

Lifebyte 60

Will You Be Among Those Our Lord Chastises? (Part 3)

It's Time For Followers of Jesus To Live Repentantly

*"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves,
and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways,
then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land"*

(2 Chronicles 7:14)



*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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*“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,
that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19)*

“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is Yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; You are exalted as Head over all”
(1 Chronicles 29:11).

You’ve just read a powerful verse praising the incredible LORD of our lives, the Creator of all there is. In this and numerous similar verses, our Lord and His marvelous attributes are extolled. But do you understand *why* passages like these saturate Scripture’s pages for you to internalize in wondrous awe? Our God wants us and *all the world* to recognize and experience **His power** and **His glory**, **His majesty** and **His splendor**.

Our Lord isn’t passive about ensuring that His majesty, splendor and glory are recognized on the Earth. He’s not a Deist entity that has brought about life but is now observing from a distance what a mess we’re making of it. Far from it!

He is *actively involved* in revealing Himself as the One true God who alone is worthy of honor and glory. And one of the ways in which He’s chosen to be glorified is *through those who belong to Him*.

**Our God delights in showing Himself strong on behalf of His people.
In this way His glory is revealed.**

If you surveyed a group of Christians about what God did in the book of Exodus, most would probably respond with something like this: “He freed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and brought them to the Promised Land.” While this is a truthful statement, it falls far short of what our God accomplished on His own behalf to *fulfill His purposes*.

A few passages about that awesome deliverance will help us see our Lord’s

motive from *His* perspective — from that of a heavenly Bridegroom calling out a people from darkness unto Himself as their God, their Savior, their Husband.

“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD...”

I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen.

The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen”
(Exodus 14:4,17,18).

God indeed freed the Israelites from 430 years of slavery to set apart a people who were freed to worship Him. But, He also had a far-reaching purpose behind that frantic chase to the Red Sea’s shore: God intended to use Pharaoh and his armies *to gain glory for Himself*. Through that miraculous intervention, Egypt and all who heard about it would know that **He is the LORD**.

Making His Name known among all humanity has always been a supreme goal of our Lord — and He’s repeatedly accomplished this in ways that get people’s attention! For instance, at the end of Israel’s forty years in the desert, God miraculously dried up the Jordan River while it was at flood stage. This powerful act of intervention allowed them to enter the Promised Land near the city of Jericho, whose walls would soon tumble.

Again, look at our Lord’s purpose for this awesome act: *“That all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever”* (Joshua 4:24).

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Accounts abound in the Older Testament in which our Lord supernaturally intervened on behalf of His beloved Israel. Note, though, that the pattern is ominously repetitive. Israel would walk in obedient trust in God and His blessing would flow. As long as they remained repentant, He'd respond mightily on their behalf.

But then they'd falter in their trust and cave in to spiritual adultery by compromising their faith with disobedience in self-serving evil. In their refusal to repent of their sin, God would use famine, wars and disease to chastise them. *Then*, they'd remember their God and once again cry out in humility and repentance, taking ownership of their iniquity and joyfully receiving His merciful deliverance and restored Presence.

We're not just rehashing historical facts here. As God spoke through His servant Paul, the lessons and warnings we so vividly read in the Hebrew Scripture are intended as *warning and admonition for us today* (1 Corinthians 10:11). So let's examine one of those examples of how *not* to respond to our Father's grace!

When Israel chose to ignore God and His ways and/or willfully sin in the hope that He wouldn't hold them accountable, He countered according to His unchanging righteousness. He refused to fight on their behalf against their enemies.

In Joshua, chapter 7, we find the account of Achan, one of the men who had participated in the rout of Jericho after God collapsed its mighty walls. Joshua had forcefully warned the Israelites to keep their hands off Jericho's "accursed things" that might tempt them because the *whole camp would suffer* if defiling things were brought in. Yet not all who heard obeyed. Achan thought he could give way to unright-

eous covetousness unnoticed and willfully disregard God's command.

Israel's army was unaware of this sin. Flush with victory, they mounted an assault on the little town of Ai. Three dozen Israelites were struck down and the hearts of Israel grew faint. Now why did so many go down to death in defeat? Because of Achan's sin.

