to one another that’s far deeper than the casual approach of most home gatherings today. You can see that you’ll need to **reprioritize your relationships**

The Essential Relational Priorities of Kingdom Living



and **realign your purposes for fellowship** according to the biblical pattern.

Your **home** is the primary place to enact the love Jesus commands. Next, your **home fellowship family** provides relational load-bearing to both individuals and family units as *extended spiritual family*. It's a total, 24/7 commitment to each other in which you help meet the *seven God-given needs* of each other out of love for your Lord and for one another. This is what takes place when you work together as a Spirit-filled family of brothers and sisters in Jesus the way He desires:

1. **Your fellowship** with others must *spur you on to glorify our Father* through praise, worship, and a lifestyle that yields glorifying testimony of praise to Him. [See Matthew 5:13-16.]
2. **Your fellowship** with one another should result in *progressive growth in Christlike character* in each person as you walk in the scriptural "one-anothers." [See 1Corinthians 11:1; Philippians. 2:5-11.]
3. **Your fellowship** provides the corrective/confrontational means to *help each other remain in righteousness and enter the narrow gate*. [See 1Thessalonians 5:12; 2Timothy 4:2; also our book, *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation*, a free download.]
4. **Your fellowship** must strive to *extend the Kingdom of God on earth*, pursuing the lost so they too may enter Covenant with our Father in union with Jesus by His Spirit. [See Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8.]

What does it take for an extended spiritual family to provide relational load-bearing as brothers and sisters within the context of each family and home? This one facet alone of love-motivated *relational responsibility* will mean significant change in your priorities! Each of you who are part of an extended spiritu-

al family must help develop the depth of trust where anyone in the family can seek spiritual guidance and/or emotional support grounded in the love of Jesus.

Each person brings a different experience, history, gifting and maturity into a fellowship family group. That's why **discussion** together is so important:

- (1). To clarify each person's understanding of their purpose and intent for being in relationship with others as extended spiritual family.
- (2). To provide loving undergirding of each other in time of need and in victories too.

The "need" aspect may not always be tangible. It may mean helping someone through a trying time in their life. Or, "need" may be the willingness to warn or rebuke a person when they're slipping into sin or have already given in to it.

Relational Load-bearing

Bearing The Load With Those Who Suffer

One of the loneliest places on earth is in a fellowship family that should be bearing each other's needs but instead ignores their hurt and leaves them feeling alone.

"Now if we are children, then we are heirs— heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory" (Romans 8:17).

No one enjoys suffering. But accepting our Father's Covenant in union with Christ means we *will* suffer. It's part of our Father's refining plan of transformation! Jesus suffered. Should our Father treat His children any differently by withholding that which helps to conform us to His Son's image? *"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the Author of their salvation perfect through suffering"* (Hebrews 2:10).

You might ask, why should we suffer?

Wasn't the suffering of Jesus enough? Our Father explains why suffering is so essential in our pilgrimage: "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that **suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us**" (Romans 5:3-5). Hope is the lifeline that keeps us focused on the narrow gate and a heavenly welcome. Satan offers us pleasure, then despair. Our Father offers us suffering, then hope—the *confidence of His love for us*.

It'd be so simple if we could just bask in our Father's care here on earth and then be zapped up into heaven before any trials come our way. But that notion just does not fly scripturally, nor does it bring honor to the Father Who sustains our beleaguered brothers and sisters in

other lands who are being persecuted with harsh torture and the loss of all things for the sake of Christ.

We who love Jesus and love His own are called to bear the load with those who suffer:

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15).

- How do you respond when you encounter people who are suffering?
- What character transformation have you undergone as a result of a personal season of trial or suffering?
- How often do you pray for our suffering family in Jesus who are being persecuted around the world? When did you last share your own resources with organizations that help meet their needs and bring them comfort and encouragement?

