

Lifebyte 57
Kingdom Living (Part 7)
To Be In The Kingdom Is To Expand It

Jesus Proclaims A Kingdom



*For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?
Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)*



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Introduction

Our Lord's goal for ALL His followers is to be loving and fruitful instruments in His Spirit to expand His Kingdom. In doing this, it's a given that we will wage spiritual war against demonic forces in the heavenly realm (Ephesians 6:12). But neither the expansion of His Kingdom nor our ability to fight demonic forces hinges on our own strength or effort. We're entirely dependent on the Spirit of King Jesus in us!

The indwelling presence of our Lord's Spirit distinguishes His followers from all other people on earth. The Spirit of Jesus will continue to abide in those who trust Him until we stand before Him at the Judgment Throne. *His presence* is our guarantee that we will receive our salvation—eternity with the King of kings (Ephesians 1:14).

The Spirit of Christ isn't sitting passively by as we go about our lives. Far from it! His purpose is to rule our lives according to the will of God and to help us increasingly conform to the character and purposes of Lord Jesus. It's as this process progresses in each of us that we have an effect on those around us—one way or another!

*For we are to God the **fragrance of Christ** among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the **aroma of death** leading to death, and to the other the **aroma of life** leading to life* (2 Corinthians 2:15,16).

Do you yearn to wholeheartedly love and serve the King of the Kingdom? Then willingly yield to His Spirit inside you and become the aroma of life. *Your* part in expanding the Kingdom is to be the fragrance of Jesus to all you encounter.

Kingdom Service: *Personally* Caring For The Needs Of Others

There's a vast distinction between *belief that God exists* (which even the demons have) and a *trust* that's evidenced by *your obedient actions*:

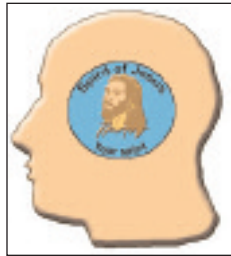
*But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by **what I do**. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and tremble* (James 2:18,19).

The trust that's described in the Hebrew Scriptures emphasizes justice for the poor and compassion for the needy, reflecting the heart of the Father as He uses His people to respond to needs. Both justice and compassion require *awareness* of those in distress, and a *responsive love* to come alongside them as His hands and feet and heart.

Jesus modeled obedience to the commands and character of His Father by healing the sick (Matthew 14:14), restoring sight to the blind (Matthew 20:34), cleansing lepers (Mark 1:42), and feeding the hungry (Matthew 15:29-39). Profoundly aware of the needs of others, He took concrete steps to help them.

In fulfilling these prophesied acts of kindness that revealed Him as the Messiah (see Isaiah 61), Jesus embodied miraculous power at work. He was setting the stage for those who follow Him to walk in His responsive steps. For instance, as He transformed water into wine (John 2), Jesus was carrying out the command of the Hebrew Scriptures: "**Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the *power of your hand* to do so**" (Proverbs 3:27). Our Lord *could* change water into wine, so He did.

What does this mean to those of us who are born again? We are *powerful*



instruments of compassion because of the Spirit of Christ in us!

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).

- **What does it mean about your own faith if you're *not* doing greater things than our Lord said you'd do in Him? Does your failure to do greater things make Jesus a liar through you? What changes are in order so that you'll fulfill our Lord's words, "he will do greater works than these"?**

- **Describe how you're carrying out your Kingdom responsibilities toward others "when it is in your power to do so."**

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

If the Spirit of Jesus abides in you, you're called to *glorify our Father* (John 15:8). This is a lifelong endeavor with a twofold purpose: to demonstrate not only that you're truly born again, but also that you're undergoing an inward transformation of sanctification into Christ's likeness. Since Christ proclaimed by word and example that we must put our faith into action (see Matthew 25:32-46), then we're to bear

fruit by meeting the needs of others, to the glory of our Father.

Fruitfulness is a key command in the Kingdom! Jesus warned that every branch *in Him* that doesn't bear fruit will be taken away by His Father (John 15:2). And even those who are fruitful will be *pruned by God* (think about what that means to who you are, what you have, what you do!) so that they will be even more fruitful.

Paul prayed heartily and unceasingly for the followers of Jesus in Colosse that they would be filled with the knowledge of our Lord's will and bring joy to the Father. The apostle yearned for this Kingdom purpose to be fulfilled in the lives of those who were spiritual children to him:

That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10).