We've written so often about **communal righteousness** because it is a biblical concept that has disappeared in individualist, western understanding. When you are born into the family of God through Jesus, you're no longer an isolated entity unto yourself. Those with whom you fellowship are joined to you as part of the body of Christ, a communal expression of Him here on earth. You *belong* to one another in the sense that Paul writes about as an arm, an eye, a hand (see 1 Corinthians 12). And that belonging carries with it both the privilege of interconnectedness as well as the responsibility of living in righteousness as His Name-bearers.

Your fellowship family *belongs* to one another. That's why our Lord holds your entire fellowship accountable for one person's unconfessed sin — so that you will grieve for that person's sin as our Lord does, and that authentic fellowship can be restored when that person repents (Matthew 18:15-20). The day you take this truth seriously, you'll find our Father responding with God-sized answers to your prayers.

As much as God loved His people Israel (and still does on account of the patriarchs and His promises to them!), *His holiness* demanded that He chastise them and allow them to *experience the consequences* of continual disobedience and lawlessness.

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There comes a time when a nation is so reprobate that God no longer goes out to fight on its behalf (Psalms 44:9; 60:10). This reality has present application. The last war the United States won was World War II (1945). All throughout the 20th century and into the current one, this nation has been involved in repeated conflicts and “police actions”. We’d like to think we’re on the side of righteousness, but the foundation of greed and economic gain that has precipitated much of our involvement has shown otherwise.

It’s been over 60 years since the end of World War II. During those decades prayer has been abolished in public school classrooms; millions of babies have been slaughtered through abortion (1/5 of those women claim to be “born again”); sexual immorality whether through adultery, fornication, or sodomy has proliferated; our corrupt ways has been exported to the nations to pollute them with sexual filth from the media, and with drugs and tobacco — and with all their accompanying aftermath.

Who today mourns as did Jeremiah? Who bows in shame for the *collective sin* of his people as did Ezekiel, Nehemiah and Daniel, and humbly cries out on their behalf?

Our Lord tells us, “*When a man’s ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him*” (Proverbs 16:7). Please, connect the dots. The millions of innocents mercilessly murdered in the womb have brought forth an unanticipated but all too deserved result: the horror of tens of thousands who have needlessly died on battlefields because of the sins of this nation. We *are* the collective image of Babylon inscribed in the Book of Revelation!

If you doubt this, just travel overseas or listen to the strident voices and pic-

tures of the media. To those in other lands this nation is the “Great Satan”, the exporter of all that is evil — and the one nation on Earth with the audacity to declare on our coins, “In God We Trust”!

How the precious name of Lord Jesus is reviled and mocked among the nations because of this country’s claim to be “Christian”! We who live here know better, but to a world who observes through the media a steeple on every corner in this land, can you blame them for their faulty assumption? What has so often been called the “most powerful nation on earth” is being blamed by the rest of the nations for the greed and self-indulgence that’s brought on this global financial crisis. And, you know their appraisal is accurate.

For followers of Jesus this is a critical decision time. We can’t keep pretending that the day the Lord returns is in some distant future, way over the horizon. While the Gospel has not yet been preached in all the world, the technology He has provided has brought that day much nearer than anyone could have imagined just a decade or two ago (Matthew 24:14).

You need to *be prepared* that this may be the day of His return. In that light, Jesus is asking YOU, “**If I came back today, would I find you living for Me?**”

Do you find you can’t give a resounding “Yes!” to His question? Then you’ve got a problem, one that may carry eternal consequences. Where this nation as a whole ends up isn’t your immediate problem; where you end up is! This nation is heading for a chastisement that will far surpass this present bowshot of financial instability. The God of redemption awaits responsive, humble hearts who will turn or return to Him in response to His call to repent and be restored in union with

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Jesus (Nehemiah 1:9; Joel 2:12).

We’ve mentioned previously a sign that the Dark Days of Chastisement are near: when a woman becomes President. (And, don’t think just because elections are over, this couldn’t happen suddenly.) When women rule, it’s a sign of God’s judgment against a nation (Isaiah 3:12). It indicates that so many men who should have been righteously leading have failed in their responsibility.

The rule of women has long been taking place in single-parent families. Over the past several decades divorced women have been left to raise families without male protection and leadership. At the same time, homosexuality has increased proportionately. And it’s no small accusation against Christendom that it leads unbelievers in divorce, and that clergy are a leading occupation for divorce.