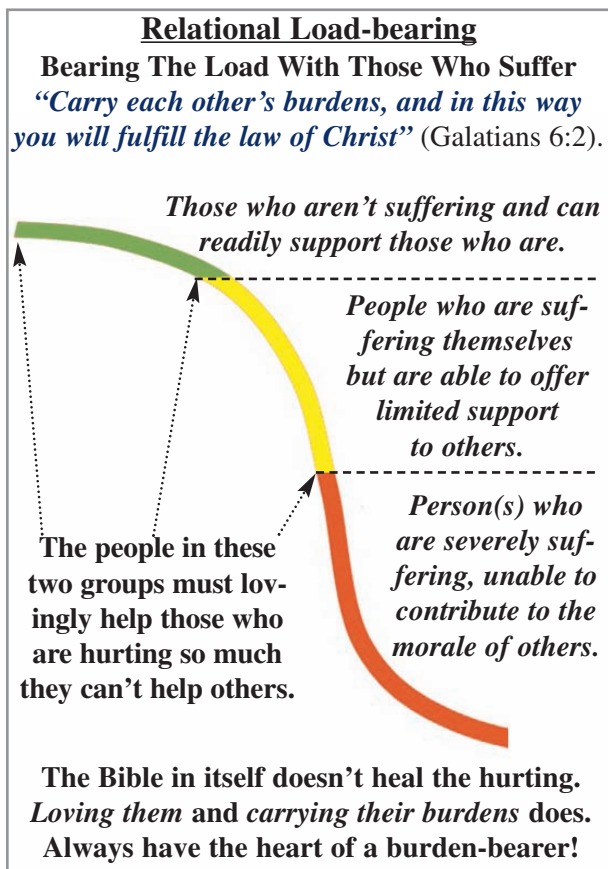
Relational Load-bearing

Collectively Seeking His Righteousness

"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 [who live unrepentantly]" (1Peter 3:12; also Psalms 34:15; Proverbs 15:29).

Our Hebraic forefathers in the faith were impacted by a truth that's been lost to most in Christianity today: Ongoing sin and the failure to repent doesn't just affect a guilty individual. Within a home fellowship family, unrepentance—the failure of even one person to confess their sin—will hinder the prayers of everyone in the fellowship family from being answered. **Unconfessed sin cuts off the "vertical" dimension of answered prayer for everyone in the home fellowship.**

Because of their *communal awareness as extended spiritual family*, early followers



of Jesus were deeply concerned with more than just individually living righteously. As a relationally load-bearing body they understood their need for *communal righteousness*. They understood themselves to be *mishpachah* [mish-puh-KAH], extended family who by grace are responsible for one another as brothers and sisters who fellowship in repentant righteousness.

The Hebrew Scriptures show that one person's sin indeed brought severe consequences to other people:

- God prevented the *entire nation of Israel* from conquering the city of Ai because of the hidden sin of one man, Achan (see Joshua 7).
- In disobedience David numbered his troops and *thousands of Israelites* died of plague because of it (1Chronicles 21).
- Korah's rebellion resulted in the death of his *entire family* (Numbers 16) as well as the families of the other instigators.

There was a collective responsibility when one individual sinned.

That our Lord Jesus upholds this same standard of righteousness for His called-out ones is clearly spelled out in Matthew

18:15-17 in confronting an unrepentant sinner: *"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."* Paul commanded the followers of Jesus in Corinth to remove the unrighteous fornicator: *"Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord"* (1Corinthians 5:5).

The Bible reiterates that unrepentance by one person brings terrible consequences on the heads of others. In God's sight you *are* your brother's or sister's keepers—both in your home and your home fellowship! And a congregation is too big for the personal accountability that's needed to one-another as spiritual family.