The concept of fruitfulness as an indicator of spiritual responsiveness is a recurrent theme in the Older Testament. To *love God* was inseparable from actions that mirror HIS love for His people. The Law and the Prophets were signs for generations to come that *fruitfulness* in both God's people and the land of Israel resulted from ongoing, obedient trust (see Ezekiel 19:10, Isaiah 32:15).

God intends that His people be vines that *spread out* and *bear nourishing fruit*. To do that, the vines must be clean, unhampered by tendrils of entangling unrighteousness. The psalmist reminded God of His faithfulness in *bringing a vine* out of Egypt and *casting out the pagan nations* so that His hand might plant and establish that precious vine. Through His guiding and nurturing hand the vine took deep root and filled the promised land (see Psalms 80:8,9).

A sure principle is at work here:

Fruit cannot be brought forth unless the Lord of Life initiates it from root to branch to fruit.

That the Hebrew Scriptures use a vine as a metaphor for God's people is shown time and again, whether the vine is obedient and proliferates, or rebels and withers. The interconnection between the vine and its Vinedresser is unmistakable, as the prophet makes clear about the return of Messiah to Israel for His millennial rule:

For the seed shall be prosperous, the vine shall give its fruit, the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew—I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these (Zechariah 8:12).

As noted earlier, the *intimacy of connectedness* that yields lasting fruit has a unique parallel: the *union* of a vine with its branches and Jesus *united through His Spirit* within His beloved (John 15). Abiding in Jesus through His Spirit is a relationship of *lifegiving dependence* on Him that is fruitful: “*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me*” (v.4)

He has chosen His followers for a specific purpose: to bear *lasting fruit*, a fruitfulness that's undergirded by the branches in their *relationship with each other*. The connectedness of the followers of Jesus to *one another* is also clearly understood by the terms “*mother and brother and sister*” used by both Jesus and Paul to refer to extended spiritual family in Him.

Now put this *interconnectedness* into perspective in the parable of the Samaritan who responded righteously. When a certain Jewish traveler was beaten by rob-

bers and left for dead, neither the Levite nor the priest who were passing by came to his aid. Disregarding his helpless plight and even crossing the road to avoid contact, they were confirming the *hardness of heart* which surrounded their neglect. (See Luke 10:30-37; also Proverbs 3:27; Hosea 6:6.)

Yet these two religious leaders were violating the very essence of motive that God had commanded *all* His people: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD*” (Leviticus 19:18). Love calls for *responsive action*, whereas these men neglected the enacted mercy and righteousness that underlay all the Law and the Prophets (see Matthew 7:12).

The Bible leaves no doubt that our God, the Creator of all that is, shows loving regard for mankind. He's created *every individual* in His image! He keeps watch on both the evil and the good (Proverbs 15:3). He blesses both the righteous and the wicked, the just and the unjust, with the sun and the rain (Matthew 5:45). The lesson here for followers of Jesus:

If our holy God can bless both the righteous and wicked, then we too need to see humanity through His loving eyes, regardless of whether a needy person is a believer or not.

Doing good when it is in *your power to do so* is a Hebraic principle of righteous response to our loving Father as His Spirit confirms His will through you. The same God Who promised Israel that He would *never stop doing good to them* (Jeremiah 32:40) has set an example for all who claim to walk His pathway of righteousness. If you will let Him, the Spirit of our King, Jesus, will empower you to *go about and do good* (Acts 10:38).

Doing good when you can is Kingdom life, as illustrated in the Luke 13:18-21 parables. The mustard seed didn't have much going for itself as a tiny entity, but when planted it matured and blessed others as a shady, protected home for birds. The woman's leaven was hidden in three measures of meal, creating useful bread dough that could nourish many. By itself, the leaven would have been useless. But by being *fruitful and spreading*, the leaven was life-giving.

The Kingdom of heaven has not been given to followers of Jesus because we deserve it or are in any way worthy of it. Those among the Jewish people who rejected Messiah Jesus made that mistake in thinking that their heritage through Abraham was their security:

They answered and said to Him, 'Abraham is our father.' Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham' (John 8:39).

Those who rejected the King of the Kingdom which Jesus offered banked their confidence on their **position** as Abraham's children. They claimed *status* as their key to acceptability.

But Jesus reminded them that the descendants of Abraham were chosen by God to fulfill a **purpose**: *"I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (Genesis 12:3). Don't lose sight of the reality that you too have needful purpose in the Kingdom (see Ephesians 2:8-10)!