Judgment is already beginning throughout Christendom (1 Peter 4:17). It’s time that we confront reality. Western Christianity in particular has become “friends with the world”, copying its goals and its techniques. This is truly a desperate situation which sets us at enmity with God as His *spiritually adulterous enemies* (James 4:4).

A poignant example will put this bold statement into focus. Because of the powerful influence of certain highly visible worship leaders in the 1980s and 90s, lively praise and worship are now widely embraced throughout western Christendom. Now, exuberant expression of grateful joy to our Lord marked King David’s relationship with the Lord he loved and served. But *repentance*, praising God with a *pure heart*, was his preparation beforehand — a preparation for worship that’s commanded to followers of Jesus as well (Psalms 24:4; 51:10; 2 Timothy 2:22).

The **contrived worship** of so many leaders in the Christian music industry today employs enticing tunes and forceful exhortation to conjure a **soulish mood** in the same manner pagans use. You may recognize with a certain revulsion that many “worship leaders” draw on the same methods and means that are practiced in rock concerts to attract and satisfy audiences.

The self-gratification that’s derived in man-pleasing worship has duped the unsuspecting into believing that the ONLY way they can bring glory to our Lord is through song. While heartfelt worship and praise from those who are clean before Him does glorify our Lord, His Word calls for *obedient and loving reflection* of Him in our daily lives.

Let’s look at several factors that display a *way of life* that evidences we truly belong to Jesus as His loving and obedient family.

The Righteous Seek The Glory Of God

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

(James 5:16-18)

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 things [the unrepentant]”

(1 Peter 3:12).

What glorious assurance we are promised from these passages that if we live righteously in the Spirit of Christ, our

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prayers will be heard by our Father! And His answers to your prayers are primary testimony through which He may be glorified in and through you to others.

Pay attention to this important truth: The *answered prayers* of the earliest followers of Jesus got them noticed. Wouldn't you like to have been among that company of praying believers when Peter and John were released by the religious leaders? *“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness”* (Acts 4:31).

If the miraculous isn't happening in answer to your prayers, if our Father isn't being glorified through His answers, then you and/or those you with whom you fellowship need to consider this: there's a strong chance you're clinging to unconfessed sin. Again, if your prayers are not regularly being answered, then you've become accustomed to **communal unrighteousness**.

Is there biblical precedent for this assertion? Prayerfully weigh these verses:

- *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear”* (Psalms 66:18).

- *“One who turns away his ear from hearing [with the intent of obeying] the law, even his prayer is an abomination”* (Proverbs 28:9).

- *“The LORD is far from the wicked but He hears the prayer of the righteous”* (Proverbs 15:29).

- *“Don't be fooled. Bad company ruins good character. Come to your senses! Live righteously and stop sinning! There are some people who lack knowledge of God [which includes His character, His unchanging Word, and His ways] — I say this to your shame”* (1 Corinthians 15:33,34).

There's danger in the dark complacency that substitutes the **“presumptuous grace of sinful compromise”** for the righteous responsiveness of walking His path of love-grounded, obedient trust. Whatever it takes, start becoming a modern-day Elijah. In his righteousness of obedient trust, this man who was as human as we are acted boldly on behalf of God — the pattern for anyone who claims to belong to Jesus. God's Word holds true: *“The righteous are as bold as a lion”* (Proverbs 28:1).

If you're a Spirit-empowered servant of the King of Kings, you don't need “great faith” to witness His answers to your prayers. Lord Jesus Himself had promised, *“If you have trust as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you”* (Luke 17:6). The power behind that trust lies in a faithful Father Who responds to the trusting prayer of His children.

If you aren't seeing any “God-size” answers to any of your prayers, be alarmed. Ask yourself this: Are you *out of fellowship* with our Lord through your sin and/or through your fellowship with others who are clinging to unconfessed sin?

This is no light matter before our holy Lord. He expressed His horror through His prophet Ezekiel over those who profaned Him by coming to His sanctuary on the very same day they'd willfully sinned. Worship with unclean hands and heart never penetrates the ceiling. (The only exception? The *repentant cry of confession* of a lamb who is seeking Him.)

You need the broken, determined response of Joshua when the Israelites were defeated by the people of Ai.