Relational Load-bearing

Seeking His Righteousness—*Triaging*

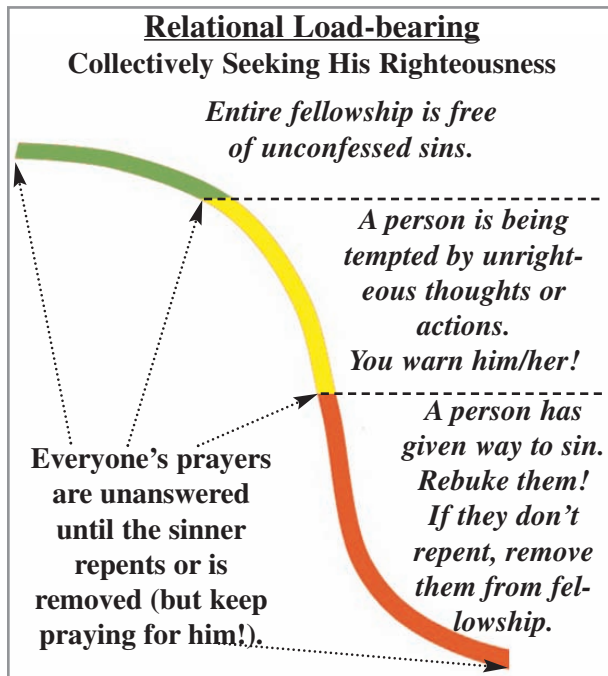
In order to uphold communal righteousness by the grace of our Lord, you must exercise *spiritual triage* [TREE-ahzh]. Triage is a medical term which sorts people into one of three categories:

1. those who will live even if they receive no care.
2. those who will live *if* they receive prompt, appropriate intervention.
3. those who are terminal no matter what you do.

Below you'll see the category criteria of discernment in spiritual triage. You need *Holy Spirit guidance* about an individual and his situation, as well as the confirmation of two or three if the person refuses to repent.

Level 1 Spiritually Healthy

These are repentant people who will go on following Jesus in loving, obedient trust. They are fruitfully functioning as they serve His purposes and live repen-



Restoration Ministries International

Sharing the Hebraic Foundations of the Earliest Followers of Jesus
Preparing Today's Followers of Jesus to Do Their Part in His Kingdom

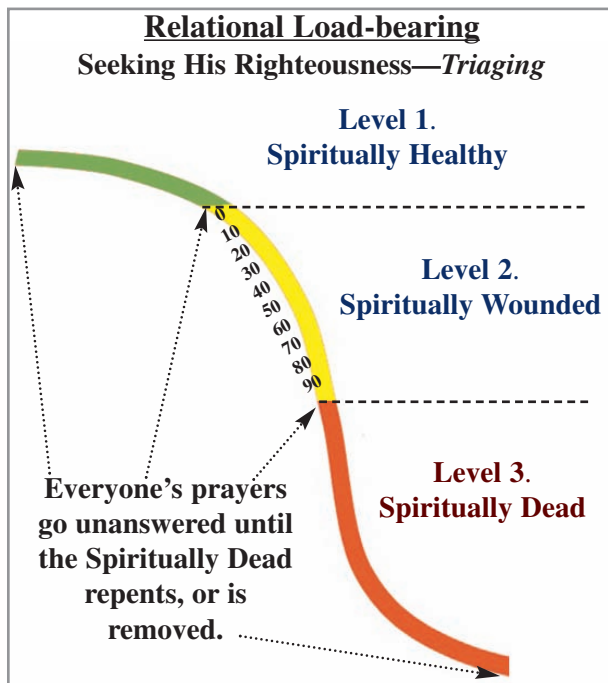
tantly (Matthew 3:8; John 15:2-8,16).

Level 2 Spiritually Wounded

These are encountering temptation which they're finding hard to resist. They need prompt attention and support by load-bearers who genuinely care for them. If wise counsel or warning is *given, received* and *acted on*, their probability of becoming *Spiritually Healthy* increases.

This Level is further subdivided using a scale of 0 to 90 (diagram below). Those with numbers nearer "0" aren't deeply enmeshed in temptation, and they'll normally respond to *encouragement* and *direction* as you point them toward obedient trust in the Lord Who loves them. Those nearer "90" are being severely tempted and finding it almost impossible to resist.

We've found that the higher the number in Level 2, the more these individuals have repeatedly given in to temptation in the past. They normally need to be warned with a sharp rebuke to stop their downward progression. The rebuke can act like shock "paddles" on a dying cardiac patient.