Today, so many Christians are position-based. They misplace their confidence as so many Jews did in their denominational tie or the prosperity of their congregation. Their misguid-

ed focus on their particular brand of religion keeps them from carrying out the purposes of the King.

Scripture is clear that you enter the Kingdom of God by trust in the Chief Cornerstone, Jesus (1 Peter 2:6,7). As the Psalmist had prophesied to the unbelieving Israelites, *"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes"* (Psalms 118:22,23). Jesus openly used this commonly known passage to confront the skeptical Jews who refused to recognize and worship Him as the Prophesied One.

His accusation was drawn directly from the Hebrew prophets: the Kingdom would be *taken from them* and given to people who would *bear its fruits* (Matthew 21:43). Indeed, as God had promised, many among *non-Jewish* nations would eagerly seek Him (see Isaiah 65:1; 1 Chronicles 16:24-31).

Whether or not you bear fruit in the Kingdom depends on HOW you hear the Word, for the manner in which you *internalize* the Word determines its importance in your life. Hearing the Word of God from a Hebraic context means that you've realized you must put into practice that which you've heard. That's why Jesus so often summarizes His teachings with the repeated phrase, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* Intent to follow through is a deep internal motivation grounded on your loving trust in your Lord.

The principle of obedience to God's commands because of your love relationship with Him is foundational to Hebrew Scripture. The people of Israel realized that when a true prophet spoke, his words were those that God intended for them to obey. For instance, the theme of *love-grounded obedience* in Joshua 22:5 is

largely unknown as a way of fruitful life for much of western Christendom today. But in the time of Jesus there was no doubt about the interconnection between love, obedience and holding fast to their God in willing service. That's why Jesus could so readily inform His listeners that His "*family members*" were those who HEAR the word of God and DO IT (Luke 8:21).

There was also no doubt among those who had ears to hear that Jesus equated His teaching with "*the word of God*". An example: the parable of the seed (Luke 8:5-18) depicts the different types of heart soil into which the seed is planted. The seed is the WORD of God, planted within each person who hears (8:11). What happens to that seed differs from person to person according to their response to its priority in their life.

- In v.12, the WORD of God has been received in their heart but *not cherished as such*. The devil takes away the WORD from their heart so they don't trust and find salvation in a lifelong journey with Jesus as Lord of their life.

- Next are those in v.13 who joyfully receive the WORD because it sounds so good. But as with the previous soil, the tempter lures them away. The significance of the WORD in their lives never takes root. Since the WORD isn't a life priority to which they've clung wholeheartedly, they too fall away.

- The next soil type hears the WORD as well (v.14). But mixed within their hearts are thorns of worldly cares, riches and pleasures which produce compromise. Because they don't mature, they produce *no lasting fruit*. These will ultimately be cast into fire (see John 15:6).

- Those who have heard with a *prepared heart*—noble and good—KEEP GOD'S WORD and bear fruit as they per-

severe in Christ. They have determined to DO that which they hear, allowing neither temptation nor worldly compromise to diminish fruitfulness for their King.

How painfully graphic is the warning by the writer to a group of Hebrew followers of Jesus: don't be among those who HEAR and TASTE God's Word but GIVE UP and FALL AWAY! If your life keeps producing worldly thorns and briars, you'll be rejected, "*near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned*" (see Hebrews 6:4-10).

Be Absolutely Sure You're The King's Subject

The Kingdom of Heaven offers us our freedom within the *boundaries of God's Word*. Our King's teaching calls for a return to the heart motivation of *obedience* to a loving and gracious God. The blessing comes to those who HEAR the Word of God and OBEY it.

Truth is something you DO, deeds which are done in and through God (John 3:21). Those who have done good will rise to life, while those who have done evil will rise to condemnation (John 5:29).

For 40 days our resurrected Lord spoke of things that pertained to the Kingdom (Acts 1:3), a message that was continued by Paul (Acts 19:8) and Phillip (Acts 8:12). When King Jesus fulfilled the sacrificial requirements of God's Law, He in no way nullified the *way we should live* according to its wisdom—a Kingdom way of life.