Joshua tore his clothes and fell face-down to the ground before the ark of

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the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads (Joshua 7:6).

Overwhelmed with grief before their holy God, they humbled themselves in profound repentance. In response to their repentant hearts God revealed who in their midst had sinned. And as Joshua reported, *“That man **did not die alone in his iniquity**” (Joshua 22:20).* There was *communal consequence* to Achan’s willful violation of God’s direct command: the death of all his family, his livestock, and the 36 slain warriors who were sons, fathers, brothers, and cousins of the people. The *whole of Israel* suffered grief because one of their company hid in unrepentant sin.

We need this same earnestness for righteousness today for *His Name’s sake*. Is our Father finding unrepentant sin in your life that is hindering Him from answering your prayers? Are you treasuring fellowship with those who mock and shame His Name because they *claim* to be His yet are living as friends with the world’s ways? What does that say about you and your relationship with the Father? Is Lord Jesus *really* the pearl of great price to you?

An insidious heresy is widely embraced in western Christendom today. It goes something like this:

**We don’t need to fear God,
because He is all loving.**

This lie that separates His awesome holiness and unchanging character from His authentic grace and love has enabled so many to rationalize and excuse their sin. But a life that pleases God starts with a *holy fear of Who He is*: the amazing

Creator, the King of the universe, the Sovereign through Whom all authority exists. That same reverent fear recognizes from His Word the very real consequences of disobeying Him, and to *fear God* is to HATE evil (Proverbs 8:13).

*“The fear of the LORD is the **beginning of knowledge**, but fools despise **wisdom and discipline**” (Proverbs 1:7).* “Knowledge” as it relates to God is recognizing Him as He has revealed Himself *through His Word*. Why is this such a critical point? Because many Christians have made Him into what they want Him to be, a personally designed, doting grandfather who universally receives all into His Presence.

The same fear of God that’s tied into attaining knowledge of Who He is closely connects with *wisdom and discipline*. What is wisdom according to its use in the Bible (over 225 times)? Wisdom is *seeing life from God’s perspective*. It is understanding the requirements and boundaries He has established for our well-being and protection, and the freedoms He gives to fully live within those boundaries in the power of His Spirit. This is true wisdom. (We will discuss “discipline” later in this Lifebyte.)

When we *fear* the Lord with an awesome regard for Who He is, we begin the lifelong pilgrimage of getting to know Him, to love and serve Him by living according to His way, and to understand the underlying Father-love in His discipline of us. Wisdom reveals that fearing God is a life-giving fountain, turning us from the snares of death that disobedience and self-will set for us (Proverbs 14:27).

In the third chapter of his letter to the Roman followers of Jesus, Paul compiles a litany of accusation against mankind, Jew and non-Jew alike. In verses 10-17 he

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apperceives portions of six psalms, summing them up with this foundational reality: *“There is **no fear of God** before their eyes”* (Romans 3:18). Might this be true of you or your fellowship family?

Don't think that “fearing God” is strictly an “Older Testament” phenomenon that's irrelevant to those who are in Christ. Luke quotes the exalted praise of Jesus' mother: *“His mercy is on **those who fear him** from generation to generation”* (Luke 1:50). Paul exhorts his beloved Corinthian family to *cleanse themselves from everything that defiles body and spirit so that they may perfect holiness* (be available and set apart for His use) **in the fear of God** (12 Corinthians 7:1).

Time and again we're admonished to fear nothing of this world or what others may do to us. However, we're never to lose that holy fear of our mighty God either! Peter commands us to love and honor people but to **“fear God”** (1 Peter 2:17). For all eternity we'll hear the unending song of Moses and the song of the Lamb passionately declaring, **“Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy”** (Revelation 15:4).

If you've personally given way to the deceit that holy fear of God has no place in your spiritual life, then we encourage you to repent. Don't defy the very warning of Jesus to His disciples, calling them “My friends”: **“Fear Him** who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him” (Luke 12:5).

Please, don't casually fly through the questions in this Lifebyte. Prayerfully align your heart with our Lord's requirements from His Word.