It's important that those who accept a rebuke are given specific biblical direction to follow and have ongoing personal accountability to someone who's walking alongside them with authentic love. This way they can grow in spiritual health and rediscover the grace of what a godly walk in their Lord looks like as His Spirit works.

Call it "intensive care" for a period of time. Remember, they're near spiritual death! They need to *turn away from their sin* and *receive the loving forgiveness* that only Jesus can bring.

Level 3 Spiritually Dead

Those who are spiritually dead may show a veneer of "Christianity," but they enjoy their sin too much to turn from it. They may like belonging to a fellowship group for purely social reasons or for the attention they crave. The critical point is this: they have NO desire to live righteously for Christ and uphold His reputation.

They've chosen to live unrepentantly for so long that Satan has a foothold in their lives. The Adversary will try to slip the unrepentant into your fellowship family for two purposes:

- to *wear down* healthy followers of Jesus as they devote more and more attention to them;
- or to *entice others* into spiritual despair or sin in their struggle to press on in Jesus.

If you fail to prayerfully discern the spiritual health of those in your extended spiritual family, Satan will send you all the *Level 3 Spiritually Dead* people he can. Most will appear needy. We've found over the years that many will have experienced divorce and are still angry about it. Behind their seeming need, many hide a sin of bitterness. And as they recount their past, many portray themselves as innocent, blameless victims.

Those who are plagued by bitterness

and refuse to renounce that grim burden will in time defile others in your faith community: *“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many”* (Hebrews 12:15).

Defiled relationships and unanswered prayer are the poisonous fruit of a bitter person taking part in your fellowship family.

The *grace of God* is sufficient for a person to choose to forgive as He calls for. Missing that grace evidences their lack of appreciation for the preciousness of Jesus’ shed blood so they could be forgiven. Those bitter tentacles can reach into the lives of a fellowship family to cause grievous trouble in the whole flock, such as strife and division and backbiting.

The KINGDOM *Jesus is building* in the hearts of His followers requires personal and communal righteousness for true fellowship to exist. Unrepentance halts genuine fellowship!

Please consider from God’s perspective of love, truth and holiness those you fellowship with. A fellowship that’s filled with deceived **spiritual degenerates** has many indicators: •People who think too much of themselves, or are busy running from one “Christian” venue to the next. •People who have never dealt with their bitterness or unforgiveness, and are often angry. •Individuals who compromise



Our Experience

Ponder this anecdote about our sheep flock which was used by Mike when he counseled religious leaders: A local 4-H’er offered us his ewe. She was a good-looking sheep and we gratefully added her to our flock. Not too long after, we noticed she was limping. Close inspection revealed the shepherd’s bane: foot rot. A highly contagious affliction, foot rot destroys the hoof tissue, crippling the sheep and hindering her ability to graze. To our dismay the entire flock had been infected. How many hours we spent dipping hooves into copper sulfate and cutting away rotted tissue! The lesson we learned has spiritual implications: No matter how wonderful a sheep looks on the outside, if the *infection of bitterness and/or unconfessed sin* are present, you can be sure that others will be contaminated by it.

their faith by relentlessly pursuing idols of worldly wealth and personal acclaim.

Please weigh this:

If you’re going to remain communally righteous in our Lord for His Name’s sake, *unrepentance* and *unforgiveness* are the hindrances you’ll confront most often. Make sure each person is clean (1John 1:9) before they enter your fellowship family, and commit to stay clean within the extended spiritual family!

When you’re meeting with someone who wants to be part of your fellowship family, don’t be reluctant to ask about any unresolved bitterness and/or sins they’re holding on to. **Really probe** in Spirit-guided loving wisdom!

You Must Turn Bitterness to Forgiveness and Blessing

The Biblical Mandate

I tell you who hear Me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27,28).

Lord Jesus *commands* you to forgive from your heart without exception: to belong to Jesus *is* to forgive. Forgiveness gets you out of negative territory on the chart to ‘0.’ Your emotional healing through Jesus occurs as you enter positive territory of Blessing through prayer for and good deeds toward the one who has hurt you. The further a forgiving person goes into positive territory, the less likely that bitterness will return.