Our God has detailed all that we need to know of His character, His nature, and His ways. The consequences of turning our hearts *away* from God as He has revealed Himself in both testaments are severe. Most Roman Catholics and Protestants would vehemently deny that they bow down to idols or images. But many do "*worship other gods*" as did their Israelite ancestors (see Deuteronomy 30:

17,18) by *ignoring* the insights into the one true God as He has revealed Himself in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Self-serving religious practices, man-made traditions that override His Word, and blatant law-lessness among those who misinterpret God's grace point to the worship of "another god" besides that of Scripture. *Love of God* and *obedience to His Word* are inseparable evidence that you are clinging to Him *as He calls for* (see Deuteronomy 5:10, 30:20; John 14:15; 15:10,14).

Are you aware of how necessary for spiritual growth are the foundations of Hebraic truth that underlie the Newer Testament? When people choose to neglect or disregard the Older Testament, they often form unscriptural interpretations of God's nature and character. They project their own thoughts and ways into how they perceive God thinks and acts, infusing their own desire for soul-pleasing "grace" to override His timeless righteousness and justice. The warning is clear in His Word: If you choose NOT TO HEAR, you will perish.

Kingdom people, however, realize that they are called to be *set apart* in Jesus their King all throughout their lives. The Spirit of Jesus in them sanctifies them as they yield vestiges of self to His transforming power. Being *set apart before God* for His use and purpose has a Hebraic precedent as well (see, for example, Joshua 3:5; 7:13). As the Psalmist has written, "*know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly*" (Psalms 4:3).

Those who are called by the name of the King represent Him on earth. Compromise with the world's ways and values brings down His reputation among people who have yet to believe, and mocks both His righteousness and His faithful ones who are walking uprightly in Him

(James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). His honor is in your hands. He daily leads you in paths of righteousness for *His Name's sake* (Psalm 23:3).

Sometimes personal uprightness means having to leave behind those you love in order to carry out your Kingdom responsibilities.

Many times those who don't follow Jesus in Spirit and in Truth disagree angrily with your path of obedient trust!

You're probably familiar with Jesus' declaration that those who love their parents or children more than they love Him are not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37). A parallel concept appears with the Levites, the tribe from which came the priests who served before the God of Israel. The pre-eminence of God's Word in their lives and their covenant with Him caused faithful priests to acknowledge that their relationship even with their parents, siblings and children was secondary in comparison (Deuteronomy 33:9).

By now you're realizing that OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD because of your loving trust in Him and your willingness to walk according to His Spirit in you is an essential quality within the Kingdom of God. Paul was drawing upon Hebrew Scripture as he described what he calls in Romans 10:6 the righteousness that is by faith: "*But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it*" (Deuteronomy 30:14, apperceived in Romans 10:8).

The Greek word Paul used for the "word" of faith is *rhema*; the Spirit of Jesus in you reveals God's will to your heart for obedient response. To HEAR God's Word is to DO it out of loving response to your King—the LORD of all. [We discuss your need for *rhema* in Lifebyte 53.]

“Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”
(Matthew 7:12).

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the **ministry of reconciliation**, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the **word of reconciliation**”* (2 Corinthians 5:17-19).

Everything written in the Law of God and reported by the prophets is summed up in this simple command: *“Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.”* Everyone who genuinely serves the King of the Kingdom is given *the ministry of reconciliation*. Do you see a connection between the boxed passage and Matthew 7:12?

- **How did you first hear about Jesus? Was someone fulfilling their responsibility to share the “word of reconciliation”?**

- **In light of our responsibility to both *do to others what we would have them do to us* and to carry out a *ministry of reconciliation* between God and man, is any Kingdom subject exempted from service? Yes or No? Have you exempted yourself? If you have, what have you neglected to do?**

- **If you haven’t carried out your Spirit-empowered privilege to bring reconciliation between our Lord and others, are you in His Kingdom? Explain.**

- **Why are living where you do? Why are you at your particular place of work? Why do you have the relationships you have? Are these for Kingdom purposes? Describe your purpose for where you live and work, and for the relationships you’re in.**

- **If your response above lacks Kingdom purposes, what do you need to do to change?**

- **Who in your neighborhood, workplace or school knows you are a follower of Jesus? Describe how you represent your Lord in your daily interactions with others. Are you living as a beloved subject of the King?**

For more on the Kingdom, see Lifebyte 7. *When Death is Good*; and Lifebyte 8. *Resurrections Into KINGDOM Living*.

The Kingdom of God *begins* on earth in your heart and *continues* for eternity; to miss the Kingdom on earth is to *miss it forever*.