- **What assurance do you have that verifies you're presently in fellowship with our Lord? Describe how you know.**

- **List three recent answers to your prayers. Describe with whom you've recently shared a testimony of our Father's faithfulness. If you have no answered prayer and no testimony, what does that say about your relationship with our Lord or about His priority in your life?**

- **When you hear the phrase, “fear God”, is that positive or negative to you? Describe your own fear of God.**

The Righteous Seek The Glory Of God

***“Most assuredly, I say to you,
he who trusts in Me, the works
that I do he will do also;
and greater works than these he will
do, because I go to My Father”***
(John 14:12).

In this verse most translators use the word “believe” in place of “trust”, and that diminishes the intensity of the relationship our Lord Jesus is emphasizing. “Believe” has become an impassive thought product: “I believe I'll go to bed early tonight.” “I believe this politician is more honest than that one.”

But that isn't the biblical understanding of *believe!* Through contemporary use it's lost the Hebraic *intensity of trust* with which it would have been understood by both the writer and the hearers — a *com-*

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mitment to the Lordship and Person of Jesus! *Belief* is passive compared to what *trust* entails. Belief certainly didn't alter the allegiance of Satan's emissaries: “*Even the demons believe — and shudder*” (James 2:19).

The Hebrew word for trust is *emunah*. This is an emotionally laden term calling for great conviction that's seen in *how you live*, even to the cost of your life. This depth of *dependent confidence* that changes your life is extolled in Revelation 12:11: “*They overcame [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives to shrink from death.*”

We've discussed previously how the Hebrew language emphasizes the verb in a sentence, focusing on the *action* or *response*. English, on the other hand, emphasizes the noun or subject — the *who* or *what*. English-based translations allow you to understand a lot about the person or object in the sentence, but little about their (and your) active obedience to God's commands.

That factor of love-motivated, obedient response to our Father's desires is why we often recommend *The Complete Jewish Bible* by David Stern. This translation encompasses more of a Hebraic sense of the *continuing, keeping-on nature of commands* rather than an impression that you can do something once and that's all that's needed. While his extensive use of Hebrew names and terminology may keep you flipping to the glossary, that sense of an *ongoing walk* of obedient trust for a lifetime of intimacy with Him comes through loud and clear!

In this light, we English-speaking followers of Jesus need a greater degree of biblical self-scrutiny to ensure that we truly belong to Him. Prayerfully examine your own life for evidence of the

Spirit of Christ in you. Lord Jesus promises His own that whoever trusts in Him will not only do the works He does but also greater ones. Because Jesus is now with His Father, His Spirit dwells within those who trust in Him. HE'S the power who moves us to will and to do according to our Father's pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

Again, are you both *willing* and *doing* as His instrument those “greater works” that He promised His disciples? Ask Him to make clear how He's calling you to serve Him in the works He's already prepared for you (Ephesians 2:10).

Besides having our prayers answered in miraculous ways that only our God could bring about, each of us needs the joyful inner confidence of His Presence as we fulfill the works He directs. *Motive is key, since you're operating in His strength and not trying to earn points!* Through our willing availability to respond, He can be glorified through our lives. As you respond in the grace of His power and the obedient determination of your heart to do His will, you're being given opportunity to bring praise and glory to Him through God-size testimony.

This is a twofold blessing! Our Father sees you carrying out His commands to bless others from a heart that's motivated by love for both Him and the ones you serve. So He blesses your spirit by empowering you to carry on with joy even as *He* is being lifted up through your obedience.

In light of the Hebraic emphasis on the verb, that is, the action required of us, please read James 2:14-26. Again, we can *never earn* our salvation by doing good works. BUT, we are demonstrating by them that we're truly on the path of our pilgrimage to salvation.

Through this sampling of exhorta-

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tion by James, we see how vital it is live as His vessels of obedience, quick to love and to serve in His name.

- *“What good is it, my brothers, if someone claims to have faith but **has no actions to prove it?** Is such ‘faith’ able to save him?” (James 2:14).*

- *“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith **without your works**, and I will show you my faith **by my works**” (2:18).*

- *“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that **faith without works is dead?** Was not Abraham our father **justified by works** when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that **faith was working together with his works**, and **by works faith was made perfect?**” (2:20-22).*

- *“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham **believed God**, and it was accounted to him for **righteousness.**’ And he was called the **friend of God.** You see then that a man is **justified by works, and not by faith alone**” (2:23,24).*

- *“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so [trust] **without works is dead also**” (2:26).*

Make sure that your spiritual house is built on the rock of obedient trust, responsive to your Beloved’s commands. It’s the very nature of God to love, and His Spirit dwells within His own. Be perfect *in love* by His Spirit (Matthew 5), and respond with actions appropriate to the needs He puts before you. It’s what you **do** in response to the Scriptural commands of your Father’s will that confirm you belong to Him (Matthew 7:21-24; 25:34-40).

- **Would our Lord call you a “believer” or a “truster”? Would He commend you for what you’re doing on His behalf out of authentic trust in and love for Him? If not, what do you need to change?**

- **How does your fellowship family spur you on to fulfill God’s will and bring Him praise? How does it hinder you?**

Our Lord Disciplines So That He May Be Glorified By The Repentant

*“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord”
(2 Corinthians 3:18).*

The Older Testament offers a striking example of our Lord being glorified in the life of a *heathen king*, Nebuchadnezzar. Chastised by God for his pride, in the end the king could proclaim with grateful joy how God had worked wonders on his behalf *through* that disciplining:

*“I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then **I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified Him** who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; His kingdom endures from generation to generation... **Now [after his seven years of chastening] I... praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in***

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pride He is able to put down” (Daniel 4:34,37).

A recurrent theme in both in the Older and Newer Testament is that of our God disciplining those He loves. His intent for correction is that the wrongdoer *turn away* from his error and *turn toward* God’s way — the way of wisdom! Then the disciple’s life will bring praise to His Lord.

The writer to the Hebrews builds on an Older Testament theme in his admonition to recognize God’s fatherhood role in bringing about the painful consequences of sinful choices.

*My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for **whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.***

*If you endure chastening, God deals with you **as with sons**; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? **God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness.***

*Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but **painful**; nevertheless, **afterward** it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been **trained by it** (Hebrews 12:5-7,11; see also Deuteronomy 8:5).*

Our Father’s discipline of His children produces a *harvest of righteousness* for those who recognize the Hand behind the chastening. That’s the *training* part, the right response to the discipline process. Otherwise, you’ll find yourself falling into the same trials over and over, wondering why you’re not finding peace.

Our Father’s discipline is all about transformation, that is, your sanctification into Christ’s holy likeness as sons

and daughters. If you choose to embrace the grace of His discipline, as painful as it may be at the time, afterward you will be *transformed into our Lord’s likeness* with ever-increasing glory!

This is the real issue of the relationship of our Father and His children: to discipline them so that they may be conformed to the character of His Son. What a picture of the righteous discipline His Word exhorts us regarding our own children!

Yet sadly this truth is discarded throughout much of western Christendom, replaced by momentary comfort and pleasure: entertaining religious services that appease fleshly emotions while ignoring unholy compromise with unconfessed sin. Being transformed into His obedient holiness seems so “legalistic” and unappealing to those who want both their spiritual veneer and worldly gratification.

For the sake of self-idolatry and the broad but deadly road of “religious tolerance”, many who use the name “Christian” don’t really belong to our Lord. Those who are authentically His know their Master’s voice and are quick to repent when they sin. They respond to His discipline and the rebuke He brings through His Spirit, His Word, and those in His family: *“Those whom I love I **rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent**”* (Revelation 3:19).

Through the prophet Malachi God challenged the people to bring their tithe and thereby witness His mighty response to their obedience: *“**Test Me in this,**” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw **open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it**”* (3:10).

*“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out,
that times of refreshing may come from the Lord” (Acts 3:19)*

- **You need to see the power and glory of God; to be in awe of what He does in response to personal and communal righteousness as His own child.**

At the beginning of the next gathering of your faith community, challenge those assembled: “Unless someone has a testimony that we all agree is a God-sized answer to prayer that brings Him glory, let’s all go home.” If there’s no testimony, go home with the same criterion for your next gathering. If you have the loving courage to rid yourselves collectively of unrighteousness through confession and repentance, you’ll lose those who refuse to repent. BUT, you’ll begin to experience God-sized answers to your prayers.

Our loving and faithful Father enjoys receiving glory among those for whom nothing less than righteousness for His Name’s sake matters. For the righteous life which emanates from a heart that wholeheartedly loves Jesus is the pathway through which testimonies to His glory are made possible.